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“The Moment I Came in It Got Much Easier . . . I Should Come Here More”: Student Experiences at Three Midwestern LGBT Resource Centers

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“THE MOMENT I CAME IN IT GOT MUCH EASIER . . . I SHOULD COME HERE MORE”:
STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT THREE MIDWESTERN LGBT RESOURCE CENTERS

A Dissertation

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The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

Burr Dyrall Hartman, II

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Keywords: LGBT resource center, LGBT student services, LGBT student experiences, LGBT
campus climate, LGBT student perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Although LGBT resource centers have been fixtures on college and university campuses for more than 40 years, there is only limited research about these resource centers. To date no empirical evidence exists that supports the impact of LGBT resource centers in the experiences of undergraduate students who make use of these centers. This qualitative study examines the role LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of LGBT students at three Midwestern universities. The qualitative research methods employed for the study were case study and ethnography. Using semi-structured interview data and field observations, five major themes surfaced: (a) perceptions of campus climate, (b) first impressions, (c) the role of LGBT resource centers, (d) what are students taking away, and (e) importance of LGBT resource centers. As a result of these themes, eight key findings emerged for discussion: (a) LGBT resource centers fulfill a number of roles for LGBT students; (b) LGBT resource centers enhance the experiences of LGBT students who seek out their services, resources, and programming; (c) the staff of LGBT resource centers influence the ways in which students interpret and understand their experiences with the centers; (d) LGBT resource centers provide a sense of visibility and voice on campus; (e) LGBT resource centers reinforce LGBT student identity; (f) the location of and community associated with the center impact the atmosphere of the LGBT resource center; (g) despite their presence on campuses some LGBT students have no or only limited involvement with LGBT resource centers; and (h) the placement of LGBT resource centers within larger multicultural centers may impact how centers are utilized and perceived. Based on these

findings recommendations for institutions with LGBT resource centers and student affairs practitioners as well implications for future research are provided.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Burr Dyrall Hartman and Anna Marie Hartman, for their unconditional love and support and for accepting me for who I am.

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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE OF STUDY

On September 22, 2010, Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi committed suicide (Parker, 2012). This desperate act was a result of harassment at the hands of his college roommate, Dharun Ravi and Molly Wei, another student from his residential housing unit. Clementi, a closeted gay male, was publicly “outed” when Ravi and Wei streamed live video of an intimate encounter between Clementi and another male. Unable to cope with the humiliation and harassment he experienced, Clementi posted one final message on his Facebook page, “jumping off the GW bridge sorry,” before leaping to his death from the George Washington Bridge in New York City (Parker, 2012).

Amanda Stevens, a first-year transgender student, was forced to disclose her gender identity during orientation at State University of New York at Albany (Tilsley, 2010). When the larger group divided into smaller groups based on sex, Amanda, biologically male, chose to join the female group, the group she identified with most (Tilsley, 2010), the orientation leader asked in front of the entire group if she had made a mistake. It was at that point that Amanda was forced to disclose to everyone that she was transgender (Tilsley, 2010).

Although these scenarios represent very different challenges faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, both relate to a larger issue in higher education—colleges and universities must update their policies and practices to more effectively acknowledge the presence and support the needs of LGBT students, faculty, and staff. Despite

the efforts of LGBT advocacy groups as well as students, faculty, and staff dedicated to enhancing the campus climate toward LGBT students, Clementi's and Stevens's situations indicate that there are many issues that still require more attention. Most disturbingly, Clementi represents but one of many suicides linked to bullying of LGBT youth (Andrews & Lewinsohn, 1992; Bagley & Trembley, 2000; Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Marine, 2011; Remafedi, 1999; Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991; Remafedi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998). The suicides of Clementi and other LGBT youth represent an extreme response to the many issues of emotional and physical bullying as well as related challenges that this marginalized population experiences in a heterocentric and heterosexist society. According to Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002), the types of harassment that LGBT students face include "offensive jokes, ugly graffiti, sexual harassment, hate mail/e-mail, verbal insults and threats of physical violence to vandalism of personal property, having objects thrown, being chased, followed, spat upon, punched, kicked, beaten, and assaulted with weapons" (p. 12). These are problems faced by students ranging from middle school to college ages. As a result, schools need to recognize the need to create and improve services to help LGBT youth.

College campuses offer a unique opportunity to increase the resilience of LGBT students through the development of targeted policies, procedures, programs, and resources. Some college campuses have already demonstrated this commitment by providing resource centers that engage students of specific identities and interests. It is not uncommon for colleges and universities to establish multicultural and African American centers, as well as services for Greek organizations and other historically underrepresented and marginalized groups. To ensure these programs and centers are well grounded, the Council on the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) established standards and guidelines to effectively manage such

programs (CAS, 2009). These include standards for LGBT centers, women's centers, and multicultural centers. In addition, student affairs professionals working with historically underrepresented and marginalized groups often identify with and are often members of the communities they serve. As Komives and Woodard (1996) stated, these student affairs professionals "possess a specialized understanding of students, their experience, and how the academic environment can enhance their development and learning" (p. xvii).

In the 1990s, colleges and universities began acknowledging that LGBT students may also require specialized resources that were not historically available on their campuses. B. Beemyn (2002) indicated that less than 10 LGBT resource centers existed prior to 1990 with more than 50 new centers established throughout that decade. Since that time, over 200 campuses have hired staff to provide support for LGBT students. Although LGBT youth are self-disclosing at ever increasingly younger ages (Broido, 2004), most campuses have not developed resources for LGBT students and may find themselves unable to address the expanding personal and professional development needs of these students. Colleges can be more proactive in looking at potential issues with regard to promoting LGBT-friendly campus climates (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011; Garber, 2002; Mueller & Broido, 2012; Rankin, 2005; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011), increasing awareness of LGBT issues through curricular changes (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Kahn, 2007; Sanlo et al., 2002), and providing programs and services, such as safe zones, support/discussion groups, and Lavender Graduations to name but a few (CAS, 2009; Sanlo, 2000). Additionally, campuses can establish LGBT resource centers to promote a sense of inclusion for students who might otherwise be invisible (Rhoads, 1994).

Statement of Problem

As a relatively new area of study, the scholarship on LGBT students in higher education has focused on assessing the needs and experiences of students without providing much in terms of recommendations to address these needs. The foci of the literature tend to be quite varied. On one hand, research shows the need for colleges and universities to revise institutional policies and procedures to be more LGBT inclusive. For example, when planning recruitment initiatives, little effort is made to identify and target LGBT students (Einhaus, Viento, & Croteau, 2004). Likewise, little attention has been paid nationally on the financial aid challenges faced by LGBT students (Burns, 2011). Similarly, the need to provide LGBT students housing options that allow them to feel safe has been explored (L. D. Patton, Kortegast, & Javier, 2011).

Beyond the institutional focus, a multitude of student development theories specific to the LGBT individual have emerged over the last three decades. Although Cass's (1979, 1984) model remains a prominent fixture in student affairs coursework today, it no longer reflects LGBT student development adequately (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Marine, 2011; L. D. Patton, et al., 2011). More recent identity development models by D'Augelli (1994), Fassinger (1998), and Bilodeau (2005) have explored issues of LGBT identity as they pertain to college-age students specifically; however, these models do not accurately reflect the complexities of identity development experienced by most college students today (Marine, 2011). Therefore, one must be familiar with a number of identity development models, not just those related to the LGBT community, when working with this population of students.

Lastly, there is a need for campuses to facilitate the development of an LGBT community for students, particularly one where they can feel safe and included (L. D. Patton, et al., 2011). In part, the idea of community is challenged by the heterogeneous makeup of the LGBT

community. The needs of some members of the community are different from others. As L. D. Patton et al. (2011) stated, “There is a false assumption that a unified LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer] actually exists” (p. 182). Intentional community building efforts are therefore necessary.

It is critical to note the diversity of the LGBT community, starting with the differentiation of its core aspects, sexual orientation and gender identity. As defined by Savin-Williams (2005), sexual orientation is “the preponderance of erotic feelings, thoughts, and fantasies one has for members of a particular sex, both sexes, or neither sex” (p. 28). In contrast, G. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) defined gender identity as “how one sees oneself as a gender being, which includes one’s sense of self and the image that one presents to the world” (p. 170). Subsequently, it is imperative for those working with the LGBT community to recognize that challenges faced by students with various gender identities are considerably different than those associated with student’s experiences based on their sexual identities.

On the basis of the challenges experienced by LGBT students, an ever-growing body of literature on LGBT support services began emerging in the field of student affairs, as referenced briefly in the prior paragraphs. In response to this growing field of study, some colleges and universities established LGBT resource centers to address the needs of these students. LGBT resource centers emerged on college campuses beginning in the early 1970s when post-Stonewall generation student activists began to demand space and resources to promote LGBT rights and interests (Marine, 2011). The majority of LGBT resource center scholarship concerns the history of major centers; assessing campus climates, developing recommendations, and gaining administrative support; planning and executing the establishment of centers; and developing programs and creating visibility. With regard to the issue of community building, much is

written about LGBT resource centers; however, most of this research focuses on the perspectives of student affairs professionals and university administrators. However, to date there is no significant student-centered study of LGBT resource centers. Little research dedicated to the exploration of the role these centers play in the lives of LGBT students exists. Moreover, the information that is available does lacks focus on resource centers of any particular geographical location.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the role LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of LGBT students at four-year colleges and universities in the Midwest. Although the specific motivations behind the creation of LGBT resource centers vary from institution to institution, it was determined how LGBT resource centers meet the missions and visions of the institutions of higher education from the perspective of LGBT students.

Research Question

This study explored and answered the following primary research question: What role do LGBT centers play in the experiences of LGBT students who seek out services and engage in programming?

Significance of this Study

This study was significant because it provides the first empirical data regarding student and administrative perceptions of LGBT resource centers for LGBT undergraduate students. Additionally, this study was of particular importance as program prioritization has the potential to call into question the value and validity of diversity initiatives (Marcy, 2004). As Hefner (2002) and L. D. Patton (2007) emphasized, Black culture centers (BCC) have already come in to question on predominantly White institutions (PWI) and are being merged into or replaced by

multicultural centers (MCC), experiencing reductions in staff, and operating under reduced budgets. Given this trend, LGBT resource centers may be scrutinized similarly as well. Currently no published research explores LGBT resource centers and their relationship to LGBT student experiences. This study also aimed to lay the groundwork for continued research on LGBT resource centers.

Challenges of Naming the Community

One challenge faced by those who engage with the current literature is the inconsistency in the labeling of the community. A number of terms and acronyms have emerged in recent decades, nearly all of which are informed by strong historical, social, and political motivations. As described by Marine (2011), “the politics of which words and initials are used, and in which order, is no small matter to many who study and write on the subject of sexuality in America” (p. 4). Similarly, Kulick (2000) stated,

The coinage, dissemination, political efficacy, and affective appeal of acronyms like this deserve a study in their own right. What they point to is continued concern among sexual and gender-rights activists over which identity categories are to be named and foregrounded in their movement and their discussions. Those are not trivial issues: A theme running through much gay, lesbian and transgendered [*sic*] writings on language is that naming confers existence (p. 244).

As a result of the politicization of labels, acronyms used to identify this community are not only inconsistent but often overly complicated as well. In addition to letters identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, some acronyms acknowledge those who are queer or questioning (both identified with Qs), allies (A) or asexual (A), and intersex (I). Consequently, those who interact with this scholarship encounter inconsistencies in the literature

and must be able to explain their own elected acronyms. For the purpose of this study, the acronym LGBT was used. This decision was based on the acronyms commonly used by scholars. As such this is commonly encountered in the secondary literature. Moreover, the acronym is contained within the name of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (2011; originally called the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education), the professional organization that plays an active role in LGBT student support services. Furthermore, for the purpose of this study both Gay Rights Movement and LGBT Rights Movement were used to describe the historical events aimed at achieving greater equality for those of the LGBT community. In general, Gay Rights Movement was used to refer specifically to the early years of the movement, which is linked historically with gays and lesbians. In turn, the designation LGBT Rights Movement acknowledges the evolving nature of the community's make-up, a change that began in the 1990s (Eaklor, 2008).

Personal Statement

This study holds a very special place in my heart. Having grown up in rural West Virginia in the 1980s and '90s, I experienced firsthand the mental, physical, and psychological abuse inflicted on gay youth or those perceived to be gay. Realizing as a young child that I was not "normal" started the living hell that I endured from my primary years to graduation from high school. Feelings of isolation, frustration, and numerous thoughts of suicide plagued me on a daily basis. It forced me to question my status as a man and challenged my concept of masculinity. I just wanted this hell to be over.

My saving grace came when I was able to escape the harassment of my tormentors from my hometown and move more than three hours away to begin my freshman year at college. This was the first place I had actually come into contact with people who were gay. Before, my only

exposure were talk shows, which typically focused on the campy nature of the drag community or the AIDS ridden men who were used to educate us about safe sex. It was at college that I found people who were secure enough to live their lives as openly gay. It was inspirational for me to know that even though they, too, had been ridiculed and abused, they were able to overcome it and live true to who they were. It was still several years, however, before I was comfortable enough to disclose my sexuality. Unfortunately, my alma mater did not have a resource center at that time. More importantly, I am not sure that even if they did I would have felt comfortable enough to seek out their services. If a center were available and I had been comfortable in making use of its resources, I can only speculate that I would have been able to find the community that I had longed for and, subsequently, been able to develop the confidence as a gay man that I was only able to develop in adulthood.

Even as I write this it is hard for me to believe that I am able to live my life as an openly gay man, let alone to study LGBT issues in higher education. As a student affairs professional, my focus is on assuring that the students I work with have the best higher education experience possible. Unfortunately, with regard to studies of LGBT resource centers, there is little emphasis on students and what they take away from their experiences when they utilize the services available. My goal with this research study is to provide a voice to these people by recounting how their LGBT resource center aided in their development as students, as young members of the LGBT community, and as individuals.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 2 provides an historical context of the Gay Rights Movement chronicling it from the Stonewall Riots of 1969 through current marriage equality efforts, with special emphasis on how it affected higher education. Chapter 2 also contains a review of the relative literature on

LGBT resource centers, the services and programs they provide, and identity development theories pertinent to the LGBT community.

Chapter 3 discusses the mixed-method qualitative approach used in this study. This chapter also focuses on data collection and analysis methods and provides brief biographical descriptions of the participants and sites selected. Chapter 4 examines the history of each of the three research sites, concentrating on the reasons for the creation of each center. A description of the mission and physical spaces is provided as well.

Chapter 5 examines data collected from participant interviews and presents the findings of the study. Participant responses will be discussed in relationship to five central themes. Chapter 6 consists of an analysis and interpretation of seven key findings. Lastly, Chapter 7 presents a summary of the study and recommendations for LGBT research centers, student affairs professionals, and future research as well as conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oh! You say there are no LGBT students on your campus, or none with problems? It is only because there is no safe person, space, or method in place for those students to share their lives or their issues. They are there, they are all around you, and until you break the silence, say the words and care about your LGBT students and staff, nothing will change in their lives, except to continue to live in the silenced, unprotected world, where they simultaneously dodge the closet door and perpetrators' venom.

(Ronni Sanlo, 2002, p. 172)

This study examined LGBT resource centers with an emphasis on the role they play in the college experiences of LGBT students at four-year institutions in the Midwest. The goal was to determine how these centers are meeting the academic, cultural, and social needs of students who utilize these services. This chapter provides an overview of literature related to LGBT resource centers and is divided into four sections. The first section briefly chronicles the history of the Gay Rights Movement from the Stonewall Riots to its current state, with emphasis on how the movement impacted institutions of higher education. Particular attention was given to examining those events that relate specifically to the establishment of LGBT resource centers on college and university campuses. The second section examines literature related to Black culture centers, multicultural centers, and other culture centers dedicated to the enrichment of racial and ethnic minority student experiences. Next, the literature related to LGBT resource centers and

the emergence of the field of LGBT student services was reviewed, as well as the programming and services offered by these centers. This section utilizes an organizational framework based on the steps established by Sanlo et al. (2002) to create and cultivate a viable and productive LGBT resource center. Finally, the closing section provides a review of development theories that relate specifically to LGBT students.

Contexts and Historical Background

Birth of the Gay Rights Movement

In the years leading up to the Stonewall Riots of 1969, the experiences of and situations for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in the United States were drastically different than they are today. Most often they were a silent minority. There were no openly gay politicians, athletes, or public figures. There were no political caucuses or organizations fighting for civil rights on behalf of the LGBT community. In every state except Illinois, it was illegal to engage in homosexual activities (Bayer, 1987). In fact, being homosexual was considered a mental illness until 1973 when it was removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM; Bayer, 1987).

Following the momentum of the Black Civil Rights Movement, riots such as those in San Francisco at Compton's Cafeteria and in New York City at the Stonewall Inn are considered to be the beginning of the modern Gay Rights Movement in the United States. One evening in August 1966, a police officer entered Compton's Cafeteria, which was a popular hangout for drag queens and sex workers in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco (Stryker & Van Buskirk, 1996). After being grabbed by the officer, one of the drag queens threw her coffee in his face, igniting the riot (Stryker & Van Buskirk, 1996). Windows were broken, a newsstand was burned down, and dishes were hurled at the police; as a result Compton's barred drag queens from the

cafeteria (Stryker & Van Buskirk, 1996). The drag queens responded in kind by picketing the establishment (Stryker & Van Buskirk, 1996). The Compton's Cafeteria riots serve as a first but relatively unknown radical uprising of the Gay Rights Movement.

More well-known is the incident at the Stonewall Inn. In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, New York City police officers raided the Stonewall Inn, a less-than-reputable gay bar located in Greenwich Village (Kaiser, 1997). While raids on the establishment were not uncommon, this one in particular occurred on a fateful day when many patrons were mourning the death of gay icon and advocate Judy Garland. The harassment at the hands of the officers, which normally would have occurred without reaction, ignited fury in patrons. As recounted by one such individual, Stormé DeLarverie, a cross-dressing lesbian "the cop hit me, and I hit him back" (Kaiser, 1997, p. 198). As she exclaimed, for the first time, "The cops got what they gave" (p. 198). For six days the riots continued while attracting media attention across the nation. As described by Kaiser (1997), "No other civil rights movement in America ever had such an improbable unveiling: an urban riot sparked by drag queens" (p. 205).

It is important to note that transgender people played a significant role in initiating the Gay Rights Movement through their involvement in the riots at Compton's Cafeteria and Stonewall Inn. Regardless, the riots inspired thousands of gays and lesbians to join the fight for gay civil rights. Despite the fact that much of the news coverage was negative, "the startling world of gay people fighting back inspired the formation of new, and newly radical, 'gay liberation' organizations in cities and on university campuses coast to coast" (Marcus, 2002, p. 121). In the aftermath of the riots, organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance were established to organize the fight for gay rights.

The 1970s

Marine (2011) indicated that in the years leading up to the Stonewall Riots and subsequent gay rights efforts in other cities, a parallel gay liberation movement was occurring on college campuses across the United States. In many cases the activities of gay and lesbian college students focused on creating a sense of community; however, many university administrators refused to recognize officially these LGBT groups (Marine, 2011). Nevertheless, the early stages of the gay rights movement began to play out on college campuses when Stephen Donaldson (who also used the pseudonym Robert Martin) founded the Student Homophile League on the campus of Columbia University in 1967. The group was established to oppose homophobia on the campus and received official recognition on the part of the university administration when Donaldson provided a list of members demonstrating that prominent students were affiliated with the organization (Marine, 2011). Shortly thereafter, additional chapters of the Student Homophile League were founded on the campuses of Cornell, New York, and Stanford universities (Cain, 2000). In particular, the Cornell chapter established itself as a highly visible organization focused on political and social reform when its members staged a visible alliance with African American students in 1969 in protest to the administration's refusal to acknowledge their needs. The group eventually changed its name to the Cornell Gay Liberation Front and its members began to shed their pseudonyms (B. Beemyn, 2003). As a result, B. Beemyn (2003) stated, "[the Cornell Gay Liberation Front] and subsequent groups at other colleges helped make it possible for many more gay people to accept themselves and come out" (p. 223). Students at the University of Minnesota belonging to the organization Fight Repression of Erotic Expression foreshadowed the Stonewall riots when the group declared that "pink power has come to Minneapolis" and that "Gay Power, as it is properly termed, is a

homosexual movement that seeks to change the laws, attitudes and prejudices of uptight, upright heterosexual America” (Van Cleve, 2012, p. 200). Although Fight Repression of Erotic Expression dissolved in 1972, it is recognized as one of the nation’s first queer organizations as the group fought the repression against all sexual orientation and gender identities (Van Cleve, 2012).

In the wake of the Cornell Gay Liberation Front, a number of other LGBT groups were established on college campuses. However, early efforts to establish LGBT organizations often required great determination on the part of students who were frequently met with skepticism and resistance. Often the establishment of LGBT organizations in the 1970s and ‘80s required students to join together and actively fight for recognition by higher education administrators. One such group, Homophiles of Penn State, was founded in 1971 (D’Augelli, 1989). Like many others during that time, the group was chartered to promote an understanding of homosexuality and to protect the rights of homosexuals. However, the administration of Penn State University revoked the charter of this organization, informing its members that

based upon [the] sound psychological and psychiatric opinion, the chartering of your organization would create a substantial conflict with counseling and psychiatric services the University provides to its students, and that such conflict would be harmful to the best interest of the students of the University. (D’Augelli, 1989, p. 124)

Some students associated with Homophiles of Penn State experienced more personal backlash from the university. For example, one member, an education student in the process of student teaching, was dismissed from the school board. Subsequently, he was denied his degree based on his sexual orientation and was brought before a university council who questioned his moral

character. Ultimately, the case was dismissed and the student received his degree following the intervention of Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education (D'Augelli, 1989).

Not all LGBT groups during the 1970s were politically motivated. Nevertheless, many found themselves involved in legal battles to operate on their campuses. In 1972, the Committee on Gay Education, a student group at the University of Georgia, requested to schedule a dance and to make use of campus facilities for the event (Cain, 2000). However, campus officials declined the group's request, first on the basis of a change in university procedure, and then, after a second request, citing that to do so was "not in the best interest of the University" and that the dance was in "conflict with the educational purpose in apparently promoting and encouraging acts contrary to state law" (Cain, 2000, p. 94). After an appeal to the State Board of Regents and the filing of an injunction in court, a federal judge ruled that the University of Georgia had to support the Committee on Gay Education by allowing the group to schedule its dance in campus facilities. Moreover, the judge ruled that "it is not the prerogative of college officials to impose their own preconceived notions and ideals on the campus by choosing among proposed organizations, providing access to some and denying forum to those with which they do not agree" (Cain, 2000, p. 96). Significantly, Cain (2000) pointed out that the case, *Wood v. Davison*, serves as "the first reported case recognizing First Amendment associational rights of a gay and lesbian student group" (p. 94). Two years later, this First Amendment associational right was reinforced and expanded upon in *Gay Students Organization of the University of New Hampshire v. Bonner*, in which the judge declared,

Considering the important role that social events can play in individuals' efforts to associate to further their common beliefs, the prohibition of all social events must be

taken to be a substantial abridgment of associational rights, even if assumed to be an indirect one (Cain, 2000, p. 96).

Lastly, *Wood v. Davison and Gay Students Organization of the University of New Hampshire v. Bonner* succeeded against efforts to deny the plaintiff's rights on the basis of sodomy laws as the courts did not operate on the assumption that same-sex social interaction implied an intention to violate the sodomy statute (Cain, 2000).

The first professionally staffed LGBT resource centers began showing up on college campuses in the early 1970s. The very first of its kind was established on the campus of the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor in 1971 (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013). Originally known as the Lesbian-Gay Male Programs Office, the office was the first LGBT resource center established on a campus and staffed by non-students. Although the two individuals who coordinated the center were hired on a quarter-time basis, Sanlo et al. (2002) recognized the University of Michigan center as the “first time that a major university offered supportive services to lesbian and gay students” (p. 17). By 1977, the center was staffed on a half-time basis before becoming part of Counseling Services in 1982 (Sanlo et al., 2002). Of the LGBT centers recognized by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, only one additional center was established during the 1970s on the campus of the University of Minnesota at Mankato (1977; Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013).

The establishment of the first LGBT resource centers during the 1970s represents a marked shift in attitudes toward sexual orientation-based minorities. During this decade, a number of significant advances for lesbian women and gay men occurred on college campuses. Among the most notable were the first course on lesbian and gay studies offered at the

University of California at Berkeley (1970), the first known openly gay student body president, Jack Baker, was elected at the University of Minnesota (1971) and re-elected (1972), the first Queer Studies Department was founded at the City College of San Francisco (1972), and the first conference for lesbians hosted by UCLA (1973; Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011). As the decade came to a close, a number of additional firsts in the fight for gay rights occurred away from college campuses, such as the establishment of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (1972), the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (1973), and Lambda Legal (1973).

Additionally, Harvey Milk was elected the first openly gay member on the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco in 1978 but was assassinated later that year (Fetner, 2008). Consequently, however, anti-gay rights efforts also increased significantly throughout the decade, as exemplified by the efforts of conservatives, such as anti-gay activist and Christian leader Anita Bryant (Fetner, 2008). The decade closed with an important milestone for the Gay Rights Movement when an estimated 75,000 to 125,000 gay men and lesbian women participated in the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (Ghaziani, 2008). Recent scholarship suggests that the idea for the National March on Washington was Harvey Milk's (Ghaziani, 2008).

The 1980s

During the 1980s, the Gay Rights Movement saw an important shift from regional to national efforts. At the beginning of the decade most efforts for the movement were situated on college campuses and in large cities, particularly those with active LGBT communities.

However, by the end of the decade, a number of important umbrella organizations were organizing on a national level and expanding movement efforts (Fetner, 2008) in an effort to turn the idea of a gay community into a reality (Adam, 1987). Nevertheless, the movement also faced

two new challenges not initially experienced during the first decade of its existence. First, with the election of President Ronald Reagan, a conservative Republican from California, the Christian Right gained new support (Fetner, 2008; Stein, 2012). By 1980, about 90% of all religious television programming was purchased commercially by religious conservatives, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson (Adam, 1987). Additionally, these groups openly attacked gays and lesbians in print and other media; in a well-known 1981 letter, Falwell wrote, “Please remember, homosexuals do not reproduce! They recruit! And, many of them are out after my children and your children” (Adam, 1987, p. 113). Nonetheless, some members of the gay and lesbian community openly endorsed liberal religious leaders such as the Reverend Jesse Jackson during his 1984 and 1988 Democratic presidential campaigns (Adam, 1987; Stein, 2012).

Second and more importantly, however, a new pandemic emerged that seemingly targeted western gay men (Adam, 1987; D’Augelli, 1998; Nadal, 2013; Rayside, 2008; Stein, 2012). Initially the disease was known as “the gay plague” due to its prominence among men who engaged in sexual activity with other men (Stein, 2012). As a result, gay men were stigmatized by religious conservatives who “defined gay men as disease carriers polluting an innocent population” (Adam, 1987, p. 157). Among scientists and researchers, the disease was referred to as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID; Stein, 2012). Perhaps most startling, however, was that funding for research to develop treatments and cures for the disease was difficult to obtain, largely due to major research companies rejecting the funds Congress was making available at the time (Nadal, 2013). Only after the media began to associate the disease with celebrities (e.g., Rock Hudson, Liberace) and other well-known individuals (e.g., Ryan White), and scientists demonstrated that the disease was transferred through unprotected sex (i.e., heterosexual and homosexual alike) as well as contaminated blood, did GRID assume the name

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and the virus that causes it to become known as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV; Stein, 2012). It would not be until 1987 that President Reagan publicly addressed HIV/AIDS and established the Presidential Commission on HIV (Rimmerman, 2004b).

Despite the challenges posed by the Christian Right as well as HIV/AIDS, these new obstacles also helped to unify the gay and lesbian community. In light of the stigmatization associated with HIV/AIDS, gay and lesbian groups on college campuses and larger cities began to organize and establish resources for those struggling with the disease (Fetner, 2008). In general, these resources were located in large cities where most cases of the disease were centered, namely Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City (Fetner, 2008). Still, gay and lesbian activists began organizing their largely regional efforts to establish nationwide groups to combat the mobilization of the conservative efforts against the Gay Rights Movement (Stein, 2012). As a result, these new umbrella organizations employed new fund raising and organizing methods not previously used as well as helped to train a new generation of gay and lesbian to effectively manage large-scale organizations (Fetner, 2008). For example, during the 1984 Democratic Convention in San Francisco, approximately 100,000 marchers joined efforts to demand

- Immediate, increased funding for AIDS research
- Provision of social services for lesbian and gay youth, aged, disabled, prisoners, and poor
- “An end to violent attacks against lesbians and gay men”
- An executive order prohibiting discrimination in federal employment
- A national lesbian and gay rights law

- Child custody, adoption and visitation rights
- Enforcement of civil rights legislation, including with the lesbian/gay community
- Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment for women
- An end to discrimination in immigration and naturalization laws
- The right of women to choose “if and when to bear children” including the right to choose abortion
- Legal recognition of lesbian and gay relationships
- Repeal of sodomy and solicitation laws. (Adam, 1987, p. 128)

Following the march, several of these demands were adopted by the Democratic Party and endorsed as part of presidential nominee Jesse Jackson’s platform (Adam, 1987). Gay and lesbian activists reprised the idea of a national march with the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which drew an estimated 200,000 to 650,000 gays and lesbians (Ghaziani, 2008). In essence, the challenges posed at the onset of the decade gave gay and lesbians the skills needed to organize and finance efforts to expand the Gay Rights Movement and gain ground in the 1990s (Fetner, 2008).

With regard to those efforts aimed at bettering the experiences of LGBT college students, Kevin Berrill founded the Campus Project in 1987 (Sanlo et al., 2002). A subsidiary of the NGLTF, Berrill used his role within Campus Project to examine the climate for LGBT college students (Sanlo et al., 2002). Before the end of the decade, five college campuses established LGBT resource centers: University of Pennsylvania (1982), University of Massachusetts at Amherst (1983), Grinnell College (1986), Princeton University (1989), and Western Michigan University (1989; Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013).

The 1990s

Overcoming the challenges of the 1980s, the new decade saw a number of advances on the political front with regard to the struggle for LGBT rights. In August 1990, newly elected President George H. W. Bush signed the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resource Emergency (CARE) Act into law, which provided federal funding for programs to help people living with HIV/AIDS (Rimmerman, 2004b). As a result the public was more cognizant of the challenges posed by the disease, regardless of one's sexuality. Consequently, a red ribbon was established in 1991 by Visual AIDS as a symbol to promote awareness of and compassion for LGBT community members fighting AIDS (Rowlett, 2004). Nevertheless, members of the LGBT community continued to struggle for their civil rights and against efforts to deny them. Perhaps most notably were two policies signed into law during the presidency of Democrat Bill Clinton. First, Don't Ask Don't Tell was signed into law in December 1993 to allow homosexuals the right to serve in the military as long as they did not disclose their sexual orientation (Eaklor, 2008; Rimmerman, 2004a). Second was the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that was signed into law in September 1996; the law defined marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman (Eaklor, 2008; Rimmerman, 2004a). Additionally, DOMA gave individual states the right to not recognize a same-sex marriage granted in other states (Eaklor, 2008; Rimmerman, 2004a). Nevertheless, President Clinton did issue by Executive Order in May 1998 that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited within the federal government (Eaklor, 2008).

Prior to DOMA being signed into law, however, a historic turn in the quest for equality for same-sex couples occurred when in 1993 the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled in *Baehr v. Lewin* that the state's ban on same-sex marriage was discriminatory on the basis of the state's

constitution (Andersen, 2005). In doing so, the court openly challenged the enduring idea that marriage is a construct for opposite-sex couples only. Groups such as Lambda Legal embraced the court's ruling by prioritizing same-sex marriage among those initiatives that warranted lobbying and served as co-counsel in the case as it proceeded through the judicial process (Andersen, 2005). Consequently, the ruling ignited a wave of legislation across the nation intent on denying marriage rights to same-sex couples (Andersen, 2005). Ultimately, 30 states and the federal government passed laws denying marriage rights to same-sex couples before Hawaiian courts made their final ruling on appeals, which decided that same-sex couples had no right to marry (Andersen, 2005).

In light of the political and legal challenges faced during the 1990s, organizations associated with the Gay Rights Movement continued to use the skills they developed to promote their efforts at the national level. In part, this involved broadening the community to include transgender people, who up to now were marginalized; in essence the LGB community of the 1970s and 1980s became the LGBT community during the 1990s (Eaklor, 2008). As a result, the LGBT community was more highly visible than in previous decades. Of particular note is the 1993 National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, which attracted a record of nearly 1,000,000 lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender persons (Ghaziani, 2008).

The struggle for equality by gays and lesbians received invaluable support when Coretta Scott King, widow of civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., appealed to civil rights activists around the country to join the efforts to put an end to homophobia (Long, 2012). This call echoed similar statements expressed by her during the 1980s (Eaklor, 2008). Rather than presenting LGBT people as deviant and predatory or as struggling with mental illness or

HIV/AIDS, as had been common in previous decades, film and television introduced the public a wide range of people who simply happened to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Eaklor, 2008).

Television series in the 1990s revealed to audiences the ordinary and occasionally extraordinary lives. Such firsts include same-sex marriages on *Friends*, *Northern Exposure*, and *Roseanne*; the first openly gay main character (*Will & Grace*); gay reality TV star and AIDS activist, Pedro Zamora (*Real World*); and the first coming out (Ellen DeGeneres on *Ellen* and in real life) to list just a few (Eaklor, 2008). Film accomplished much of the same. Tom Hanks and Hillary Swank both earned Oscars for their portrayals of a gay man terminated due to AIDS and a transgender man murdered due to his gender identity respectively (Eaklor, 2008). Less serious depictions of gay and lesbian life were presented in *The Birdcage* (1996) and *In & Out* (1997; Eaklor, 2008).

Even as the community made strides to become more visible, LGBT people were often victimized through acts of violence solely on the basis of their sexual and gender identities. During this decade, two such cases received national attention after each of the victims died as a result of their injuries. In 1994, Brandon Teena, a transgender man from Nebraska who was born female but identified as a man, was brutally raped and murdered by two men whom he had met through his girlfriend (Eaklor, 2008; Marine, 2011). The case was highly publicized; however, the media did not know how to refer to Teena when discussing his death since his biological sex did not match societal expectations with regard to his gender identity (Eaklor, 2008). For example, Katherine Ramsland, a well-known Court TV commentator, consistently referred to Teena using the pronouns “she” and “her” during telecasts (Eaklor, 2008). Less than five years later, Matthew Shepard was savagely beaten by two men he met in a bar near the college campus of the University of Wyoming (Eaklor, 2008; Streitmatter, 2010). Shepard, an openly-gay man, was strapped to a fence and left to die by his attackers (Eaklor, 2008;

Streitmatter, 2010). After five days on life support, Shepard succumbed to his injuries while the world watched (Streitmatter, 2010). Many prominent figures (celebrities, politicians, and gay rights advocates alike) responded to Shepard's death with demands for hate crime legislation and for stricter penalties for individuals who commit them (Streitmatter, 2010). The victim's father, Dennis Shepard, addressed the media stating,

My son Matthew paid a terrible price to open the eyes of all of us who live in Wyoming, the United States, and the world to the unjust and unnecessary fears, discrimination, and intolerance that members of the gay community face every day. (as cited in Eaklor, 2008, pp. 216–217)

Both Shepard's and Teena's stories were later turned into movies and plays, bringing more attention to the challenges that many young LGBT people face. *The Matthew Shepard Story* (2002) and *The Laramie Project* (2002), which was based on a play by the same name, recounted the events surrounding Shepard's death, and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), for which Hilary Swank won an Academy Award for best actress, helped to make the American public more aware of the realities of hate crime violence (Eaklor, 2008). Subsequently, the decade ended with greater urgency to increase legislation to combat hate crimes in the United States (Streitmatter, 2010).

The 1990s was a critical decade for the advancement of efforts to assist LGBT students on college and university campuses. During the early 1990s, a number of Safe Zone programs were established on college campuses (Sanlo et al., 2002). Similarly, college campuses began to incorporate statements about sexual orientation and gender identity/gender expression into their nondiscrimination policies as well as offer domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples during the decade (Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). Driven by the efforts initiated by Kevin Berrill and the Campus Project, NGLTF began to funnel more resources into projects for LGBT students (Sanlo

et al., 2002). By 1993, the Board of Directors of NGLTF started looking for ways to provide the funding needed for Campus Project to be successful and selected Curtis Shepard to direct the program (Sanlo et al., 2002). Based on Shepard's early work with Campus Project, he indicated that his primary goal for the organization was "to foster the growth of campus organizations that are healthy, effective, and equipped to participate meaningfully in improving the quality of life for LGBT people in academe" (Shepard, Yeskel, & Outcalt, 1995, p. ii). However, due to the limited resources of NGLTF, Campus Project was eventually eliminated with the understanding that the organization would work closely with campus directors (Sanlo et al., 2002). Directors of LGBT resource centers around the country met in November 1995 at the NGLTF Creating Change leadership conference (National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change) to begin the discussion concerning the need for a professional organization for LGBT professionals in higher education (Sanlo et al., 2002). However, it was not until July 1997 that three campus directors (Robert Schoenberg of University of Pennsylvania, Ronni Sanlo of University of California at Los Angeles, and Sue Rankin of Pennsylvania State University) drafted a proposal for the new organization, which was approved during the Creating Change Conference in November of the same year (Sanlo et al., 2002). The new organization was named the National Consortium of Directors of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources in Higher Education (Sanlo et al., 2002). Following the establishment of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, Sanlo drafted the LGBT standards and guidelines for the CAS (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011). Of particular note was the fact that the terms bisexual and transgender did not enter the standard vocabulary of higher educational professionals until the mid-1990s (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011). By the end of the 1990s, more than 50 new LGBT

resource centers were established on campuses nationwide (The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013).

2000 and Beyond

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been a number of significant advances in the struggle for equal rights for LGBT people. In part, the struggle for equality involved continued nonviolent demonstration and increased visibility. With this increased visibility, the LGBT community began to more fully recognize those individuals who were identified as “queer, questioning, intersexed, and interested” (Eaklor, 2008, p. 237) and began to include the Q as part of the acronym. In April 2000, nearly 200,000 people gathered for the first Millennium March on Washington for Equality (Eaklor, 2008). A similar march attracted more than 500,000 in October 2009 (Hirshman, 2012). Perhaps most notable, however, is that the 21st century saw the first recognition of the civil unions, with Vermont being the first in 2000 (Walters, 2006). In subsequent years, other states would follow suit. Following the successful passage of Vermont’s law permitting civil unions, the first state to recognize same-sex marriages was Massachusetts in 2004 (Marshall, 2006). As was the case with civil unions, additional states would follow Massachusetts’s example and legalize same-sex marriage. However, the topic of same-sex marriage remained a contentious issue in some states. In 2004 alone, amendments banning same-sex marriage were passed in 11 states (Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah; Eaklor, 2008). In California, the law permitting same-sex marriage, which was passed in 2008, was blocked by the Ninth Circuit (Hirshman, 2012). After multiple years of appeals through the federal court system, Proposition 8, as the state constitution amendment banning same-sex marriage was known, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a statement in June 2013 indicating that

the sponsors of Prop 8 “lacked standing to appeal to the Ninth Circuit from a district court decision holding Prop 8 unconstitutional after a full bench trial” (Soubly & Walsh, 2013, p. 5). At the time of this study, 19 states and the District of Columbia recognize same-sex marriage and a number of states recognize or allow civil unions (Human Rights Campaign, 2013). In addition to Proposition 8, three additional laws denying rights to the LGBT community were abolished since 2000. In 2003, the anti-sodomy law in Texas was overturned by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Lawrence v. Texas* (Eaklor, 2008; Kennedy, 2006). This ruling set a precedent for other states on the basis of equal protection guaranteed by the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Eaklor, 2008, Kennedy, 2006). Similarly, the aforementioned Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and the Defense of Marriage Act were both repealed (Frank, 2013; Soubly & Walsh, 2013).

In spite of these successes, the fact remains that the situation for LGBT people is still in need of improvement. More than a decade after the tragic death of Matthew Shepard, LGBT youth still suffer physical and emotional abuses based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, perceived or otherwise. In September 2010, nine teenagers committed suicide in response to bullying experienced in reference to their sexual orientation and gender identities (Monroe, 2012). Statistics indicate that LGBQ youth are twice as likely to experience harassment on the basis of their sexual identity as their heterosexual peers (Rankin et al. 2010). Similarly, transgender and gender non-conformist (GNC) individuals experienced harassment at more than three times the rate of their gender conforming peers (Rankin et al., 2010). In light of the suicides and the sobering statistics regarding bullying of LGBT youth, Dan Savage, a sex advice columnist based in Seattle, and his husband, Terry Miller, launched the It Gets Better campaign (Savage & Miller, 2011). Intended to inspire LGBT youth who are struggling with their identities and experiencing bullying, Savage and Miller recorded short statements of their

personal experiences with bullying and rejection during high school and how they overcame these obstacles and were able to find love and acceptance after graduating (Savage & Miller, 2011). Within a matter of days, the campaign consisted of more than a 1,000 videos from around the world, many of which were submitted by prominent celebrities (e.g., Ellen Degeneres, Neil Patrick Harris, Chaz Bono, Tim Gunn) and political figures (e.g., President Barack Obama, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Nancy Pelosi); this far exceeded the initial goal of 100 videos (Savage & Miller, 2011). Sensing the historical and cultural significance of the It Gets Better Project, even the presidents of universities contributed to the campaign, including the presidents of the University of Pennsylvania, Emory University, University of California, and the University of Arizona as well as the members of LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education (It Gets Better Project, 2014).

In higher education, an important achievement for access and equity for LGBT students and professionals occurred when Charles R. Middleton was named the nation's first out university president when he accepted the presidency of Roosevelt University in 2003 (Neff, 2003). Since Middleton assumed his position at Roosevelt University, a number of other out college and university administrators have accepted positions as president for their respective institutions. Subsequently, the organization LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education was established in 2010 (Masterson, 2011). The establishment of groups such as the organization of LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education demonstrates a shift in attitudes toward gay and lesbians in academic institutions. This sentiment is echoed in the fact that more than 100 LGBT resource centers have been created since the turn of the millennium (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013).

Review of Related Literature

The Rise of BCCs and Culture Centers

LGBT resource centers represent only one type of culture center on college campuses today. Colleges and universities around the country have established a number of different facilities serving marginalized students on their campuses, such as Latina or Latino culture centers, Asian American culture centers, Native American culture centers, and BCCs as well as MCCs that target a variety of minority student groups at PWIs (L. D. Patton, 2005, 2010b). Unfortunately, discussions of culture centers in higher education are limited in both number and scope (Lozano, 2010; L. D. Patton, 2005, 2010b). Moreover, most of the literature relates specifically to BCCs, which were among the first culture centers established on campuses in the wake the Civil Rights Movement. In general, however, writings about BCCs and other culture centers are historical or anecdotal in nature (L. D. Patton, 2005, 2010b). L. D. Patton (2004) found that most writings focused on the impact of student protest movements during the 1960s and 1970s on the establishment of BCCs.

In general, BCCs were founded in response to institutions that were reluctant to change and acknowledge the shifting landscape of their student bodies' compositions (L. D. Patton, 2010b). Despite the fact that Black students began to attend colleges and universities in greater numbers during the 1960s and 1970s, most institutions expected Black students to assimilate to the new predominantly White environment and maintain the status quo (L. D. Patton, 2010a). Consequently, Black students experienced feelings of marginalization and isolation. As Ladson-Billings (2010) pointed out, "students of color often report feeling isolated and misunderstood on campuses of predominantly White institutions" (p. xii). Similarly, Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, Tuttle, Ward, and Gaston-Gayles (2004) stated "Black students were barely tolerated on many

campuses and felt the sting of racism in class where they were simultaneously invisible and a spectacle” (p. v). Additionally, students of color tended to perceive and experience racism, prejudice, and stereotyping more than their White peers (Griffin, Nichols, Pérez, & Tuttle, 2008). Accordingly, such experiences tended to have a negative impact on their experiences as students as well as their educational progress and success (Griffin et al., 2008). As such, the creation of BCCs were rooted historically in the struggles of Black students who held the administrations of PWIs accountable to their needs, who fought against their marginalization, and who demanded that their identities be acknowledged and reflected in academic courses as well as in university resources (L. D. Patton, 2010b).

The first to extend beyond historical and anecdotal discussions, L. D. Patton’s (2004) study assessed the role of BCCs in the experiences of Black students at three PWIs. Patton wanted to gain insight on the role such centers played in the lives of those students who utilized their services. Using a mixed methods approach that combined case study and phenomenological qualitative methodologies, Patton interviewed 31 students recommended by the center directors of one Southern and two Midwestern BCCs; institutions varied in both size and type with one institution being an all-male college. In addition to providing empirical data outlining the experiences of Black students who make use of the BCCs on campuses, Patton aimed to understand the relationship between the BCCs and undergraduate students, the types of programs, resources, and services offered by the BCCs, and the value of BCCs to the academic, cultural, and social experiences of Black students. Through her interview data, Patton identified five major themes informing the experiences of Black students and their interactions with BCCs. First, she determined that Black students perceived a lack of support from their respective institutions and the presentations of campus climate given during campus visits were inconsistent

with the climate experienced once they matriculated. Additionally, those interviewed expressed disappointment and frustration with the failure of their institutions to acknowledge Black students through the curriculum and student activities (e.g., celebrations of Black culture during Black History Month). Second, interviewees revealed varying degrees of knowledge about and comfort in making use of the programs, resources, and services of the BCCs on their campuses. Although some students arrived on campus intending to fully engage with their BCC, other students were skeptical and only connected with their BCC later during their time as students.

The third theme revealed by L. D. Patton's (2004) study involved the overall atmosphere of BCCs. In general, those interviewed communicated that their BCC served as a "home away from home" and that others who worked for and made use of the centers established themselves as "family." For example, one student expressed "It's homey, it's welcoming, it's fun . . . you know the people accept you . . . you're just another member of the family" (L. D. Patton, 2004, p. 133). Fourth, Patton discovered that student involvement with the BCCs on their campuses varied significantly. On one extreme, some students made only occasional visits to the centers on their campuses. In contrast, other students participated in programming and made use of resources very regularly, either as frequent visitors or as student employees. Finally, those interviewed perceived that their BCCs fulfilled a number of valuable roles in their experiences as undergraduate students. Some students identified the BCC itself as a valuable symbol of Black history on their campus. For others, the BCC served an important role in their transition as first-year students through offering transition-to-college programming and through collaborations with new student orientation programs. However, beyond the first year, BCCs also served the role of cultivating a sense of community by supporting Black student organizations, establishing connections with the Black community beyond the campus, and by validating their identity and

providing a voice within the greater campus community. In essence, Patton found that BCCs function beyond simply providing a place for Black students to gather; BCCs serve a valuable role in the experiences of Black students at PWIs. As expressed by Patton, “today, BCCs continue to reflect the continued progress of supporting, uplifting and celebrating Black students and Black culture” (p. 236).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Multicultural Movement in higher education began as a response to the Civil Rights Movement (L. D. Patton & Hannon, 2008). The Multicultural Movement brought with it assertions that multiculturalism and diversity were important values for institutions of higher education to embrace (L. D. Patton & Hannon, 2008). Similarly, university administrations and the federal government worked “to increase the successful enrollment, matriculation, and graduation of racial minorities to be at least congruent with the racial minority population in the United States” (L. D. Patton & Hannon, 2008, p. 143). In essence, colleges and universities began to acknowledge the value of diversity that minority student groups brought to campuses and began to nurture such diversity through reforms of curriculum and campus services (L. D. Patton & Hannon, 2008). Analogous to the Civil Rights Movement giving rise to the Multicultural Movement, the establishment of BCCs inspired the establishment of multicultural centers and other types of culture centers to better reflect the presence and serve the needs of other student groups marginalized on the basis of race and ethnicity (L. D. Patton, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010a, 2010b). However, the same push for diversification also resulted in centers for LGBT students, women, and other marginalized groups (L. D. Patton & Hannon, 2008).

The establishment of BCCs and other types of culture centers has been met with skepticism, however, by those who believe that such centers encourage segregation and

separatism from the broader university community rather than attempts to assimilate and fit in (Bankole, 2005; L. D. Patton, 2010b). However, as L. D. Patton (2006) pointed out, MCCs and other culture centers are open to everyone in a campus community and serve roles beyond those intended for Black students. Nevertheless, due to the lack of empirical evidence supporting them, the value of BCCs is under attack, particularly in light of greater numbers of students from other racial and ethnic groups (L. D. Patton, 2010). Consequently, BCCs and other independent culture centers are being merged to establish multicultural centers that serve a number of different student groups (L. D. Patton, 2007). However, such efforts to combine culture centers under a single roof undermine the struggles of such groups to establish an identity on campuses as well as their rich histories (L. D. Patton, 2004). More importantly, merging groups into a single multicultural center assumes that all students and their needs can be addressed the same way (L. D. Patton, 2004). Contrary to such beliefs, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting student development.

Summary

As revealed in the discussion above, BCCs and other types of culture centers are important resources for helping racial and ethnic minorities successfully navigate their college experiences at PWIs. Beyond the programming and support services often associated with such entities, culture centers offer students of color opportunities to connect with other students like them and develop a greater sense of community. Both are important factors for decreasing the feelings of isolation and marginalization that often result from the racism inherently experienced by these students on college campuses. Nevertheless, it must be noted that due to a lack of empirical evidence supporting the value of culture centers in the experiences of undergraduate students, these centers (and BCCs in particular) are increasingly scrutinized (L. D. Patton,

2010a). This is largely due to arguments that culture centers serve only limited numbers of students and the increasingly strained budgets under which institutions of higher education operate.

Like racial and ethnic minorities on campuses, LGBT students face a number of challenges associated with their marginalization from the broader institution community. As a result, many institutions struggle to meet the needs of LGBT students, particularly in light of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism, and traditional gender binaries (B. Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Similar to Black and other racial or ethnic minority groups that suffer marginalization and isolation due to racism, LGBT students who experience homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism are less likely to be satisfied with their higher education experience and, as a result, less likely to succeed and graduate (L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Accordingly, a number of institutions have established and updated policies to help support LGBT students, either through the presence of LGBT student organizations and inclusive policies (e.g., domestic partner benefits, LGBT-based diversity initiatives) as well as through student affairs programs such as the creation of LGBT resource centers (Milem, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Unlike BCCs and other culture centers, LGBT resource centers are a relatively recent phenomenon in higher education with most resource centers established during the late 1980s (L. D. Patton et al., 2011; Sanlo, 2000). Some institutions, however, have integrated LGBT student service initiatives into campus MCCs, the primary focus of which tend to be to support students of color and ultimately confusing perceptions of the roles of MCCs (L. D. Patton et al., 2011).

LGBT Resource Centers

The needs of LGBT college students and the people who work with them have been the focus of scholarly and casual discourse since the Gay Rights Movement. Many of the needs of LGBT students have been addressed through the creation of LGBT resource centers on college campuses as well as the establishment of CAS standards for student affairs professionals (CAS, 2009). Although LGBT resource centers have been fixtures on college and university campuses for more than 40 years, the scholarship about these resource centers is still in its infancy (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011). Concerning research on LGBT centers in particular, the majority of the current literature focuses on issues of campus climate for LGBT students, the establishment of centers, programming and services, and the inclusion of the LGBT community with regard to diversity initiatives.

Although not a research study, the most substantive discussion of LGBT services and programs is Sanlo et al. (2002) *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. This monumental text focuses on establishing the tradition of LGBT resource centers on college campuses throughout the United States. Written as a response to the death of Matthew Shepard, Sanlo et al. developed the text as a way of urging colleges and universities to be proactive in creating a safe environment for the LGBT students. The focus of this resource guide is to discuss the historical context in which well-known centers were established and operate as a way of ascertaining the best practices for campuses interested in starting their own LGBT center. Sanlo et al. provided chapters and essays that specifically address issues of assessing the need for resource centers through climate studies, hiring effective center directors, establishing an advisory board and mission plan, and maintaining and expanding the center. Additionally, Sanlo et al. (2002) described some of the more popular programs

available at and associated with these centers; such programs include Safe Zones and peer counseling as well as Lavender Graduation ceremonies. Moreover, extensive appendixes are provided as a resource for new directors and new resource centers. Significantly, Sanlo et al.'s book remains the most comprehensive and authoritative reference guide on LGBT resource centers despite the fact that it is more than a decade old.

LGBT Campus Climates

Several researchers have explored the issue of campus climates for LGBT students, faculty, and staff. In general, these climate studies have focused on exploring the perceptions of campus quality from the standpoint of LGBT students, faculty, and staff (Rankin, 2005). Although the primary goals of these studies often differed, the conclusions drawn were quite similar. LGBT students were largely marginalized on college campuses, faced harassment and violence of varying degrees, and suffered consequences as a result of such experiences (Rankin, 2005). These studies also revealed that LGBT students most often rank their campus climates lower than their heterosexual peers (Rankin, 2005). In response to these findings, some climate studies initiated discussions about ways colleges and universities can create more LGBT-friendly campuses (Rankin, 2005). In part, this involves greater training for resident assistants and other student affairs personnel who typically have more direct contact with LGBT students than faculty and administrators (Rankin, 2005).

To date the leading expert on the issue of campus climate for LGBT students is Susan R. Rankin, a founding member of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. Based on more than two decades of research on the issue, Rankin has published more than a dozen studies of campus climates as perceived by LGBT students, faculty, and staff as well as other minority groups (Evans & Rankin, 1998; Rankin, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005;

Rankin, Millar, & Matheis, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Reason & Rankin, 2006). As Reason and Rankin (2006) indicated, students require a non-discriminatory environment in order to be successful, a sentiment echoed in multiple earlier studies (Aguirre & Messineo, 1997; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001). Often, however, LGBT students do not find their college campuses to be non-discriminatory environments. In fact, nearly 20 years of research indicates that college campuses are generally unwelcoming to LGBT students and less accepting of LGBT people than any other marginalized group (Rankin et al., 2010). In part the harassment that many LGBT students experience from more dominant campus groups is intended to change or reinforce power structures on campuses (Reason & Rankin, 2006). In fact, of the more than 7,000 students surveyed on 10 campuses, 42% described their campuses as heterosexist, which is nearly twice the frequency of those reporting their campuses to be racist (Reason & Rankin, 2006). The experiences of discrimination and harassment by LGBT people were most frequently exacerbated when they also fell into another marginalized group based on race (Baez, Howd, Pepper, & Princeton Review, 2007; Clark, 2005; Negrete & Purcell, 2011; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010). In light of the complexity involved in understanding the needs of LGBT students, faculty, and staff, Rankin and Reason (2008) developed a model for assessing campus climate for those institutions wishing to gather this data.

In her groundbreaking 2003 study involving nearly 1,700 self-identified LGBT students, faculty, staff, and administrators on 14 college campuses, Rankin (2003, 2005) found 36% of the undergraduate student respondents indicated they had experienced harassment within the past year. Nearly 20% of those surveyed expressed feelings of fear for their safety due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and more than half of those surveyed indicated that conceal their

identity to avoid or due to fear of harassment (Rankin, 2003, 2005). Moreover, it was the perception of those surveyed that the college campuses involved in the study were strongly homophobic; in total 73% of faculty, 74% of students, 81% of administrators, and 73% of staff expressed this sentiment (Rankin, 2003, 2005). This is in strong contrast to the perception that college campuses are friendly (90%), concerned (75%), and respectful (80%) for their non-LGBT peers (Rankin, 2003, 2005). In general, 41% of respondents indicated that their college campuses do not address the needs of LGBT students, faculty, and staff (Rankin, 2003, 2005). Perhaps what is most telling is that Rankin's findings that college campuses are largely "inhospitable, and even hostile" (Rankin, 2005, p. 20) toward their LGBT student, faculty, and staff communities despite concerted efforts to combat homophobia; if this is the climate on campuses that Rankin describes as "proactive," (p. 20) the situation is likely significantly worse on less progressive campuses. Consistently Rankin has found that college campuses ignore the needs of LGBT students, faculty, and staff on their campuses (Rankin, 2003, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Reason & Rankin, 2006). Unfortunately, heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia have perpetuated the assumption that heterosexuality and the traditional gender binary are the norm; consequently, LGBT students remain a silent and invisible minority (Rankin, 2005; Zensky & Sanlo, 2005). The needs of this population extend beyond singular programs and services (Rankin, 2005). To counter this trend, Rankin advocated efforts to increase visibility and to develop a voice on the part of LGBT students, faculty, and staff in order to help promote changes in institutional cultures (Rankin, 2005). However, it was noted that individuals should be aware that greater visibility often elicits an increase in behaviors of harassment and discrimination (Reason & Rankin, 2006).

Unfortunately not much has changed since Rankin's 2003 study. In her most recent and more comprehensive national college climate study, Rankin et al. (2010) reported that LGBT students, faculty, staff, and administrators continue to experience harassment and discrimination more frequently than their heterosexual peers and that the harassment is based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Rankin et al., 2010). The results of the 2010 study also provided details about the nature of the type of harassments that LGBT individuals experience on college campuses; they are twice as likely to experience derogatory language (61%), be stared at (37%), and be pointed out and asked to speak as the voice of the LGBT community (36%; Rankin et al., 2010). Transgender identified individuals were four times more likely to be harassed than their gender conforming peers (Rankin et al., 2010). Moreover, LGBT students experienced harassment at a greater frequency than LGBT faculty and staff (Rankin et al., 2010). Consequently, LGBT respondents revealed more negative perceptions of their campus's climate than their heterosexual and gender conformist peers (Rankin et al., 2010). However, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer faculty revealed a more negative perception of the campus climate than LGBQ students and staff (Rankin et al., 2010).

Although climate studies clearly point to the fact that college and university campuses are homophobic and consistently neglect the needs of LGBT students, it is not appropriate to assume that all institutions that conduct campus climate studies will work to establish LGBT resource centers. In fact, very few colleges and universities have dedicated resources and personnel to LGBT resource centers (Fine, 2012; Rankin, 2003, 2005). Some institutions justify the absence of LGBT centers by stating that their campuses do not have LGBT people, though this stance is likely linked to the fact that students, faculty, and staff who identify as LGBT choose to remain silent and invisible for fear of safety and rejection (Sanlo, 2000). Other reasons cited include

fear of losing alumni support and that sexual orientation is not protected in their states (Sanlo, 2000). Sanlo (2000) emphasized, however, “this argument must not be allowed to be used as a smokescreen to justify the failure to provide services and safety to LGBT students” (p. 492). Fortunately, based on Fine’s (2012) analysis of data from the 2005 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, a number of variables could help to predict the likelihood of whether an institution of higher education will create an LGBT resource center. The most likely predictor of LGBT center establishment is an institution’s status as a public school (Fine, 2012). In general, public institutions are more than 50% more likely to have an LGBT center than private institutions (Fine, 2012). Likelihood of establishing LGBT centers, however, decreases for institutions in states that are more politically conservative as well as in certain geographic regions (Fine, 2012). For example, it is more likely that one will find resource centers established on campuses in the Midwest, Great Lakes, Mountain, and Western regions of the country than in the South (Fine, 2012). Another indicator of whether an institution is likely to create a center is its reputation as a prestigious institution (Fine, 2012). Those schools that are more selective and that boast lower faculty-to-student ratios are also more likely to start centers (Fine, 2012). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that private, religious colleges and universities are less likely to create LGBT centers on the basis of philosophical ideologies (Fine, 2012). Fine also found that despite common beliefs, the availability of funding, an urban location, and factors of gender and race have no significant effect on the likelihood an institution will establish a center.

Establishing Centers

Despite the overwhelming findings elicited through the research of Rankin and others, there is surprisingly little scholarship available concerning the process for establishing an LGBT

resource center. Beyond Sanlo et al.'s (2002) aforementioned text, most writings on creating LGBT centers amount to short, "how to" manuals containing general and often vague steps ("Building a GLBT Center", 2005; "Setting up an LGBT Center", 2006). However these documents simply duplicate the ideas in Sanlo et al. (2002). Most often, the steps identified include

1. Conduct a campus climate study in order to get a better understanding of the LGBT community on your campus and its needs;
2. Compile the results from the climate study in order to make recommendations; and
3. Work with administration to implement the recommendations. ("Setting up an LGBT Center," 2006)

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that there is no standard process by which LGBT resource centers are established; rather institutions must determine for themselves what the necessary steps are based on the results of the campus climate study (Marine, 2011).

Despite the fact that there are no set steps to creating a center, research suggests three primary reasons centers are created (Sanlo et al., 2002). First, some LGBT resource centers are founded in response to acts of homophobia, harassment, or bullying of varying degrees of severity (Sanlo et al., 2002). Such was the case in the founding of the LGBT center on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania in 1982, which was created at least in part as a response to the beating of a male student who was perceived to be gay (Sanlo et al., 2002). Second, a number of resource centers are the direct result of LGBT students, faculty, and staff demands for such centers as a means for educating the campus and local communities about LGBT issues (Sanlo et al., 2002). The center at Oberlin College was established as a direct result of the efforts of a group of students who requested space for a center (Marine, 2011).

Upon its creation, the center offered for “a forum for the political, social, emotional, and educational needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning people and their allies in the Oberlin community” (Marine, 2011, p. 25). Finally, and most rarely, a few LGBT resource centers have been created on the basis of proactive administrators who saw the implementation of such centers as important vehicles for promoting diversity and educating about LGBT-related issues (Sanlo et al., 2002).

Funding

Regardless of the circumstances involved in establishing an LGBT resource center, a key concern discussed in the secondary literature is the issue of funding and maintaining viable centers. Unfortunately, only limited discussion of this topic has occurred. In a recent survey, the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (2011) found that the operating budgets for LGBT resource centers varied widely with budgets ranging from \$1,200 to \$174,000 to fund services and programming initiatives (excluding salaries). Similarly, the same survey found that salaries ranged from \$30,000 to \$95,000 annually with an average of \$53,909 (or \$66,244 for those directors with doctorates; Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2011). For the most part, centers are usually funded through the institutions’ general operating budgets (Sanlo et al., 2002). More than 25% of LGBT centers count on student fees, at least in part (Sanlo et al., 2002). It is important, however, to note that the funding of such centers is sometimes controversial, particularly when mandatory fees imposed upon all students are used to fund services and programming that do not affirm heterocentric norms and beliefs (Ritchie & Banning, 2001). Consequently, some colleges and universities avoid using public funds, particularly conservative and religious affiliated institutions, due to fear of backlash (Sanlo et al., 2002). Therefore, some LGBT resource centers also rely on private donations,

alumni contributions, and grant monies in order to function (Sanlo et al., 2002). Some institutions also exploit fundraising efforts; however, it must be noted that fundraising activities to aid LGBT resource centers have the potential to compete with those efforts intended to aid other student services (Ritchie & Banning, 2001).

Locations of LGBT Spaces

Another topic addressed in the secondary literature and which is directly related to funding is the issue of location of centers, both physically and within an institution's organizational structure. In establishing an LGBT center, institutions must consider the size and scope of their planned centers; ideally the answer to this question is informed by the campus climate study (B. Beemyn, 2002). Some institutions may elect to create a LGBT office that operates within an existing division of the university (e.g., Office of Student Activities, Office of Campus Life, Multicultural Center; B. Beemyn, 2002). Due to their size, LGBT offices tend to have limited physical space (usually only two rooms), function with limited personnel, and receive smaller operating budgets (B. Beemyn, 2002). In contrast, LGBT centers often report directly to upper-level administrators, maintain advisory councils, have larger staffs, more physical space (often freestanding units), and more substantial operating budgets (B. Beemyn, 2002). Regardless of physical location of the center, most LGBT centers are administered as part of Offices of Student Affairs (78%) and report directly to the Vice President for Student Affairs or the Dean of Students while only 17% are associated with the Offices of Academic Affairs (Sanlo, 2000). LGBT centers may also be associated with gender or culture centers, especially if such centers office minority services (Sanlo, 2000).

It is important to note, however, that not all LGBT resource centers exist as physical spaces. This is particularly true at a time when campus' budgetary and space limitations prevent

such permanent centers, resulting in institutions establishing flexible spaces shared by a number of campus entities. Under such circumstances, institutions may offer some form of LGBT student support services in place of a establishing a physical LGBT resource center or office. The sites used for this study are members of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. To be recognized as an active member of the Consortium, an LGBT resource center or LGBT student support services office must be operated by a professional staff person or graduate assistant who dedicates at least 20 hours per week (or 50% time) to the activities of the position, the job description for which must include a “primary responsibility for providing LGBT services” (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013, para. 2).

Since the late 1990s, the target demographic of resource centers has experienced a market shift (B. Beemyn, 2002). Immediately after the Stonewall Riots, early centers focused exclusively on issues of sexual identity. As such they provided services to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, faculty, and staff as well as aimed to educate the campus community about the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (B. Beemyn, 2002). However, near the end of the twentieth century centers began to address issues of gender identity and gender expression, and to serve the transgender community (B. Beemyn, 2002). Similarly, only recently have centers broadened their mission to include programming and services to address the concerns of queer and questioning students (B. Beemyn, 2002). Older individuals, however, may respond negatively to the label *queer* as it may hold derogatory associations for them due to the fact that it was commonly used as an insult during earlier decades (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011). Due to these changes, many centers have been renamed to more accurately reflect the diversity of the community, for example LGB centers that are renamed LGBT centers (B. Beemyn, 2002).

Additionally, because some acronyms used to distinguish the make-up of the community are quite extensive (e.g., LGBTQQIAA), some institutions use terminology associated with the gay rights movement to designate their centers, such as “Stonewall,” “pride,” and “rainbow” centers (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011; B. Beemyn, 2002). Such designations may also be in reaction to contemporary youth, who are more resistant to labels than previous generations of students (Bazarsky & Sanlo, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2005). Despite the names, it is important to point out that very few centers include indications for allies in their name; however, nearly all LGBT centers provide programming and outreach services for heterosexuals on campus (B. Beemyn, 2002). Lastly, most LGBT centers direct programming and services toward the entire campus community, and only a few centers, all of which are located at private institutions, state directly that they provide services for students only (B. Beemyn, 2002).

LGBT Resource Center Programming

A significant area of research relevant to LGBT resource centers is that associated with programming and services offered by such facilities. For most students, LGBT resource centers are not only locations that offer services and a supportive environment where they can meet others that share their experiences and interests but also places where they can become involved on campus and in activities that will support their development as students and as individuals (Ritchie & Banning, 2001). However, because the LGBT community is in itself diverse, with some individuals making use of services on the basis of their sexual orientation although others seek programming that addresses issues of gender identity, it is a challenge for resource centers to meet all the needs of their stakeholders (Zemsky, 2004). Therefore, due to the complexity of identity development, LGBT centers must be careful to develop programs that are as inclusive as

possible to meet all the needs of LGBT students, faculty, and staff (Zemsky, 2004). In general, LGBT resource centers provide services such as these, as outlined by Zemsky (2004):

1. College recruitment of GLBT students
2. Scholarships for GLBT students
3. New student outreach through specific GLBT orientation programs
4. Student support groups (often including groups for specific constituencies such as students of color, bisexual and transgender students, other students, etc.) and support for GLBT student organizations (Mallroy, 1998, Outcalt, 1998, Ward, 1998a, Shepard et al., 1995)
5. GLBT social, cultural, and educational events (Shepard et al., 1995). Mentorship and leadership development programs (Kraig, 1998, Porter, 1998)
6. Career services designed specifically to meet the needs of GLBT students (Taylor et al., 1998, Worthington et al., 1998)
7. Safe Zone programs (Hothem & Keene, 1998, Shepard et al., 1995)
8. Specific outreach and support for GLBT students in athletics and fraternities (Salkever & Worthington, 1998, Rankin, 1998a, Bauer, 1998a, Bauer, 1998b)
9. Recognition of GLBT student achievement through awards ceremonies and Lavender Graduation events (Sanlo, 2000a, 2002). (p. 247)

Centers also likely offer information, counseling, and referral services for students, faculty, and staff when their needs extend beyond the capabilities of the center and its staff (Sanlo et al., 2002). Although the list above is extensive, it is important to recognize that not all centers have the resources or staff essential to undertake these endeavors. Therefore, services and

programming will likely vary significantly from center to center. As stated by Sanlo et al. (2002),

the combination of services offered will depend on variables such as the organization's mission, its consumers, its locus and reporting line with the institution, the unique profile of the particular institution, its lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, and the key players making the determination. (p. 75)

Sanlo et al. (2002) provided an extensive overview of a variety of commonly offered resources.

Safe Zones

One program offered in conjunction with LGBT resource centers commonly identified in the literature is the SAFE Zone program (Students, Administrators, and Faculty for Equality; B. Beemyn, 2002). Because it is often cited in the literature, it may be used as a proxy for a variety of LGBT programming in higher education. Also known as safe space, safe harbor, and safe on campus programs, Safe Zone aims to identify and educate potential allies who are concerned about the wellbeing of LGBT students, faculty, and staff (Zemsky, 2004). Such programs also attract LGBT faculty and staff who seek opportunities to network and interact with other LGBT individuals as well as other LGBT-affirmative members of the campus community (Sanlo et al., 2002). However, participation in Safe Zone programs is based primarily on an interest in LGBT issues rather than on factors of sexual orientation specifically (Zemsky, 2004). Some campuses have also established LGBT programs for fraternities and sororities (Zemsky, 2004).

In terms of operation, participants are provided with resources as well as stickers that help to identify them as safe zones (Evans, 2002; Sanlo et al., 2002; Zemsky, 2004). Having emerged on college campuses around the country during the early 1990s, Safe Zones are locations, usually offices, where LGBT students, faculty, and staff can come for information and

assistance without fear of intolerance or rejection (Sanlo et al., 2002). Student government associations, offices of student affairs, and equal employment or affirmative action offices usually fund Safe Zones; however, on campuses with such centers, Safe Zone initiatives operate in conjunction with LGBT resource centers (Sanlo et al., 2002). Still some programs are externally funded through grants and operate without the fear of institutional pressures by refusing funds from the colleges and universities they serve (Sanlo et al., 2002). Regardless, institutions must establish committed leadership in order to implement and maintain a successful Safe Zone program (Evans, 2002). In the absence of an LGBT resource center, Safe Zones are established and run by knowledgeable volunteers who provide the labor-intensive work needed to provide the on-going training required for programs to be effective (Sanlo et al., 2002). Nevertheless, regardless of who coordinates Safe Zone programs, they tend to be inconsistent from campus to campus.

Safe Zone programs and LGBT resource centers have also been the subject of lawsuits and other legal challenges. In particular, the Georgia Institute of Technology and its Safe Zone program were sued in 2006 on the basis of religious discrimination (Cai, 2008). Two students, with the assistance of the Christian legal organization Alliance Defense Fund, sued Georgia Tech, citing that the institution violated the students' First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Moreover, the plaintiffs alleged that Georgia Tech discriminated against political and religious organizations, refusing to support such groups with funds acquired through student activity fees (Cai, 2008). With regard the allegations against Georgia Tech's Safe Zone program, the lawsuit referred specifically to literature made available by the program that expressed clear preference for certain religions over others (Jaschik, 2008). In the end, the

plaintiffs settled out of court, and Georgia Tech revised its Speech Zone policies as well as removed religious materials from the Safe Zone program (Cai, 2008).

As LGBT students, faculty, and staff often feel invisible and unwelcome on their campuses, Safe Zones help to give community a sense of acceptance to LGBT individuals within a community (Sanlo et al., 2002). Therefore, Safe Zones are important for providing visibility to LGBT communities by clearly indicating that some locations and individuals are welcoming, despite the likelihood that campus environments on the whole may be unwelcoming (Sanlo et al., 2002). Such visibility is positive and affirming to LGBT students, faculty, and staff (Evans, 2002). Additionally, Safe Zone programs help campuses to be supportive of LGBT students, faculty, and staff as well as present strong messages of institutional support on such issues (Zemsky, 2004). Moreover, Safe Zones often offer awareness of and education about LGBT issues to non-LGBT individuals; however, such benefits may not be recognized (Evans, 2002). Nevertheless, Safe Zone programs often provide “teachable moments” (Evans, 2002, pp. 537–538) for program participants to help to educate others against anti-LGBT attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, however, some institutions and their administrations use the presence of Safe Zone programs to claim that LGBT issues are being addressed on their campuses (Sanlo et al., 2002). Such was communicated by participants of the Safe Zone program at Iowa State University, who claimed “more significant underlying issues facing the community continue to be ignored” (Sanlo et al., 2002, p. 97). Therefore, it is essential that LGBT inclusivity is addressed in classrooms, through efforts to document hate crimes and ease reporting of such incidents, and through the use of inclusive language on the part of institution administrators (Sanlo et al., 2002).

Safe Zone programs, however, also face other challenges. On some campuses, Safe Zone programs may not be supported by people who interpret the programs as only concerning the safety of LGBT students rather than safety for all; such attitudes present LGBT individuals as privileged rather than individuals prone to harassment, discrimination, or invisibility (Sanlo et al., 2002; Zemsky, 2004). Additionally, some may argue that Safe Zones provoke activities or behaviors that they do not support for religious or moral reasons (Zemsky, 2004). The presence of program stickers can also cause confusion when multiple individuals are located in an area, because such stickers do not clearly communicate whether an entire area is participating in the program or only an individual (Sanlo et al., 2002). Similarly, stickers sometimes cause confusion for those who encounter them, who may misinterpret the program as identifying participants as trained counselors rather than sources of information (Sanlo et al., 2002). Lastly, some program participants may experience harassment or vandalism due to the presence of a sticker in their area (Sanlo et al., 2002).

Gender Identity and Gender Expression Programming

In addition to focusing on sexuality, LGBT resource centers also provide education, programs, and services related to gender identity and expression. Transgender and genderqueer students, faculty, and staff experience college campuses in a variety of ways. As Mottet (2004) has indicated, “transgender people face situations that negatively affect very basic needs, and cause ongoing problems” (p. 35). Such problems include identification that does not match their gender, confusion about what restrooms to use, and housing arrangements. Often these challenges occur because of a general sense of ignorance about transgenderism (Smirles, Wetherilt, Murphy, & Patterson, 2009). By offering programming that addresses gender identity and gender expression, campuses can help to contribute to transgender people’s sense of

belonging and, for transgender students, positively affect their learning (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Moreover, programming on gender identity and gender expression can be of benefit to more than the transgender community as educational programming can inform the campus community about the complexities of gender identity and gender expression (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

On campuses with LGBT centers, such transgender-affirming educational initiatives are likely assumed to occur as part of the programming of these centers. However, as indicated above, this is not always the case. It is not unlikely that centers that acknowledge the needs of transgender individuals in the naming of their facilities offer only limited services for transgender people, especially for those transgender individuals who identify as straight (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Moreover, even in institutions that have inclusive anti-discrimination policies in terms of sexual orientation, which is becoming more and more common, protection for individuals based on gender identity and gender expression is less commonly so (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Therefore, colleges must be more proactive in promoting transgender-friendly campus climates, increasing awareness of transgender people through curriculum and policy changes, and providing psychological and medical services as needed (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). More than 90% of two- and four-year colleges and universities have made no changes to address transgender students' needs (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

There are several ways outlined throughout the secondary literature that would enable colleges and universities to better address the needs of transgender students, faculty, and staff. Some are simple changes that would permit transgender individuals to express their gender accurately and safely while other changes involve educating the campus community at large.

One prominent topic of discussion is the issue of housing and the need to broaden policies to consider the specific needs of transgender students (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). In general, housing policies are based on the traditional sex binary of male and female, which fails to serve transgender students, especially those who are in the process of transitioning from one gender to another (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Offices of residential life could make the application process for housing less problematic for transgender students by giving the option to identify as transgender on housing applications as well as those for admission (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Moreover, institutions should work to provide options for rooms with private bathrooms for transgender students living residence halls, gender-inclusive bathrooms in classroom buildings and common areas, and gender-inclusive locker rooms and changing areas in recreation centers, which could also serve the needs of families with children (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Furthermore, resident life staff should be provided with training that better equips them to manage concerns of and provide support to transgender students (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). However, resident life directors and staff should be sensitive to the fact that LGBT floors may not necessarily prove to be comfortable environments for transgender students, particularly those who identify as heterosexual (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Likewise, colleges and university should work to establish simple processes for transgender students to change or update records to reflect their new gender designations and names as it is important for transgender students to feel that this information confirms their gender identity (Beemyn et al., 2005; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

A second issue discussed in the literature addressing the needs of transgender students, faculty, and staff is that of counseling and health care. Unfortunately, there is only limited

research on these issues; however, it is clear that transgender people face more marginalization, harassment, violence, rejection, and isolation than their gender-conforming peers (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Rankin et al., 2010). Subsequently, these individuals are prone to experiencing more depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicide, and isolation (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Counseling is, therefore, a critical resource for transgender students, faculty, and staff; transgender students in particular face special issues associated with their gender identities as well as those faced by college students in general (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Such needs include coming out to family and friends as well as themselves, how to effectively function in gendered environments, whether to transition physically or only in terms of gender expression, romantic relationships, and managing discrimination and harassment (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Related to the need for appropriate counseling resources is the availability of health care that is sensitive to transgender people and their specific needs (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Transphobia and fear of disclosure of one's identity as being transgendered can be barriers to seeking standard medical care (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Often transgender people have to educate their healthcare providers about their needs (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). As the physical appearance of transgender individuals may not line up with their medical needs, physicians should be sensitive to the fact that transgender men may need pap smears if no hysterectomy was done as part of their transition, or that transgender women may need a prostate exam (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Moreover, transgender people may need access to safe and affordable hormones (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). The absence of such services can negatively impact "retention, academic success, and physical and mental well-being of

transgender services” (B. Beemyn et al., 2005, p. 57). By implementing the kinds of challenges detailed above, colleges and universities can demonstrate their understanding and acceptance of transgender people and make them feel part of the campus community. In turn, changing the overall climate of campuses will help to communicate to potential transgender employees and students that institutions of higher education are more accepting environments.

Summary

Similar to BCCs and other culture centers, most of the literature relating to LGBT resource centers is either historical or anecdotal in nature. To date no empirical evidence exists that supports the impact of LGBT resource centers in the experiences of undergraduate students who make use of these centers. However, due to the similar nature of the experiences of LGBT students when compared to the experiences of Black and other minority students, a number of parallel challenges emerge. Like the racism experienced by racial and ethnic minorities, heterosexism and homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are typically part of the experiences of LGBT students. Moreover, these issues are certainly compounded when LGBT students are also part of an ethnic or racial minority group. Consequently, both students of color and LGBT students express feelings of isolation and marginalization that stem from stereotyping, discrimination, and harassment. Therefore, colleges and universities must actively seek ways to support LGBT students during their undergraduate experiences.

Emergence of LGBT Student Services

Student affairs professionals are in a unique position to positively affect the experiences of students on college campuses and a small body of literature addresses the new profession of LGBT student services. As Komives and Woodard (1996) expressed, student affairs professionals “possess a specialized understanding of students, their experiences, and how the

academic environment can enhance their development and learning” (p. xvii). This sentiment is especially true for LGBT students, who face a multitude of developmental and learning challenges that other students do not. Sanlo (2000) emphasized that LGBT students “expect their voices heard, their concerns acknowledged, their needs met, and their educational environments welcoming” (p. 486). Unfortunately, however, this is not always the case as LGBT students, faculty, staff, and administrators strongly perceive college campuses are as unwelcoming by (L. D. Patton et al., 2011; Rankin, 2003, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo et al., 2002). Establishing LGBT resource centers with at least one full-time staff member is one way for institutions to make sure their campuses are inclusive of LGBT students and help meet their educational and developmental needs (Sanlo, 2000). Unfortunately, little research addresses the qualifications of and training required for LGBT resource center directors, as traditionally most of this information has been disseminated via workshops and other conference presentations (Sanlo, 2000). Nevertheless, the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (2011) found that of its full-time members who were directors of LGBT centers, most (97%) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer; were predominantly White (76%); and on average, were 38.7 years of age. More importantly, directors of LGBT centers prove to be highly educated, with 87% of those surveyed holding advanced degrees (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2011).

Sanlo (2000) provided useful information about the reasons people became directors of LGBT resource centers. In general, those surveyed indicated that they were students on campuses with no services to assist them in managing the demands of their education while also struggling with their sexual identities (Sanlo, 2000). As a result, they wished to make the experiences of younger generations of students better by providing places where students can go

to interact with accepting people and to obtain information and resources to assist in their educational and personal development (Sanlo, 2000). In order to accomplish this mission, the directors that Sanlo interviewed emphasized that in addition to having knowledge of college student development, LGBT resource center directors should also have experience with and an understanding of LGBT issues (Sanlo, 2000). Moreover, Sanlo (2000) found that directors should be “resourceful and skillful” (p. 489) in developing programming, maintain “creative and sensitive management skills” (p. 489), display a “positive regard for all students” (p. 489), exhibit a “courageous commitment to leadership and advocacy” (p. 489), and “keep students at the center of their focus” (p. 489).

In part, the limited availability of information regarding the qualifications and training of student affairs professionals is linked to the fact that most student affairs graduate programs lack courses that address specifically the needs of LGBT students. Although Sanlo (2002) found at the time of her study no courses were offered as part of student affairs graduate programs to address issues of sexual orientation or gender identity, she identified courses addressing the needs of other racial minority groups were offered in many programs (Sanlo, 2002). Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) emphasized that institutions need to be aware that student demographics constantly change and that they must adapt in terms of facilities, services, and programming in order to effectively meet these changing needs. In particular, Evans et al. identified a specific need to acknowledge and address LGBT student challenges. Unfortunately, however, most campuses have not done so. Therefore, it is critical for student affairs programs to prepare their graduates to effectively serve LGBT students. As Talbot and Viento (2005) argued, it is no longer acceptable for student affairs programs to ask whether training about LGBT issues is necessary, especially given that both NASPA and ACPA include LGBT

competencies in their professional standards and codes of ethics as well CAS standards have been established. However, as Flowers (2003) pointed out, although most student affairs programs require multicultural courses, there are not specific requirements to address LGBT student needs. Nevertheless, there are already calls for such training by a number of noted professionals within the field. For example, Wall and Evans (2000) emphasized that in the absence of such preparation “student affairs professionals must educate themselves about the issues faced by this population” (p. xiv). Sanlo (2000), in particular pointed out the need for courses that prepare student affairs professionals to assume positions as directors of LGBT resource centers. Given that LGBT students are disclosing at increasingly younger ages, it is critical for student affairs professionals who deal with these students to be prepared adequately. Talbot and Viento (2005) stressed that LGBT issues should be emphasized beyond a single course; instead discussions of LGBT students should be integrated throughout the curriculum of student affairs graduate programs. Ideally, LGBT themes should be addressed not only in standard multicultural courses, but as part of a series of rotating topics courses of greater focus, of which one would be LGBT student needs (Talbot & Viento, 2005). Student affairs organizations can help this process by meeting the expectations of LGBT student affairs professionals who maintain membership within such organizations. Outlined by Albin and Dungy (2005), these expectations, as provided by members of the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education, include

- Written, visible nondiscriminatory membership policies to include sexual orientation and gender identity or expression;
- LGBT-specific conference programming;

- LGBT issues reflected in publications and research (published articles must be inclusive regardless of topic);
- Funding for LGBT student affairs research;
- Immediate organizational response to national LGBT issues that affect higher education;
- Support for the expansion of graduate-level curriculum for full inclusion of the issues and lives of LGBT students and staff;
- Capacity-building workshops with LGBT centers;
- LGBT career seminars about advancement in higher education;
- Graduate internships in LGBT centers;
- Recognition of LGBT-related research conducted by graduate students;
- Mentoring programs for LGBT undergraduates as they consider student affairs as a career choice;
- Out SSAOs [senior student affairs officers] as models and mentors;
- Opportunities to introduce graduate students to LGBT higher education work;
- Greater effort by non-LGBT SSAOs to mentor LGBT professionals;
- Removal of the lavender ceiling; and
- Discontinuation of the discriminatory practice, conscious or otherwise, of hosting regional and annual conferences in cities that do not have sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policy. (p. 92)

By embracing the expectations of LGBT student affairs professionals, student affairs organizations can capitalize on their experiences as a means of meeting the needs of the LGBT students that their membership will potentially serve.

Unfortunately, as Sanlo (2002) revealed in a personal account of her work as a student affairs professional operating in a post-9/11 world, administrators did not seem to take her work with LGBT students seriously. The same was true of others on her campus who work with different marginalized student groups; these individuals also communicated a sense that their contributions were not valued by administrators, faculty, staff, and non-marginalized individuals in general (Sanlo, 2002). In part, this disregard for the contributions of student affairs professionals who work with marginalized students is fueled by attitudes that aim to discredit the legitimacy of the needs of these students. As outlined by Johnson (2001), calling attention to a particular group can result in accusations that the group is “being pushy or is seeking special treatment” (p. 112). However, calling attention to such needs is often the only way to receive attention, especially if the groups emphasize how most aspects of a campus are focused on non-marginalized groups (Johnson, 2001). Consequently, marginalized students and those who work with them are seen simply as biased and thus easily dismissed by administrators (Johnson, 2001; Sanlo, 2002). To combat this tendency to dismiss LGBT (and other marginalized groups), it is important for senior student affairs officers to model positive leadership on issues related to LGBT students (Roper, 2005). This in itself can be challenging as most senior student affairs professionals entered the field as a point when there was little to no information available on LGBT students and development theories for LGBT students were unavailable (Roper, 2005). Therefore, senior student affairs professionals and those who work in the departments/programs they oversee must learn to serve LGBT students, to not be afraid to acknowledge and reveal weaknesses and areas in need of improvement, and to actively seek out ways to address such deficiencies (Roper, 2005). By doing so, senior student affairs professionals can help to build a more positive environment for LGBT students, faculty, and staff by speaking articulately and by

using affirmative language in discussions of LGBT-related issues and by modeling positive behaviors and attitudes that other administrators can emulate (Roper, 2005).

Sexual Orientation Identity Development Theories

As part of their training, student affairs professionals must be familiar with a number of student development theories. Because LGBT students face not only the challenges that all others students face, but also a variety of challenges linked to sexual orientation and gender identity, it is essential that student affairs professionals also maintain a familiarity with development theories in the literature that relate specifically to the LGBT community (Evans et al., 2010; Komives & Woodard, 1996). Identity development models are typically categorized as falling into one of two distinct fields of study—the psychological and the sociological (Dilley, 2002). In general, those theories that are based on psychology “concentrate on internal changes experienced by individuals as they come to identify as homosexual” while sociological theories “tend to focus on the impact of community, development of social roles, and managing stigma” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 91). As such, it is important to recognize that the most commonly cited models of identity development associated with the LGBT population fall under the psychological realm (Dilley, 2002).

Cass’s Theory of Homosexual Identity Development

In 1979, Australian psychologist Dr. Vivienne Cass presented a model of homosexual identity that expanded on many of the concepts of Chickering’s popular development theory (Cass, 1979, 1984; Dilley, 2002). Based on her study of more than 150 gay individuals who shared their experiences to identity acceptance, she identified a series of six stages that individuals pass through on their way to self-acceptance (Dilley, 2002). Subsequently, Cass’s model now is one of the most widely used by student affairs professionals (Komives &

Woodard, 1996). Stage 1 of the model (Identity Confusion) involves individuals becoming aware that their sexual feelings differ from others (Dilley, 2002). In this stage, individuals typically ask themselves “Who am I?” and may experience feelings of anxiety, confusion, or conflict (Cass, 1979, 1984; Dilley, 2002; Evans et al., 2010; McEwen, 2003; Marine, 2011). Typically, these feelings are often addressed in one of three ways: (a) seeking out more information about homosexuality; (b) completely avoid any behavior that can be associated with homosexuality; or (c) dismiss the behavior as a phase or some other factor, such as intoxication (Dilley, 2002). Individuals can only proceed to Stage 2, Identity Comparison, when they have accepted that they possibly could be lesbian or gay (Cass, 1979, 1984; Evans et al., 2010). Once this realization is made, individuals will either continue to seek information about homosexuality and work to become comfortable with this knowledge, or they will begin to ostracize themselves from their peers or continue the resistance toward anything perceived to be gay or lesbian (Evans et al., 2010). Individuals in Stage 3 (Identity Tolerance) have realized and accepted that they are homosexual and begin to seek out other self-identified members of the community to help nurture a sense of belonging and lessen their feelings of alienation (Evans et al., 2010). In part, this involves the acknowledgement of social, emotional, and sexual needs (Dilley, 2002). Once the idea of tolerance has been accomplished, individuals move to Stage 4, Identity Acceptance. This stage allows individuals the confidence to disclose to some that they are gay (Dilley, 2002; Evans et al., 2010). They seek more friendships with other homosexuals and begin to develop a sense of self and how to present themselves in certain situations (Dilley, 2002). In Identity Pride, Stage 5, people tend to denounce all things heterosexual and no longer see their identity as abnormal (Dilley, 2002; Evans et al., 2010; Marine, 2011). Cass described this stage:

In order to manage this incongruency [the subject] uses strategies to devalue the importance of heterosexual others to self, and to revalue homosexual others more positively. This program allows [the subject] to give less weight to a perception of how heterosexual others see [him] and more to how homosexual others see [him]. (Cass, 1979, p. 233)

The final stage (Identity Synthesis) involves individuals seeing “both good and bad in other homosexuals as well as heterosexuals” (Cass, 1979, p. 235). Ultimately, this allows for the integration of their “homosexual identity with all other aspects of self” (Cass, 1979, p. 235).

Troiden’s Theory of Homosexual Identity Development

Unlike Cass’s development theory, Troiden’s (1979, 1994) identity development theory for gay men and lesbians is conceived of as a spiral construct involving four stages rather than a stepwise process (Marine, 2011). Troiden did not necessarily associate homosexual identity with same-sex behaviors or experiences, particularly given that most people have homosexual experiences but do not identify as gay or lesbian (e.g., sexual experimentation during youth). Rather, informed by his training as a sociologist, Troiden differentiated his identity development theory from others on the basis of public declaration of one’s sexual identity (Marine, 2011). As such, Troiden’s theory involves individuals coming to realize themselves to be gay or lesbian only gradually, followed by some form of public statement that ultimately separates those who identify as gay from those who simply have gay experiences (Marine, 2011). Notably, some or all of the stages of Troiden’s theory can be embraced or completely avoided based on an individual’s social setting and relationships as well as due to access to support and resources (Marine, 2011).

In the first stage of Sensitization, social experiences point to some sense of marginality. Although the experiences in question are not necessarily sexual in nature, they involve feelings of difference and not fitting in with peers (Marine, 2011). As described by Marine (2011), “gay men and lesbians identify prepubescent experiences that, although they may not point directly to admission of a gay identity, hint at the relevance of homosexuality to their lives in the future” (pp. 41–42). A lack of interest in opposite sex peers, though not necessarily sexual interest, is associated with this stage (Marine, 2011). Additionally, sexual experimentation is often a confirmation of difference that gains meaning only later in life, only after an understanding of social and sexual contexts for the differences (Marine, 2011).

The second stage, Identity Confusion, is typically associated with adolescence. In this stage, individuals experience a sense of difference and disconnect. Subsequently, they begin to process the stigmatization associated with being gay or lesbian as expressed by others (Marine, 2011). Unfortunately, individuals typically experience homosexual feelings, but without outlets to explore and discuss these feelings (Marine, 2011). As a result, they experience feelings of confusion which are processed in one of five different ways:

1. Deny feelings;
2. Attempt to repair their identity by seeking professional help;
3. Avoid interactions while seeking more information—reflection occurs to confirm homosexual identity;
4. Redefine the feelings by explaining away feelings as either a one-time experience, as a sign of bisexuality, or by rationalizing behavior or desires as result of other factors (e.g. alcohol); or
5. Accepting the identity and desires as homosexual. (Marine, 2011)

Upon coming to terms with a homosexual identity, Troiden's third stage (Identity Assumption) involves some type of coming out and individuals present themselves publically as homosexual (Marine, 2011). During this stage, individuals begin to tolerate their identity, begin to interact with and socialize with others who share their identity, enter into various subcultures, and begin to partake in sexual experimentation (Marine, 2011). In general, gay men and lesbians reach this stage at different ages. Typically gay men assume their identity between the ages of 19 and 21 as a result of short-term relationships (Marine, 2011). In contrast, lesbians move into the Identity Assumption stage between the ages of 21 and 23 following or as part of an intense romantic relationship (Marine, 2011). Many individuals in this stage actively work to "pass" as heterosexual. Although acknowledging their gay or lesbian identities, many do not declare this to family and friends (Marine, 2011). Significantly, passing requires high levels of energy and can distract individuals from developing a healthy sense of self and can result in low self-esteem (Marine, 2011). The final stage of Troiden's theory, Commitment, occurs when gays and lesbians assume their new identity for life and no longer wish to change or hide their identity from others (Marine, 2011). As individuals in the final stage tend to be more content, they are more likely to disclose their identity to others and progress from passing as heterosexual to blending in as just another member of society (Marine, 2011). Although sexual orientation is an important part of their identity, it is not the only aspect of their identity (Marine, 2011).

D'Augelli's Life Span Model

D'Augelli's life span model (1994) presents an understanding of LGB identity development that attempts to account for the variability of individual experiences rather than assumes that life experiences are alike for all. As stated by Marine (2011),

Examining one's culture, history, family and other significant personal relationships and taking into account the fact that people change throughout the course of their lives provide a fuller picture of how one comes to understand same-sex attraction as related to, but not synonymous with, one's composite identity. (p. 44)

The life span model allows for a more dynamic and complex development of LGB identity than the theories of Cass and Troiden because it assumes that individuals also shape their sense of an LGB identity "out of necessity, due to a heterosexist culture that provides no routine socialization for lesbian and gay development" (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 127). Therefore, D'Augelli's model involves six interactive processes rather than a series of stages (Marine, 2011). As such, individuals examined through D'Augelli's model may shift from one process to another or remain situated within a process depending on individual factors of history and experiences (Marine, 2011).

The first process, exiting a heterosexual identity, involves one acknowledging same-sex feelings and attractions as well as disclosing that one is gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Marine, 2011, p. 44). In the second process of developing a personal lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity, individuals begin to examine various modes of understanding and presenting an LGB identity in order to develop a personal sense of queer identity (Marine, 2011). The third process of developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity entails the establishment of a network of LGB and supportive, non-LGB friends (Marine, 2011). Claiming an identity as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual offspring encompasses the process by which LGB individuals begin to redefine relationships with parents following one's disclosure as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Marine, 2011). This process may require extended periods of time and is likely highly stressful for LGB youth who rely on their parents for financial support (Marine, 2011). The fifth process, developing a lesbian, gay,

or bisexual intimacy status, is likely among the most complex of the processes outlined as part of D'Augelli's model (Marine, 2011). This is due to the fact that there are few role models for LGB youth to deal with issues of romantic and sexual intimacy (Marine, 2011). Additionally, this process is most applicable to college-age students, who often are able to pursue intimate relationships for the first time as they live on campuses away from their parents for the first time (Marine, 2011). Lastly, entering a lesbian, gay, or bisexual community includes the development of "social, communal, and even political bonds . . . and can be marked by personal risk" (Marine, 2011, p. 45) due a lack of legal protections for LGB people.

Fassinger's Model of Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Identity Development

Fassinger's inclusive model of gay and lesbian identity development (1998) recognizes two different processes, individual sexual identity development and group membership identity development, that describe the development and mindsets of gay and lesbian individuals. As Marine (2011) pointed out, one process addresses individuals' sense of self while the other deals with individuals in relationship to the broader LGBT community. Each process contains four phases: Awareness; Exploration; Deepening Commitment; and Internalization and Synthesis. Fassinger believes that gay and lesbian students can progress through the different phases of the two processes either separately or synchronously. The first stage, Awareness, involves individuals struggling with differences from their peers. The second stage of Exploration occurs when individuals begin to act upon their attractions to people of the same sex while concurrently beginning to conceive of their role as part of the LGBT community. The third stage, Deepening Commitment, is associated with individuals creating a sense of their individual LGB identity and "simultaneously confirm one's group affiliations and loyalties" (Marine, 2011, p. 47). The final stage, Internalization and Synthesis, occurs when individuals integrate a sense of LGB identity

into their greater identity and also establishing a sense of minority identity across broader social contexts (Marine, 2011).

Gender Identity Development Theories

Although student affairs professionals are likely most familiar with identity development theories centered on sexual orientation, these models do not address gender identity development. Therefore, it is paramount that student affairs personnel gain a working knowledge of the growing number of models covering gender identity development, which first began to emerge during the 1990s and 2000s. Student affairs professionals must also be prepared, however to adapt such models to college-age students as most gender identity development theories are general in nature and do not concern late adolescence specifically (Marine, 2011). As a result, researchers know very little about gender identity development among college-age students in particular (Marine, 2011). Moreover, some theories concern specific gender identity development scenarios and are subsequently not universal in their applicability. For example, the models of Ekin (1997) and Lewins (1995) concern male-to-female (MTF) transgenderism specifically, and Rubin (2003) addressed identity development for those who are female-to-male (FTM; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Significantly, many gender identity development theories assume gender to be a binary construct where the only viable options are male and female (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Evans et al., 2010). In reality, some research calls into question this binary and suggests that the construction of gender is more fluid (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Evans et al., 2010; Savin-Williams, 2005). Even the term transgender resists this binary and has been applied to “a wide range of identities, including transsexuals, transvestites, male and female impersonators, drag kings and queens, male-to-female (MTF) persons, female-to-male (FTM) persons, cross-dressers, gender benders, gender

variant, gender nonconforming, and ambiguously gendered persons” (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 29).

Like those models for sexual identity development discussed above, those for gender identity development are multi-staged and occasionally draw upon a previously discussed sexual orientation model. Lewins (1995) provided a six-stage model for MTF individuals that begins with the stage Abiding Anxiety in which they experience feelings of discomfort within their gender assignment (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). This is followed by the stage of Discovery, in which individuals learn that it is possible to transition from one gender to another, and the stage of Purging and Delay, which is based on feelings of denial of their transgender identity (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). The final three stages, Acceptance, Sex Reassignment, and Invisibility are based on the process of embracing oneself as transgender, undergoing surgical procedures of sexual reassignment, and the subsequent passing that surgical reassignment provides. Unfortunately, Lewins’s model assumes sex reassignment surgery rather than gender confirmation as the ultimate outcome in the gender identity development process, even though not all pursue this process, or undergo only partial gender reassignment procedures (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Moreover, the model expects that those who undergo this process will no longer identify as transgender (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Similarly, most of the identity development models for FTM individuals are multi-staged and assume, as the MTF models do, that sexual reassignment surgery is inherent to the trajectory of gender identity development (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Such is the case with Baumbach and Turner’s (1992) three-stage model. In this model, which is presented as a female gender disorder model, individuals experience feelings of discomfort with their assigned gender and desire to be male as a solution to these feelings (Baumbach & Turner, 1992; G. Beemyn &

Rankin, 2011). Again, as in Lewin's model, sex reassignment is presented as the final stage of identity development, even though many FTM individuals elect to forego gender-confirming surgery while living as men in all aspects of their lives (Baumbach & Turner, 1992; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Another trait of the model about which student affairs professionals must be aware is that Baumbach and Turner assumed that all transgender people experience their gender with feelings of discontent (Baumbach & Turner, 1992; G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Perhaps most applicable to the work of student affairs professionals is Bilodeau's (2005) study, which adapted D'Augelli's (1994) model of LGB identity development to transgender students. The value of Bilodeau's study is twofold. On one hand, it represents an effort to understand identity development of college-age students specifically, instead of relying on the more general models of others and which are informed by the experiences of transgender people well beyond traditional college ages (Bilodeau, 2005; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Additionally, the model approaches transgender identity development from a non-pathological perspective; rather Bilodeau (2005) operated under the assumption that "transgender people can and do lead positive, well-adjusted lives," a stance embraced by a growing number of scholars and studies (p. 30). From D'Augelli's model, Bilodeau (2005) identified six processes by which gender identity is redefined and through which a transgender identity is established. The stages include

1. "exiting a traditionally gendered identity," which is affirmed by coming out as gender variant to others;
2. "developing a personal transgender identity," by understanding oneself in relation to other transgender individuals;
3. "developing a transgender social identity" by surrounding oneself with individuals who accept that gender is a variable construct;

4. “becoming a transgender offspring,” which involves coming out as transgender to family and reassessing relationships effected by the disclosure process;
5. “developing a transgender intimacy status” by establishing intimate relationships of a physical and emotional nature; and
6. “entering a transgender community” through active political and social involvement in anti-transphobia activism. (Bilodeau, 2005, p. 32)

Although the Bilodeau study was based on interviews with just two students, it supports the applicability of D’Augelli’s model for understanding the identity development process for transgender students. Specifically, Bilodeau (2005) found that the ideas that the various processes of the model reinforce one another, and that gender is not a binary construct.

Moreover, Bilodeau (2005) asserted the need for more scholarship on the ways in which gender binaries perpetuate gender oppression and how transgender students experience such binaries in higher education environments, such as male and female residence halls and bathrooms, Greek organizations, and athletic programming.

The diversity inherent to the LGBT community requires knowledge not only of a number of sexual orientation and gender identity development models but also the applicability of multiple identity development models. As expressed by Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), “to fully embrace individual experiences, it is necessary to explore differences within each aspect of identity as each is influenced by the simultaneous experience of the other dimensions” (p. 2). Identity construction is a dynamic process that changes depending upon specific contexts. As such, “no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). Unfortunately, the study of intersectionality of multiple identity markers is complex as a result of the changing nature of

how identity is performed and the exchange that occurs between individuals and broader social groups (Abes et al., 2007). Therefore, it is essential for student affairs personnel to understand that models only inform our understanding of a phenomenon and do not define or explain it (Evans et al., 2010). Additionally, one must consider and understand the assumptions of identity models in order to effectively apply the models to student affairs work; indeed it is an ethical responsibility (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Student affairs professionals can facilitate this by taking the time to understand their own multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007).

Abes et al. (2007) provided a useful model for understanding intersectionality of multiple identity characteristics with one's sexual orientation identity. They posited that such intersectionality manifests in one of three ways: formulaic, transitional, or foundational (Abes et al., 2007). In this model, formulaic meaning-making aspects of identity are believed to be absolutes and often include those traits of identity that are taught or told (Abes et al., 2007). Marine (2011) contended that such formulaic aspects of identity are considered to exist without influence from or connection with other aspects of identity, and are often not analyzed for accuracy. In contrast, Marine (2011) stated that "transitional meaning making involves critical departure from formulaic ways of thinking, as student begin to grapple with the inherent contradictions in and among the teaching they have received or observed about their identities" (p. 54). Such transitioning can prove challenging as students may experience conflicts as they evaluate one sense of identity in the context of others, such as what it means to be both lesbian and Christian, gay and Black, or transgender and disabled (Marine, 2011). Lastly, those in the foundational stage have rectified their various identities such that they "resist stereotypes and messaging to arrive at a more authentic and self-derived persona" (Marine, 2011, p. 55). Regardless of which intersectionalities students experience and struggle with, it is important for

student affairs professionals to remind them that they do not have to tackle them alone. With proper training and knowledge, they can provide the support these students need (Marine, 2011).

Summary

Although it is useful for student affairs professionals to understand the identity development theories outlined above, it is also important to recognize that these theories have been criticized for failing to account for other aspects of individuals' sense of self (L. D. Patton et al., 2011). This is particularly important when considering millennial students. Today many college students arrive on campuses having come out at earlier ages, with greater awareness of their sexual identities, and more fully accepting themselves, thus rejecting the closet than earlier generations of students (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Instead of adhering to traditional identity labels, today's LGBT youth often embrace more fluid labels and are more flexible in their sexual practices than before (L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Consequently, the development theories of Cass, Troiden, D'Augelli, and others are no longer as useful for understanding and explaining the identity development experiences of today's LGBT youth since sexual orientation is but one factor of one's sense of identity (L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Also, standard identity development models are often restricted to LGB individuals and do not account for issues of gender identity and gender expression; separate identity theories and models must be considered to account for identity development issues experienced by transgender students (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Moreover, many identity development theories fail to acknowledge issues of intersectionality, such as race and ethnicity, social class, or ableness (Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002; L. D. Patton et al., 2011). Nevertheless, knowledge of identity development theories associated with LGBT youth is valuable for student affairs professionals since they are likely to engage with LGBT students at some point in their professional careers.

They must understand, however, that development theories are but one tool available to comprehend and support LGBT students.

Chapter Summary

As revealed by the review of the literature, research is needed in order to understand the role that LGBT resource centers play in the lives of students who make use of the centers and the resources associated with them. A lack of empirical evidence suggests that, like BCCs, LGBT resource centers are potential targets of university administrations that must justify the allocation of resources to fund such centers. Although considerable historical and anecdotal information is available, nothing in the secondary literature addresses the value of these centers in promoting the satisfaction and success of LGBT students or the broader LGBT campus community. The resources already present can facilitate the operation of LGBT resource centers, but specific efforts to document the importance of centers to students, particularly in the areas of student retention and student success, is essential to the continued survival of existing centers as well as efforts by institutions that wish to establish centers in order to better serve their LGBT students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the role LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of LGBT students at four-year colleges and universities in the Midwest Region (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Although the specific motivations behind the creation of LGBT resource centers vary from institution to institution, the primary objective is to foster diversity and create a sense of visibility and community. The research question guiding this study was “What role do LGBT centers play in the experiences of students who seek out services and engage in programming?”

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of qualitative modes of inquiry and the methodologies used for the study. Additionally, information regarding sites visited, data collection procedures, students and administrators interviewed, and data analysis procedures are included.

Research Approach

The present study involved two traditions within the qualitative approach. Case study and ethnographic research methods were used to collect data in order to explore the research questions at the center of the study. By employing ethnography research, it was possible to understand how participants interact with and understand LGBT resource centers. In turn, the use of case study methods provided insights into the phenomenon of LGBT resource centers on college campuses.

A qualitative research methodology was employed in order to explore the research questions posed as part of this study. As described by Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). In essence, as a research paradigm, qualitative research aims to provide a greater understanding of human experiences through an interpretation of social and environmental interactions. Merriam posited that such an interpretative approach to understanding the world is important because “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). The methods for gathering data to be interpreted as part of a qualitative investigation can vary significantly based on the specific goals of study. Additionally, the data collected through qualitative inquiry are empirical in nature and may be gathered through interviews, participant observations, case studies, and group meetings, to name just a few sources.

Ethnography

This study used an ethnographic approach to examine the impact that LGBT resource centers have on the experiences of students who seek out services and engage in programming. Ethnography as a research methodology can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when anthropologist engaged in observational fieldwork (Merriam, 2009). Today ethnography is one of the most well-known research methodologies and is employed by researchers in a number of fields (Merriam, 2009). As described by M. Q. Patton (2002), “ethnographic inquiry takes as its central and guiding assumption that any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture” (p. 81). Thus understanding culture is central to ethnography. According to Wolcott (1999), ethnography “must provide the kind of account of human social

activity out of which cultural patterning can be discerned” (p. 8). Ethnographic methods often result in detailed descriptions based on lengthy periods of study and presence in a particular social setting (Merriam, 2009). However, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) pointed out that educational ethnography tends to require less time due its roots in cultural anthropology. Although largely based on observation-based data collection, ethnography may also involve interviews, and analyses of various documents and artifacts (Merriam, 2009). However, ethnographic research provides more than simple description as researchers provide interpretations of their observations (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 1999).

Applying ethnographic research methodology to the study of students who utilize LGBT resource centers provided a more complete understanding of these subjects and their everyday experiences as participants of these centers (Creswell, 2009). By engaging in extended periods of observation and using in-depth interviews, ethnography can better capture the ways in which these students understand the culture of LGBT resource centers and their role as part of that culture.

Case Study

The ethnographic methods outlined above were combined and applied within a case study model. Case study approaches are historically tied to anthropology, sociology, and psychology, and involve “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). A bounded system is any clearly defined entity that serves as the basis of a study, which could be as specific as an individual or more broadly conceived of as a group, institution, or community (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Additionally, case study approaches can involve a single case, multiple sites, or a specific process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). What is important to understand about case study research is that it involves a clearly defined

unit or units to be studied (Merriam, 2009). As such, case study research may involve a variety of research methodologies, including interviews, surveys, observation, document analysis, or more structured tests (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) identified three types of qualitative case study methods: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. In a particularistic case study, the researcher focuses on “a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Due to this focus, particularistic case studies are important for understanding specific problems (Merriam, 2009). Descriptive case studies, in contrast, aim to describe a specific phenomenon by examining as many variables of the situation as possible and describing their interactions, which usually requires extended periods of time to document and describe (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, heuristic case studies aim to “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 44) in order to provide new meaning or confirm what is known about a particular phenomenon.

By using multiple sites for the present study, it was possible to understand the role that LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of LGBT students at four-year colleges and universities in the Midwest. Additionally, the use of multiple sites allowed for the development of generalizations that can then be useful in understanding the experiences of LGBT students using resource centers on other campuses.

Research Design

Merriam (2009) identified two types of sampling commonly employed by researchers. The first, probability sampling, is a statistical phenomenon and is not frequently used by qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2009). Rather, qualitative research sample selection is more frequently nonprobabilistic, also known as purposive or purposeful (Merriam, 2009). The use of

purposeful sampling assumes that the researcher wishes to understand or gain insights into a phenomenon and therefore chooses a site and sample that will provide the best opportunities to learn (Merriam, 2009). With regard to selecting a sample in case studies, there is a two-part process that must be considered. First, a specific case must be identified; second, representative sampling must occur within that case to prevent a need to study all individuals within the case (Merriam, 2009).

Sites

In selecting sites for participation in this study, I reviewed institutions listed on the website of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (2013). The Consortium is an organization of higher education professionals who share an interest in and dedication “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, 2014). After exploring the resource center map, provided by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, a number of institutions in the Midwest were considered. Boundaries for the Midwest region were based on those used by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013); it is important to point out, however, that both Illinois and Indiana fall within the Great Lakes region as defined by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. All centers listed on the map are directed by at least one professional staff member or graduate assistant who dedicate 50% of their time to providing LGBT student support services (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2013). A number of potential sites were selected in order to provide a variety of institution types and locations within the Midwest. Also, the LGBT resource centers at these sites represent centers established as

early as the 1970s through the present decade. The following is a brief overview of the sites selected for this study. A more detailed discussion of these sites, however, is provided in Chapter 4.

The University of Illinois, whose main campus is located in Champaign-Urbana, was founded in 1867 as a comprehensive public land grant, Research I institution. It serves nearly 45,000 students. The campus houses the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Center, which was founded in 1993.

Established in 1820, Indiana University is a comprehensive public Research I university with the main campus located in Bloomington, Indiana. The Bloomington campus serves approximately 42,300 students. The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Support Services Office was founded in 1994.

Purdue University, located in West Lafayette, Indiana, is a land grant public Research I university established in 1869. Purdue is known primarily for its programs in science, technology, and engineering and serves approximately 41,052 students. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Center was founded in 2012.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were identified through a combination of network selection and participant recruitment. At each institution, center directors suggested current undergraduate students at the institutions they knew through their work in their respective LGBT resource centers. Additional prospective participants were identified through the use of a recruitment letter, which referred to a recruitment survey. The survey, in turn, asked for relevant demographic information that was used to help diversify the participant pool. Lastly, participants were asked to refer other students who met the criteria for the study as potential

participants. Ultimately, research participants were obtained through a combination of director nomination, the recruitment letter, and student referrals. All participants selected are college students who self-disclose as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender and who are over the age of 18. These students also actively engaged in the services and programming at LGBT resource centers at institutions of higher education in the Midwest. The total number of subjects was 30, with 10 coming from each center. All participants were given an opportunity to ask questions prior to data collection and prior to signing the human subject informed consent forms (see Appendix A).

Although they did not serve as participants of the study, center directors and their staff served as key informants offering their expertise as LGBT student support service professionals. As defined by M. Q. Patton (2002), key informants are “people who are particularly knowledgeable about the inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge-people whose insights can prove particularly useful in helping an observer understand what is happening and why” (p. 321). These individuals were particularly helpful in understanding the specific activities, programming, and services of the research sites as well as the history of each LGBT resource center.

Sample

The participants for this study consisted of undergraduate college students who self-disclose as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender and who actively engage with the LGBT resource center on their campus. A total of 30 participants were interviewed, with ages ranging from 18 to 30 years of age. With regard to class standing, 17% were first-year students, 23% were sophomores, 37% were juniors, and 23% were seniors. Of the participants, 60% identified as male and 40% identified as female. The largest portion of the sample identified as cisgender

men (47%), and 30% identified as cisgender women. Cisgender individuals are those who identify with the gender and sex assigned at birth. The remaining participants identified as transgender men (13%) and transgender women (7%). One participant (3%) wished not to disclose. Pertaining to race and ethnicity, 80% identified as White, 3% as African American, 3% as Hispanic, 7% as Asian, 3% as Middle Eastern, and 3% as multiracial.

In terms of sexual orientation, 23% identified as lesbian, 43% as gay, 17% as bisexual, and 7% as queer; three transgender participants identified as heterosexual (10%). With regard to the disclosure of their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, 90% exhibited varying degrees of openness in their daily lives, whereas 10% had not yet disclosed (or maintained only limited disclosure).

By and large, the majority of the participants (77%) were active on their campuses through involvement in student organizations. The types of student organizations in which they participated varied significantly, including professional honor societies, student government, career-oriented clubs, Greek organizations, and school media (e.g., campus radio and newspaper). It is important to point out that of those who did indicate participation in student organizations, 50% were active in organizations related to LGBT issues. Additionally, students represented a wide range of academic programs and majors.

Participants from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Brian. Brian is a 22-year-old junior majoring in psychology from a Chicago suburb. Raised in a fairly religious Lutheran family, he is an openly gay man of Middle Eastern descent. He is active in the campus group Pride as well as other non-LGBT clubs. He plans to graduate in 2015 and become a physician assistant.

Stephanie. From Chicago, Stephanie is a White transgender (MTF) lesbian studying political science as well as gender and women's studies. She was raised in a two-parent, lower-middle class Jewish household in a predominantly White, Christian neighborhood. A 20-year-old junior, she anticipates graduating in 2015. She is the founding president of Campus Union for Trans* Equality and Support (CUT*ES) and is active in Women of Pride.

Jay. Jay is a White, transgender man (FTM) from Urbana, Illinois who identifies as gay. A 22-year-old senior, he is pursuing a double major in painting and East Asian languages and cultures. Both of Jay's parents serve on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is an active member of CUT*ES.

Kelly. A 22-year-old female lesbian from Northern Illinois, Kelly is a senior pursuing a degree in molecular and cellular biology. Having disclosed her sexual orientation during her sophomore year of college, Kelly's parents are still adjusting to her coming out. She is active in Pride and CUT*ES.

Kevin. Kevin is a 20-year-old, gay White man majoring in chemical engineering. He is from a small town near Austin, Texas. Currently a sophomore, he anticipates graduating in 2016. He is an active member of the University of Illinois's student chapter of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE) and Building Bridges, an LGBT and Ally Christian group.

Kaleb. A graduating senior, political science major, Kaleb is a 21-year-old, White gay man. A child of a military father, Kaleb moved around extensively as a child. He disclosed his sexuality after he started college and his parents were accepting. He is active in Infusions, a multicultural gender and sexuality alliance organization dedicated to inclusion and diversity with a focus on the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race.

Anon. Anon is a 21-year-old junior architecture student from the Chicago area who plans to graduate in 2016. A gay, Taiwanese American man, he is involved in Design for America, a national organization that looks at using design thinking to solve social problems, and other architecture student groups. He has disclosed his sexual orientation to only a few close friends.

Jake B. From the Chicago area, Jake B. is a transgender man (FTM) who identifies as straight. An 18-year-old freshman studying human development and family studies, he began his transition during high school. Jake B. is an active member of CUT*ES and the campus poetry club, Word.

Katherine. Katherine is a 19-year-old lesbian woman, raised in the Philippines in a conservative household and identifies as Christian. Having moved to the United States during her early teens, she is a sophomore studying technical systems management and plans to graduate in 2016. She is an active member of Women of Pride, serves as social chair of Pride, and the outreach chair of Infusions.

Adrian. An 18-year-old sophomore studying human development and family studies, Adrian plans to complete his degree in 2016. He identifies as a bisexual man of mixed Hispanic heritage raised in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in Southwest Chicago. He is political chair of Infusions.

Participants from Indiana University at Bloomington

Bryant H. Bryant H. is a 19-year-old first-year student from Elkhart, Indiana. A White, gay man, he is pursuing a double major in English and gender studies. He began secondary school at a conservative Christian high school but completed his studies at Indiana Academy,

one of the most liberal high schools in the state. He is the Vice President of Diversity for Wright Student Government.

Brendan. As an East Asian Studies and East Asian languages and culture, Brendan, a 22-year-old White gay man, anticipates completing his degree in 2014. Brendan grew up in Valparaiso, Indiana, and disclosed his sexual orientation while still in high school. Although he does not participate in any student organizations, he does volunteer at the center.

Emily. Emily is a 19-year-old, White, bisexual woman from Lebanon, Indiana; however, she also questions her sexual orientation due to a stronger preference for women. A sophomore studying theater and drama, she is not active in any student organizations but does volunteer at the center.

Xander. A 20-year-old, White, gay man from Indianapolis, Xander is a junior pursuing a double major in communication and culture and mathematics. In his free time he volunteers at the center and serves as a DJ at WIUX student radio.

J. From Columbus, Indiana, J is a White 21-year-old transgender man (FTM) who identifies as heterosexual. He is junior pursuing a degree in outdoor recreation and anticipates completing the degree in 2015. Additionally, he plays for the Rugby Club where he serves as Fundraising Officer. J is also an active member of the National Guard.

Courtney. First-year anthropology and human sexuality student, Courtney, an 18-year-old, White, bisexual woman, anticipates graduating in 2016. From Strongsville, Ohio, a very conservative suburb outside of Cleveland, Courtney serves as a volunteer at the center but is not active in any student organizations.

Matt. Matt is a 19-year-old, White, gay man from Carmel, Indiana. A sophomore studying journalism, he is active with University Players, Full-Frontal Comedy, and Student Media. He is also an associate editor of *Inside Magazine*.

Bryant M. An 18-year-old, first-year student from Bloomington, Bryant M. is a gay White man pursuing a degree in infomatics. He is involved with University Players.

Steve. Steve is a 23-year-old, gay, White man raised in Northwestern Ohio. A senior studying linguistics, he is not active in student organizations but serves as a volunteer at the center in his free time.

Heather. Heather is a 19-year-old, White woman who identifies as queer. Raised in a conservative Christian family and church, she is a sophomore pre-med student and a member of the Rugby Club. She has not disclosed her orientation to friends and family for fear of being ridiculed and outcast.

Participants from Purdue University

Tyler. Tyler is a 19-year-old, White, transgender woman (MTF) who identifies as a lesbian. From a small town in southern Indiana, she is a freshman majoring in physics who anticipates graduating in 2018. Although she realized she was transgender in high school, Tyler did not begin transitioning until college. Currently, she is not active in any student organizations.

Caryssa. Raised in Chicago, Caryssa is a 20-year-old, multiracial, lesbian woman. Currently, she is a junior studying graphics technology and anticipates graduating in 2016. She is not actively involved in any student organizations.

Sarah. Sarah is a 20-year-old junior studying communication; she plans to graduate in 2015. A White lesbian woman from Michigan, Sarah is a member of Gamma Rho Lambda, a

progressive all-inclusive sorority, where she serves as social chair, activism chair, and public relations chair and does the event planning for the sorority.

Tom. A non-traditionally aged student, Tom is a 30-year-old bisexual man. He is a junior majoring in a science program and participates in non-LGBT student organizations. At the time of the study, he had not disclosed his sexual orientation to many individuals; only a few close friends know that he is bisexual.

Brit. Brit is a 19-year-old, White lesbian pursuing a degree in communication who hopes to graduate in 2016. She is active in LGBTQ Student Alliance, an umbrella organization for the LGBT community at Purdue.

Nate. From southern Indiana just outside of Cincinnati, Nate is a 20-year-old sophomore majoring in history with a minor in LGBT studies; he anticipates graduating in 2016. Nate is a White, transgender man (FTM) who identifies as heterosexual and who grew up in a conservative, religious community. He is active in the Purdue Drag Club, a member of the Association of Queer Athletes, and plays rugby.

Jake R. Jake R. is 21-year-old, White gay man. He is a junior pharmaceutical science major who anticipates graduating in 2015. Growing up in Santa Claus, Indiana, Jake R. disclosed his sexual orientation during high school. He is a member of the LGBTQ Student Alliance and a member of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity.

Wendy. Wendy is a White, 24-year-old, bisexual woman, who prefers to identify as queer. From Fishers, Indiana, she is a senior studying chemistry education and anticipates graduating in December 2014. Currently, she is not involved in any student organizations.

Allan. From Indianapolis, Allen is a 24-year-old senior majoring in French. He is an African American and identifies as a gay man. Allan grew up in a religious Missionary Baptist

household. Currently, he is not active in any student organizations; however, he was a member of the Purdue Varsity Glee Club for four years.

Haley. Haley is a 20-year-old, White woman who identifies as queer. From Frederick, Maryland, she is a junior in the Krannert School of Management. She is a member of Krannert Outsource, an LGBTQA organization for the School.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this study through a combination of individual face-to-face interviews, review of relevant documents and artifacts, and participant observation. A semi-structured interview protocol was used (see Appendix B). As described by Merriam (2009), a semi-structured interview is one in which “either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (p. 90). Interviews were guided by a set of predetermined questions; however, the order in which questions were asked as well as the way questions were phrased varied from interview to interview in order to allow “the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Additionally participants were asked to provide basic demographic information, including age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, and the like. Moreover, biographical information relative to issues such as major, where students were raised, campus involvement, and expected graduation dates was requested as well. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in a location selected by each participant to guarantee safety and comfort. Most participants, however, elected to use private or semi-private meeting spaces within to the LGBT resource centers.

Observational data were collected in order to record the everyday activities of the LGBT resource centers. Field notes were recorded while attending events and observing students as

they interacted within the centers. Because the goal of these observations was to gain a general understanding of student experiences and activities when visiting the centers, it was not necessary to observe all participants.

Documents and artifacts related to the operation and activities of the LGBT resource centers were collected as well. In addition to artifacts, the archives at these sites were explored for any relevant historical documents pertaining to the establishment and early history of the centers. Documents reviewed included center newsletters, event flyers, programs, and informational brochures when available.

Data Analysis

Once data were collected, the audio recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in order to construct a thick description of how LGBT students experience and interact with the LGBT centers and services on their campuses. Merriam (2009) describes data analysis as the effort to “make sense” (p. 175) of the gathered data. In order to interpret the statements of those interviewed, it was necessary to search for recurring themes and identify patterns in their statements. These in turn were coded in order to allow for the identification of preliminary themes (Merriam, 2009; M. Q. Patton, 2002).

Triangulating Data

Data for this study were validated using a number of different strategies. Creswell (2009) defined validity as the process by which researchers check “for the accuracy of their findings by employing certain procedures” (p. 190). Validation strategies included triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and field notes. M. Q. Patton (2002) indicated that the process of triangulation validates a study through a combination of methods. Within the context of a qualitative study, triangulation may be attained “by combining both interviewing and

observations, mixing different types of purposeful samples, or examining how competing theoretical perspectives inform a particular analysis” (M. Q. Patton, 2002, p. 248). The use of both observational and interview data as well as various documents and artifacts allowed for triangulation in order to validate the findings of this study.

Member checks were used to validate the findings of this study. Also referred to as respondent validation, member checking involves requesting feedback from participants interviewed as part of the study regarding preliminary findings (Merriam, 2009). Ideally, member checking reveals that the experiences of the participants can identify their experiences as communicated through the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested that member checking can be applied to the interview process as well by rephrasing responses and through asking additional questions to ascertain more nuanced meanings. In the present study, participants were asked to review their interview transcripts to help guarantee accuracy. Additionally, participants were asked to provide feedback as the findings of the study emerged. Furthermore, participants were asked to review their individual descriptions as they would appear in the dissertation.

Lastly, peer debriefing was utilized in order to determine if the data collected revealed consistent findings to unbiased individuals outside the study. Additionally, peer debriefing helped to reveal additional unanswered questions and confirm whether or not the research questions guiding the study were addressed. Peer reviewers were individuals in higher education who are familiar with and knowledgeable about resource centers or issues of gender and sexuality. As such, one reviewer was a doctoral student pursuing a graduate certificate in gender and women’s studies and whose research addresses issues of gender and sexuality in popular

culture. Two reviewers serve as faculty members in women's and gender studies departments. Two other reviewers are faculty members who identify as members of the LGBT community.

CHAPTER 4

SITES

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of each of the LGBT resource centers selected as sites for this study. For each center, relevant background information is given to contextualize the three centers. As each center was created under different circumstances, this historical background reaffirms Sanlo et al. (2002) statement that LGBT resource centers are most often established for one of three reasons: as reactions to incidents of harassment, in reply to campus insistence on establishing a safe space, or as a proactive response to a campus climate study. Additionally, the chapter contains detailed descriptions of the three centers that served as a research sites. This allows the reader to envision the centers through the eyes and experiences of the research. This is particularly important as resource center environments can impact student interactions and experiences.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center at the University of Illinois Overview and Mission

Established in 1993, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center (LGBT Resource Center) at the University of Illinois was created as part of the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations to promote a safe and inclusive environment for all members of the campus community regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (University of Illinois LGBT Resource Center, 2014b). In the two decades since its founding, the LGBT Resource Center has offered a variety of cultural, educational, and social programs as well as provides

support groups, referrals, and consultations to the university at large (University of Illinois LGBT Resource Center, 2014b). In addition to the activities of the office, the LGBT Resource Center serves as a meeting space for a number of affiliated student organizations, including Women of Pride, Infusions, The Campus Union of Trans*Equality and Support (CUT*ES), Pride, Building Bridges, and Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (oSTEM). Although the center and its activities focus on issues of the LGBT community specifically, it is open to the entire University of Illinois campus (University of Illinois LGBT Resource Center, 2014b).

History

The LGBT students, faculty, and staff of the University of Illinois–Urbana/Champaign were active on the campus from the earliest years of the Gay Rights Movement. The campus’s chapter of the Gay Liberation Front was founded in August 1972, Gay Switchboard was created in January 1976 as a support and crisis management hotline, and the Gay Illini resource center, a student-run organization, opened in the local YMCA building, but with limited hours and a noticeable focus on gay men’s issues (University of Illinois LGBT Resource Center, 2014a). Each of these groups was initiated and supported by students. An official, university-supported LGBT resource center was not established on the campus until 1993.

The earliest efforts to establish an official LGBT resource center occurred during the mid-1980s. In February 1986, President Stanley Ikenberry established the Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation to assess the “campus climate as it exists for gays and lesbians, and recommend ‘a process of social education to improve conditions on this campus for members of the gay and lesbian community’” (Chancellor’s Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation, 1987, p. 1). Drawing upon information gathered from surveys, the Task Force presented

President Ikenberry with qualitative and quantitative data indicating that campus climate was marked by both “fear and ignorance” (Chancellor’s Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation, 1987, p. 1) with regard members of the LGBT community. Moreover, the task force reported that “although efforts are being made there exists no systematic, comprehensive organization of . . . programs to educate the community about gay and lesbian issues and that the services to gays and lesbians also need coordination” (Chancellor’s Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation, 1987, p. 1). As a result of its findings, the task force made a series of specific recommendations to address the campus climate for gay and lesbian students, faculty, and staff. In particular, the committee recommended that

a full-time permanent academic professional be hired within the Office of Academic Affirmative Action to coordinate programs and strategies for making the campus community aware of and accepting of the broad range of diversity within [the gay and lesbian] community. The three specific areas of concern where efforts would be directed are sexual orientation, sexism and racism. (Chancellor’s Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation, 1987, p. 23)

Furthermore, the Task Force recommended that a committee be formed to advise the person hired for the proposed position and to “continually monitor the development of programs” (Chancellor’s Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation, 1987, p. 3). Lastly, the Task Force recommended that the individual in question should be openly gay or lesbian (Chancellor’s Campus-Wide Task Force on Sexual Orientation, 1987). Unfortunately, President Ikenberry dismissed the recommendations and neither a resource office was established nor was a professional staff member hired.

Although the recommendation to establish a position to specifically address the concerns of the LGBT community was not realized, the Task Force advised campus administrators regarding policies prohibiting discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, which was appropriately timely. Prior the task force, the issue of harassment and discrimination was addressed only through a 1978 statement issued by the Board of Trustees, which stated,

Resolved by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois that it reaffirms its commitment and policy (a) to eradicate prohibited and invidious discrimination in all its forms; (b) to foster programs within the law which will ameliorate or eliminate, where possible, the effects of historic societal discrimination; and (c) to comply fully in all university activities and programs with applicable federal and state laws relating to nondiscrimination and equal opportunity. (University of Illinois Board of Trustees, 1987b, pp. 259–260)

However, without specific reference to sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, there was too much uncertainty. As such, members of the LGBT community expressed concerns about the recourse available to those who experienced discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation. Initially, a request by the student organization Gay and Lesbian Illini to meet with the Board of Directors was denied by President Ikenberry, who believed that the concerns of the group were already under review (University of Illinois Board of Trustees, 1987a). Subsequently, members of Gay and Lesbian Illini requested during the May 1987 Board of Trustees meeting that the university add language that protects against harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, specifically represented by Kristina Boerger, the group suggested language stating “it is the policy of the University of Illinois to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation for all University of Illinois faculty, staff, and

students” (University of Illinois Board of Trustees, 1987b, p. 261). The group followed up with a request that “all University of Illinois written policies where nondiscrimination statements appear should specifically include a prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation,” which was supported by an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union who expressed concerns that the 1978 statement was inadequate in its protections against discrimination and harassment as a result of sexual orientation (University of Illinois Board of Trustees, 1987b).

The creation of the LGBT Resource Center in April 1993 was the direct consequence of specific demands made by the student organization Gay and Lesbian Illini as well as a group for gay and lesbian faculty and staff, Out on Campus (McKay, 2013). In an interview with Curt McKay, former director of the LGBT Resource Center, he recalls a meeting during which LGBT concerns were of central focus. During the meeting McKay asked university administrators specifically about efforts to attract and retain quality LGBT faculty, a question to which he received no response (McKay, 2013). Upon realizing that the university had limited programs and services for LGBT students, faculty, and staff, the chancellor established the Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns.

In the beginning, the Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns was located in a small office space in the Illini Union that was shared with two graduate assistants for the university’s ombudsperson. The half-time position reported directly to the chancellor and was filled by a member of the full-time faculty, first held by Dr. Jim Lee, a faculty member from the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese; the chancellor assumed that a member of the faculty would be taken more seriously than a graduate assistant or staff member (McKay, 2013). Operating on a small budget of \$10,000, the Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns was

charged with not only serving as a resource for students, faculty, and staff who had questions or concerns, but also coordinated programming, such as National Coming Out Day, and brought speakers to campus to present on a variety of LGBT issues (McKay, 2013). The part-time availability of Dr. Lee and the shared nature of the space resulted, however, in limited use of the office by the campus community (McKay, 2013).

After two years in the position, Dr. Lee returned to the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese and the duties of the Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns fell to two individuals, one man and one woman, who each dedicated 25% of their time to the position (McKay, 2013). This configuration remained in place until 1999, when McKay became co-director of the office with the director of the women's program (McKay, 2013). During the first year of his tenure as co-director, the ombudsperson suddenly resigned and the space dedicated to that position was absorbed as part of the Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns, which shortly thereafter became the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources (McKay, 2013). However, the small budget of the office prevented adequate use of the extra space; the additional rooms were used primarily for storage until 2005 (McKay, 2013). The office did, however, expand its services by coordinating Day of Silence, first organized by an undergraduate intern, as well as created a series of student organizations (McKay, 2013). In 2005, in response to continuing pressure to create full-time position, the chancellor reassigned the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns to the Office of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, who increased the budget of the office to allow for a renovation of its space in the Illini Union (McKay, 2013). The renovated space was renamed the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center (McKay, 2013). As full-time director, McKay used the increased budget to promote greater diversity within the staff,

which occurred primarily through the funding of graduate assistants and undergraduate interns from around the campus (McKay, 2013).

Facility Layout

Tucked away on the third floor of the Illini Union, the LGBT Resource Center is located beside the Tenant Union, an office that assists students and their landlords, as well as the Office of Student Legal Services, a group of attorneys specifically designed to support the campus community. The third floor is located away from the main traffic of the Illini Union, which also houses a hotel, dining facilities, conference areas, a recreation area, an art gallery, and various shopping areas as well as study spaces and computer labs. There is limited foot traffic outside and around the center.

Upon entering the center, one first encounters a front office space. The area contains a wall of cabinets on top of which were informational brochures, a calendar of upcoming events, and a display wall that changes monthly to feature specific LGBT themes and issues. During the time of the study, the display wall featured prominent African Americans from the LGBT community in several disciplines, including the arts, sciences, media, and technology; this theme was selected due to February's designation as Black History Month. The area also contains ample seating for students waiting for services, to hold informal meetings, or to simply lounge. Immediately upon entry, the wall to the right contains numerous, beautifully framed, black-and-white photos of students; although the photos are not labeled, it is likely that the students in the photos have connections to either the center or the LGBT community.

Adjacent to the welcome area is the office of the administrative assistant. Although it is a rather small office, it was decorated and professionally accessorized. The majority of the space, however, was occupied by office furniture. During the course of the fieldwork, the door to the

area remained mostly closed, likely as a result of noise originating from the welcome and lounge areas.

Proceeding through the welcome area, one enters the lounge and recreation room. The largest room of the center, this area is divided into two distinct areas. The first is a work area containing the LGBT resource library materials as well as computer stations. The library is contained in a series of bookcases along the entry wall and two computers and a printer are positioned on the right hand wall. Attached to the bookcases is a sign-in sheet used to track student use of the space. In the center of this area is a large table with seating for six, and on the far wall is a refrigerator and microwave. This area is often used for students to gather for lunch, to discuss classes or current events, and for work on projects for the center. The second area is designated specifically for recreation. It contains a sofa and chairs as well as a large-screen television. This area is decorated with flags representing the various subsets of the LGBT community.

Off of the work area of the lounge is the office of the assistant director. At the time of the study, however, the position was vacant and the office area remained closed. Adjacent to the recreation area is the office of the director. The office is professionally decorated and welcoming. The area features the professional accolades of the director as well as other personal items. The office also features seating for students and others of the campus community who wish to meet with the director.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Student Support Services Office at Indiana University

Overview and Mission

Part of the Division of Student Affairs, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Student Support Services Office (GLBTSSSO) was created in 1994 to provide education and outreach services to the Indiana University and Bloomington communities. As a resource center, the primary mission of the GLBTSSSO is to provide “information, support, mentoring, and counseling to members of the IUB campus and the larger community . . . through networking, collaboration, education, and outreach in an attempt to create a climate where all members of the community are encouraged to promote and defend diversity” (Indiana University GLBTSSSO, 2014, para. 1). Beyond counseling, mentoring, and referral services, the GLBTSSSO webpage also provides a calendar of LGBT-related activities on the Indiana University campus and in the Bloomington community as well as a list of LGBT student groups active on the campus. A key information resource of the GLBTSSSO is its extensive library, which contains more than 3,000 books, periodicals, and media items. The library serves as a major resource for students researching or interested in LGBT history, culture, and social issues; borrowing privileges are extended to students and community members alike. Moreover, the library serves as an informal lounge area where students can relax in a welcoming and safe space.

Although programming is not a primary activity of the GLBTSSSO, the office does sponsor or co-sponsor a number of events throughout the academic year. Among these events are speaker panels, LGBT parties, public protests, film screening, music performances, volunteer services, and other social activities (Indiana University GLBTSSSO, 2014). Additionally, the GLBTSSSO sponsors the annual PRIDE Film Festival at which the GLBTSSSO presents the

recipients of their annual Spirit Awards. Established at the time of the GLBTSSSO's fifth anniversary, the Spirit Awards honor "individuals, groups, offices and departments that embody the strength, character, and spirit of the Indiana University GLBT Student Support Services Office" (Indiana University GLBTSSSO, 2014).

History

The creation of the GLBTSSSO at Indiana University was prompted by the institution's efforts to track instances of harassment, primarily race-based harassment. African American students on campus were reporting instances of racially insensitive graffiti and various forms of verbal harassment at an increased rate during the late 1980s. However, at the end of the first year of tracking such statistics, university leaders realized that there were as many cases of harassment based on sexual orientation as there were those related to race, both of which violated the university's harassment policy. According to the center's director, Doug Bauder, campus administrators acknowledged that Indiana University lacked resources to support the needs of sexual minorities and Chancellor Kenneth Gros Louis and Richard McKaig, Dean of Students, initiated the process of developing services for LGBT students, faculty, and staff. In 1989, the Board of Acons, a group of juniors and seniors recognized for their outstanding scholarship, leadership, and campus service, issued a report to Chancellor Gros Louis requesting the establishment of an office dedicated to LGB student concerns (K. King, 1994). The Indiana University Student Association also endorsed the idea of an office for LGB students in 1989 and again in 1993 (Wimmer, 1994, p. 1). The following year, McKaig created the GLB anti-harassment team to help reduce the problem of harassment experienced on the basis of sexual orientation; in particular the team cited a 35% increase per year in the number of reported cases of harassment between 1990 and 1993 (K. King, 1994).

Ultimately, as communicated by Bauder, after two years of study and planning, Chancellor Gros Louis approached the Board of Trustees about establishing a GLB Center. The board approved the request and the Budgetary Affairs Committee approved a budget of \$50,000 to the center to pay the salaries of a full-time director and a part-time administrative assistant (K. King, 1994). Specifically, the center was publicized as being established to “deal with complaints and sponsor educational programs on campus to help to eliminate misunderstandings that breed in a hostile environment” (Hahn, 1994, p. 5) as well as reinforcing that the “center is for anybody who wants to learn more about the issue of sexual orientation. This center is not just for GLBs” (p. 5). Citing the 1990 Kinsey Institute’s report estimating that approximately 10% of population is homosexual and projecting that potentially 3,600 Indiana University students to be gay or lesbian, the Indiana University Student Association Senate supported the creation of the center, stating “the homosexual group is one of the largest under-represented groups on the campus of IU” (Hahn, 1994, p. 5). Pam Freeman, Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Student Ethics emphasized that the center would “be a place where people can feel safe” (as cited in Hahn, 1994, p. 5).

Unfortunately, the center became a point of contention and controversy almost immediately upon its approval. Opponents of the center opposed its creation for a number of reasons. Some expressed the belief that the \$50,000 allocated to the budget of the GLB Center would be better used to fund renovations that would benefit the Indiana University community more broadly (Hahn, 1994). Shun Ravago, former president of Young Americans for Freedom, indicated that the renovation of already established facilities should “take precedence over the funding of a new center” (as cited in Hahn, 1994, p. 5). He continued stating “for IU, it is not fiscally responsible for them to do this. If there is such a great need for a center like this, then

there should be enough people to contribute private money for the center” (as cited in Hahn, 1994, p. 5). Matt Wilkenson, also of Young Americans for Freedom, echoed Ravago’s assertion that the \$50,000 allocation should go to the campus majority stating, “We think it is wrong that the money should go to such a small minority of students” (as cited in Bajko, 1994, p. 12). In general, statements challenging the GLB Center proposed the idea of using private funds to fund what was seen as a special-interest project for a small number of students.

Predictably, most statements by those resistant to the creation of the center, however, were also motivated by anti-LGBT prejudice. Such is exhibited by Ravago’s continued protests against the planned GLB Center; he asked, “Why should money be appropriated for a GLB center when most of the country does not accept this type of lifestyle? This center will not be just for educating people about homosexuality, it will be advocating it” (as cited in Hahn, 1994, p. 5). Ravago’s statements grew increasingly negative and prejudiced in nature. Insisting that there was no reason to establish the planned center, Ravago exclaimed,

There does not need to be a center for just homosexuals; there should be just one place where a person can go in general. The gays, lesbians, and bisexuals at IU are a minority group of the population, like pedophiles and masturbators. We do not have a center for all of these groups. Homosexuals do not need a specific center. I think that it is ridiculous to have a center for every little thing, especially when homosexuality is a preference. (as cited in Hahn, 1994, p. 5)

Similarly, Jim Holden, chairman of the Indiana University College Republicans, was so strongly opposed to the idea of the GLB Center that his organization planned to seek legal action; he stated, “I am not sure what grounds we could test on, what it takes we will find our grounds.

There are sodomy laws in the state of Indiana; the center would be promoting something that is technically illegal” (as cited in Bajko, 1994, p. 12). Additionally, Holden asserted that

if anything, the center will cause so much tension that it will increase harassment—not that I believe there’s an incredible problem with it already. I know a lot of minorities who object to the idea that there is no difference to being a minority and being homosexual. I would personally be offended if that comparison was drawn. I don’t think there’s a similarity between someone’s behavior and the color of their skin. It’s a behavior that you willfully choose to participate in. (as cited in K. King, 1994, p. 3)

Nevertheless, it was precisely the type of moralizing exhibited in the statements of Holden, Ravago, and others that campus administrators were attempting to stifle with the creation of the GLB Center.

Initially, campus leaders responded to student opposition with relative apathy. Rather than debate issues of morality and equality, Gros Louis and McKaig reiterated the role of the center and its direct association with the Student Code of Ethics: the center’s efforts to provide protection to all students regardless of sexual orientation (as cited in Hahn, 1994). Specifically, McKaig stated, “The office is a separate location because it will then have more of a sense of being institutionally recognized and a part of the structure of the university” (as cited in Hahn, 1994, p. 5). Gros Louis, in turn, responded,

I think based on information from the task force GLB students have been harassed on campus, and the educational value would explain to more people the natures of GLB individuals. [The center] is part of the diversity that makes up the University. (as cited in Bajko, 1994, p. 12)

Still, others responded more emphatically. Sue Wanzer, advisor of the LGBT group OUT, responded to the suggestion that the center would promote sodomy, indicating that sodomy “has nothing to do with the GLB Center. I am pretty sure that the center is not going to be set up for having sex” (as cited in Bajko, 1994, p. 12). Sally Green, president of OUT, maintained that “every word that comes out of the opposition’s mouth just adds to the evidence of need for an office like this on campus” (as cited in K. King, 1994, p. 3). Likewise, trustee Cindy Stone reiterated, “The primary focus of the office is to help educate. It’s not a social club, an opportunity for people to have parties or dinners and stuff like that. It’s an office” and that “this university is built on inclusiveness, not excluding people because of one or more characteristics that are different” (as cited in K. King, 1994, p. 3).

When students returned to campus during the fall of 1994, debates concerning the GLB center resurfaced. In addition to public statements against the creation of the center by Board of Trustees President Robert H. McKinney, State Representative William Ruppel (R-New Manchester) led an effort to reduce the funding that Indiana University received from the state by \$50,000, the amount that was allocated to the GLB Center (as cited in Vince, 1994). However, it was State Representative Woody Burton (R-Greenwood), a member of the Ways and Means Committee, who most fervently threatened the university by drafting a proposal that would reduce state funds by \$500,000, declaring “making this kind of decision on an issue without hearing from the public is wrong. This is a major policy change” (as cited in Vince, 1994, p. 1). Citing support from 17 other legislators, Burton justified his proposal indicating, “I’m not attacking IU. I’m going after the administrators who have helped implement [the GLB Office]” (as cited in Vince, 1994, p. 1). Sensing that neither those in support of nor those against the creation of the center were going to end their debating, outgoing President Tom Ehrlich

encouraged Gros Louis to issue an official memorandum explaining the university's motivation and position on the GLB Center; the memorandum compared the creation of the GLB Center to harassment when the university supported African American students, faculty, and staff during the Civil Rights Movement (Gros Louis, 1994). Shortly thereafter, Burton issued a memorandum stating,

We all have the right to live as we wish, however, when the promotion of special interest groups is funded with taxpayers' dollars, it is time to speak out. When these special interest groups take on a role that introduces and encourages their controversial activities to vulnerable citizens, we need to consider all the negative ramifications that may result. We need to take a close look at what Indiana University is espousing in their literature.

(Burton, 1994, para. 2)

He also encouraged his supporters and others opposed to the GLB Office to contact Gros Louis as well as Indiana University's new president, Myles Brand, directly to communicate any concerns. State Representative Mark Kruzan (D-Bloomington), however, supported the creation of the center reiterating that statements such as those by Burton and Ruppel reinforced the need and significance of such an office (Vince, 1994).

Burton's proposal to reduce Indiana University's state funding by half a million dollars served as a catalyst for renewed student debates and protests. In late September, Indiana University's College Republicans and College Democrats joined forces to oppose using student generated funds to support the GLB Office (Wimmer, 1994a). Ultimately, however, College Democrats responded in a 29-to-1 vote to support the creation of the GLB office stating that the group's former president, Randy DeCleene, misrepresented the group; Leiellen Atz of the executive council stated that "most of the democrats feel as strongly as we [the executive

council] that this is the party of inclusion and we don't want to exclude anyone" (as cited in Binhack, 1994). The Indiana University Student Association demonstrated their support of the office by donating a single dollar to help fund its creation (Wimmer, 1994b). The solidarity evidenced by the Student Association's gestures is not to suggest that support was unanimous; minutes of the Student Association reveal that significant discussion on the issue of the GLB center occurred at the October 6, 1994 meeting (Indiana University Student Association Student Body Senate, October 6, 1994). DeCleene, who also served as a member of the Student Association, argued that the GLB community already had the resources it needed, stating,

The bottom line is that the services being talked about are already there. The GLB community and students who want to use those services already have health center consulting. They have OUT, they have Mr. Burton's QUEST. They have the gay hotline number. They have Diversity Advocates. The list goes on and on. All that needs to be done is to activate the resources that we have and the services that we can use that are already in place. (Indiana University Student Association Student Body Senate, October 6, 1994, p. 33)

In contrast, a student representative identified only as Hurst, stated,

I think what really one of primary reasons for this office is to dispel all of the fear that students have on this campus and in this community. Nobody should have that fear. It was mentioned earlier that yeah, there's a lot of services around campus, but students should not have to go through an incredible amount of effort to obtain information and find their own support. This center would offer a centralized place for students to come and to pick up all of this material. And it's not just for GLB students. If some is writing

a paper, they can come in. It is a support center for anybody to use. (Indiana University Student Association Student Body Senate, October 6, 1994, p. 36)

In the end, the Student Association's resolution to reaffirm its support of the GLBSSSO was passed with a vote of 22-3-2 (Indiana University Student Association Student Body Senate, October 6, 1994; Wimmer, 1994b).

In an effort to diffuse the situation and prevent the loss of \$500,000 in state funding, President Brand opted to seek private donations to fund the GLBSSSO and to change the name of the Office of Student Ethics to the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Programs (Rowland, 1994a). By the time he announced these changes, President Brand had already secured the \$50,000 needed to support the GLBSSSO from an anonymous, private source; however, Brand indicated that had private funds been insufficient, he would have continued to fund the office using public funds (Rowland, 1994a). Moreover, Perry Metz, Assistant Vice President for External Affairs, indicated that the name change was to clarify the reason the office fell under the umbrella of student ethics (Rowland, 1994a). In the end, Representative Burton dropped his efforts to combat the creation of the GLB Office and cut university funds (Rowland, 1994a). Doubtless, President Brand believed he had successfully neutralized the conflict surrounding the GLBSSSO; unfortunately, that was not the case.

Following Brand's announcement, LGBT students began to protest the proposed modifications to the GLBSSSO proposal. To some students, the decision to use private instead of public funds would result in "keeping the center in the closet" (Buntain, 1994, p. A8). Similarly, student Brian Carr stated, "we're not interested in being privatized" (Buntain, 1994, p. A8). Brand responded to such comments stating, "The private funding does not push the center back into the closet" and stressing that the university was unable to take sides of controversial

political and social issues (Buntain, 1994, p. A8). Members of Indiana University's various LGBT groups united as Zero Tolerance, a new umbrella group opposing the changes to the planned office and organized a series of demonstrations outside of the president's office. Graduate student and member of the Lesbian Avengers Julie Thompson stated, "I'm very disturbed by the decision to change the name and mask its identity. It sends the message that Indiana University is ashamed of its gay and lesbian population and I don't approve of that message" (as cited in Welsh-Huggins, 1994b, p. A1). Thompson's sentiment was reiterated by Representative Kruzan, who expressed the belief that "the university has made a terrible error at crumbling under the pressure of a few legislators" (as cited in Lear & Smith, 1994, p. 5). Other students warned the campus community that Brand's decision reflected a general disregard to policy and projects. As Duncan Mitchell expressed,

If Myles Brand can take away money that has been legitimately appropriated by the Bloomington Faculty Council and the Board of Trustees from a project that has already been approved, if he can just make it go away, then he can do that to all kinds of other departments, all kinds of other projects that he wants to get rid of. That's a real risk. Other groups on campus need to be aware that they may be next. That's a matter of principle right there, that Brand behaved illegitimately in the way he has handled this. Brand has to go through the same channels as everyone else. If he does get away with it, then he will do it again. (as cited in Wickens, 1994, p. 7)

Brand's decision also inspired a handful of political cartoons, which were published in the student newspaper, the *Indiana Daily Reader*.

Zero Tolerance also responded to Brand's decisions regarding the GLB office by issuing a set of exacting demands; among the demands were

1. the \$50,000 in public funding originally promised to the GLB Office as well as a minimum of \$75,000 in private funding earmarked for the activities of the Office;
2. a change of name to Indiana University Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Cultural Center “to be visibly recognizable . . . on official letterheads, exterior signs, and phone directory listings and cross-listings” (para. 5);
3. a full-time, 12-month director to report directly to the Dean of Students and whose position pertains solely to the Center;
4. the establishment of a student advisory board consisting of various representatives of the Indiana University queer community and who are to be consulted in all decisions regarding the Center;
5. public funds are to be used to staff the center, which would include an administrative assistant and librarian;
6. the center is to be funded, staffed, and open to the public no later than December 1, 1994; and
7. President Brand must issue a public apology to the Indiana University GLB community for his “egregious act of betrayal and breach of confidence” (para. 10) as well as explanation for his sudden change to the previously negotiated Office. (Zero Tolerance, 1994)

Students were not the only people frustrated with Brand’s decision to seek out and allocate private funds to cover the budget of the GLBSSSO. The members of the Search and Screen Committee issued a formal memorandum to President Brand, Chancellor Gros Louis, and Dean McKaig expressing their own disappointment with the planned changes and resounding many of the ideas communicated by students. In part, the memorandum stated,

Shifting to private funding, even if it was intended to protect the office and the university from meddling by lawmakers, sends a none too subtle message that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people at this university are somehow less worthy than other groups that have received public funding. This indication that non-heterosexual populations on campus must be assigned a special status serves to undermine both the university's original mission in opening such an office and its overall commitment to rejecting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. (Members of Search and Screen Committee, 1994, p. 1)

The memorandum continued, stating,

Even more damaging than the decision to move from public to private funding of this office, however, was the public relations fiasco that accompanied it. Allowing a state legislator to be the spokesperson for forthcoming policy decisions made by the administration makes the University look foolish, particularly when the legislator in question has a habit of misrepresenting the reality of the situation and making objectionable comments regarding Jews and other minorities. Moreover, the apparent ability of a noisy and misinformed minority in the Statehouse to micromanage campus affairs and radically alter carefully made decision of the University represents, in our view, a troubling precedent.

We believe that the University missed an opportunity in this episode to stand up for principles of social justice, administrative autonomy, and academic freedom. In the face of an artificial controversy generated by opponents who demonstrated both a limited understanding of the mission of the office in question and an alarming willingness to display their prejudices, those who speak for Indiana University could have tried to

advance their educational goals by dispelling ignorance about the office and attacking myths surrounding issues of sexual orientation. Instead, the administration gave the distinct appearance of capitulating to the demands of the intolerant few and thereby affirming their shocking and distorted views on the matter. (Members of the Search and Screen Committee, 1994, pp. 1–2)

The committee did, however, close the memorandum expressing a willingness to move forward and work with University administrators to make the office successful and to enrich the campus through the activities of the GLBSSSO (Members of the Search and Screen Committee, 1994).

While Brand expressed his frustration with the situation and indicated that his decision was in the best interest of the university to allow the creation of the GLB Office as well as prevent the loss of funds, he did not meet any of the demands set forth by Zero Tolerance (Pearlman, 1994, p. 1). Assistant Vice President Metz responded that while the university would work toward “appropriate implementation of the office,” they were not “in a negotiating posture to respond to each of [Zero Tolerance’s] demands” (as cited in Welsh-Huggins, 1994b, p. A8). Nevertheless, some students were sensitive to the difficult position that President Brand was in; as stated by Shane Johns, “I think the gay community is upset, but I really do believe Brand’s hands are tied. We, in the gay community, should realize that our fight is not so much with Brand, but with elected officials” (as cited in Buntain, 1994, p. A8). Others expressed frustration with Zero Tolerance’s efforts to monopolize President Brand’s time (Whirly, 1994).

Despite student protests, however, the Search and Screen Committee proceeded with its work to hire a coordinator. Working from a pool of 72 applicants, five finalists were selected for interviews and three were referred to the dean of students and the director of student ethics for final interviews (Rowland, 1994d). In the end, Douglas Bauder was hired to serve as the

inaugural director of the GLBSSSO, a position that he still holds today (Welsh-Huggins, 1994a). With a background in ministry and rehabilitation services, Bauder was hired to help mend relationships between the various parties involved in the creation of and debates about the office. Specifically, Bauder stated,

I understand the anger and sense of betrayal that many students feel. Public funding is a powerful symbol. I also understand political realities, and like to believe that President Brand is committed to this office but has made some mistakes in the process. He has admitted to those mistakes and I think is now looking to bridge the gap and at least get people talking again. We're really all committed to the same thing. We have different tactics, maybe, but let's pull together now and get this going and off the ground. Let's do the best we can with what we've got. (as cited in Pool, 1994, p. 2)

In another news article, Bauder stated "I just think we need to continue to create opportunities for dialogue even with people who are strong opponents. I expect that will be an important part of my work" (as cited in Welsh-Huggins, 1994a, p. 1). Indeed, mediation was an important part of his work during the first months of his tenure as director; however, he also knew that the Office would benefit LGBT students more directly. Bauder developed a library for the GLBSSSO as well as formed a 16-member advisory board (Binhack, 1995). However, the office was to serve a major role for the LGBT community by providing counseling and referral services. Regarding the issue of counseling in particular, Bauder expressed the belief that

There is a need for someone with counseling, teaching, and advocacy skills. My thought is that counseling is the most important, as important as activism is. For everyone one to two activists there are 10 to 20 people struggling quietly and desperately for support. (as cited in Rowland, 1994c, p. 1)

To encourage students, faculty, and staff to make use of the office, Bauder aimed to “create an accepting environment where all people can expect to find understanding, trust, friendship, and, perhaps above all, safety” (Pool, 1995, p. 60). Nevertheless, when the GLBSSSO officially opened, things were relatively quiet; Bauder reported only making a few phone calls and meeting with a handful of visitors (Rowland, 1994b). Bauder indicated that the only thing of note was the arrival of a handpicked bouquet of flowers from an alley in the library. Although the center opened to relative quiet, Bauder shared that he had anticipated the possibility of demonstrators when the GLBSSSO hosted its first open house. However, again things were relatively quiet; Bauder reported that the center saw nearly 300 visitors, including some trustees and various Indiana University administrators.

Since Bauder’s arrival as coordinator, little has changed in terms of the general operation of the GLBSSSO. Bauder indicated that his staff also includes an administrative assistant as well as a team of student interns, in particular graduate interns from the library and counseling programs. Additionally, Bauder indicated that the name of the office also changed its name during the mid-1990s to acknowledge and address the needs of transgender students, faculty, and staff and becoming the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Student Support Services Office (GLBTSSSO). The greatest change is the size of the GLBTSSSO office space, which was initially shared with other campus entities, including the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Program and the Alcohol and Drug Information Center that have since relocated to other parts of campus. Bauder shared that such relocations have permitted the GLBTSSSO to operate more efficiently by providing the coordinator and his staff private offices in which to conduct their business as well as provide social spaces and opportunities to expand the library collection.

Facility Layout

The GLBTSSSO is located in an older, two-story house on the periphery of the campus. The building is directly next to La Casa, the Latino Cultural Center. While not directly on the main campus square, it is only a short walk away from the Memorial Union Building. The building itself has a welcoming porch area featuring a rainbow flag and where colorful chairs are available during the spring and summer months for students to lounge.

Upon entering the building, one encounters an awkward entryway; instead of entering into a welcome area, visitors find themselves in a short hallway. To the left is a reception area where student volunteers as well as graduate assistants working in the center are located. There are work desks for three individuals. To the left is a large, L-shaped work area on top of which are brochures and information packets. Two additional desks are located in the space. As this space was originally a living room, there is a large fireplace over which hangs a welcome sign; this gives visitors the feeling that they have entered a home-away-from-home rather than an institutional office space.

Across the hallway from the reception area is an office for the administrative assistant. The small area is decorated with the personal belongings of the staff member; however, the office also features a pair of chairs where visitors can sit when meeting in the space.

A large resource library is located down the hall on the left. One of the largest rooms in the building, the collection contains more than 3,000 books, magazines, and media items, which students and community members may borrow. The room also contains a small library table and a few chairs where students can sit while they read. There is also a computer station available for students. At one time the library served as the entire space dedicated to the GLBTSSSO.

Directly across from the library is a large office space for the director. The space features the personal belongings of the director as well as houses a large collection of scrapbooks detailing the history of the office. The space serves as an informal meeting area for the visitors and other university administrators working with the director.

The rear of the building contains a storage area, a restroom, and bookcase containing information about programs and services, flyers detailing upcoming events, and free condoms. There is also a doorway to a screened-in porch area, beside which is a microwave and refrigerator. Stairs leading to the second floor are located in the rear of the building as well. Upstairs there are two spaces devoted to the free counseling services available through the office. There is also a small study area, which is utilized once a week for free HIV testing, and a small meeting room containing desks and a television.

Throughout the office, there are a number of posters and other forms of artwork. Many of the items communicate positive messages about LGBT identity and items related to LGBT history and rights. Of particular note is a bulletin board in the restroom where students and other visitors may post positive messages about the office, poetry, and thank you notes, as well as general questions and comments; all messages are anonymous and the board is refreshed on a roughly weekly basis.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Center at Purdue University

Overview and Mission

Established in July 2012, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Center (LGBTQC) at Purdue University serves as a unit of the Division of Diversity and Inclusion. It is part of the Division of Diversity and Inclusion, which also houses the Latino Cultural Center, the Black Cultural Center, the Native American Education and Cultural Center, the Diversity

Resource Office, and two programs that target underrepresented K-12 students to help provide access to higher education. Lowell Kane, director of the center, shared that the LGBTQC boasts a three-fold mission embracing education, outreach, and support. Specifically, the LGBTQC mission statement states,

The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer Center provides programming that engages the entire Purdue University campus and community on LGBTQ issues through an exciting calendar of events, a distinguished lecture series, advocacy for equitable access and a discrimination-free environment, and facilitation of a variety of training opportunities throughout the year. (Purdue University LGBTQC, 2014, para. 1)

Moreover, the LGBTQC serves as “a dedicated safe space where students can drop in whenever they want to and create a welcoming environment” (Muhic, 2013, para. 3). The LGBTQC also serves as the primary point of contact for the campus and surrounding community about LGBT issues, particularly with regard to efforts “to connect students with enriching resources, activities, and support services they seek in order to be successful at Purdue University and beyond (Purdue University LGBTQC, 2014, para. 1). Additionally, the LGBTQC houses a print and media resource library containing a number of news publications, scholarly books, and media items, many of which are not usually found in other resource center libraries; in particular, Kane emphasized that the film collection includes a number of international films representing the LGBT rights movements outside of the United States and the inherent diversity of the LGBT community.

History

Unlike the LGBT resource centers at the University of Illinois and Indiana University, the LGBTQC at Purdue University was not created as a direct response to discrimination and

harassment. Rather, the center was established as a direct response to the findings of a diversity assessment, which found that LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff perceived a less-than-welcoming climate (Vice President for Human Relations, 2007). In particular, the report stated “GLBT staff experienced a less comfortable and warm climate at Purdue than their counterparts” (Vice President for Human Relations, 2007, p. 10). According to the report, sexual orientation was the third most witnessed form of harassment and discrimination after race and gender as reported by faculty and staff; however, approximately 20% of students reported witnessing sexual orientation discrimination and harassment, a statistic second only to race (Vice President for Human Relations, 2007). In response to the information of the diversity assessment, Purdue University developed a five-year plan to make the institution a more LGBT inclusive campus (LGBTQ Advisory Board, 2008). This five-year plan, in turn, stressed the importance of the climate for recruiting and retaining high quality students, faculty, and staff, noting that Purdue University lacked dedicated resources for the LGBT campus community, a fact outlined by the *Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students* (Windmeyer, 2006). Significantly, this set Purdue apart from peer institutions, as it was the only Big Ten institution that lacked LGBTQ programming, resources, and services (LGBTQ Advisory Board, 2008).

Although Purdue boasted decades of student LGBT activism, the creation of a five-year strategic plan allowed for a systematic review and implementation of programming, resources, and services aimed at making the university more LGBT inclusive. The specific recommendations of the Advisory Board included

- Update University policies, documents, programs, and systems to be inclusive of LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff;

- Develop an LGBTQ resource center with full-time, paid staff to centralize support services that address LGBTQ issues;
- Target admission materials and designate scholarship monies toward those supportive of the LGBTQ community;
- Add gender identity and gender expression to Purdue's non-discrimination policy;
- Create effective and visible web programming that highlights Purdue's diversity efforts and initiatives;
- Design residence life services with LGBTQ concerns in mind;
- Improve Free Zone attention to LGBTQ community and issues;
- Provide mentoring programs for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff;
- Implement assessment surveys of current and former LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff;
- Ensure the active promotion of domestic partner benefits; and
- Create corporate partnerships with LGBTQ friendly corporations and extend Purdue's outreach efforts beyond the campus borders. (LGBTQ Advisory Board, 2008, p. 4)

In essence, the five-year plan was the first of three stages in the process of achieving the goal of the LGBTQ Advisory Board and serving as benching process that forced the university's administration to carefully examine similar institutions. The second process involved modifying and updating policies to address issues not only of sexual orientation but also gender identity, which the campus ultimately achieved in 2010. Kane indicated that the last phase was the creation of the LGBTQC, which would subsequently implement new and expand upon current programming and resources.

The importance of addressing the climate for LGBT students, faculty, and staff is perhaps most strongly indicated by the process that Purdue used to create the LGBTQC. Dr. G. Christine Taylor, Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion and the first Chief Diversity Officer in the history of Purdue University, wanted to bring a leading expert in the field of LGBT student support services to campus in a fully-established, brick-and-mortar LGBT resource center created under optimal conditions. To realize this objective, Kane stated that Vice Provost Taylor elected to complete the search for the director of the LGBTQC by contracting the Spellman and Johnson Group, a national leader in higher education leadership searches and recruitment, to conduct a national search of leading individuals in the field. Ultimately, Lowell Kane was selected as the inaugural director of the LGBTQC, having served as the inaugural director of the Gender Issues Education Center at Texas A&M University, the first LGBT resource center in a public institution in Texas.

During his time as director, Kane has achieved a number of important accomplishments. Within the first year, the LGBTQC had approximately 1,500 student visitors and attracted more than 800 participants (more than 700 allies) for the campus's Safe Zone program since assuming leadership of the program in January 2013. Additionally, Kane shared that he created the LGBTQ and Allies Speakers Bureau, a group of students trained to share their personal narrative in public forums as well as anticipate and address questions about LGBT experiences and the LGBT community. Likewise, Kane created the Distinguished Lecture Series as a way of bringing notable figures of Purdue University and discussing a number of important LGBT issues. To date, notable speakers include

- Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay ordained bishop and the first bishop ordained in a bulletproof vest;

- Cleve Jones, founder of the AIDS memorial quilt, Harvey Milk protégé, and West Lafayette native;
- George Takei, author, LGBT rights activist, and actor best known for his role in the original *Star Trek* series; and
- Laverne Cox, transgender actress most widely known for her role on Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*.

Lastly, Kane revealed that he spearheaded efforts to create an LGBTQ minor within the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program; established in 2013, the minor has already attracted 60 students making it the fastest growing minor at Purdue University.

Facility Layout

Located on the third floor of the Engineering Administration Building, the LGBTQC consists of a common space and two administrative offices. The space also contains a unisex/gender-inclusive restroom accessible only through the center. The third floor also features a large conference room/classroom as well as a computer lab and various offices. The building receives limited traffic and is relatively isolated from the activity of the campus center.

When opening the door to the center, one enters a short hallway. The office of the administrative assistant is located to the right of the hallway, and directly across from the office is the gender-inclusive restroom. The door to the center features flyers for upcoming events as well as information about the center. The office of the administrative assistant is rather small but is very welcoming; the door remained open at all times during the research period.

Just past the administrative assistant's office is the common area. The most active area of the center, the space contains a sofa, chairs, two desks, and a big screen television. One of the desks features informational brochures as well as items promoting safe sex. Located on this desk

is also a sign-in sheet where students provide their initials as a way of tracking student use of the center. The common area also features a series of bookcases that contain items from the center's resource library, including books, periodicals, and DVDs.

Adjacent to the common area is the office of the director. The space is beautifully and professionally decorated. The office is welcoming and features awards and other personal items of the director. Throughout the visit, the door remained open at all times; students and other visitors were free to stop in and meet with the director at any time.

Throughout the center there are a number of important items related to the history of the LGBT movement. Both domestic and international, these items include a pink triangle arm patch from the Holocaust, a series of pins opposing Anita Bryant, a piece of granite from the Homomonument in Amsterdam, as well as various badges and pins outlining different stages of the LGBT movement. There is also a signed print from Cleve Jones, who spoke as a part of the Distinguished Speakers Series.

Since the time of data collection, the LGBTQC has moved to a different building. Now located on the second floor of Schleman Hall of Student Services, the LGBTQC is positioned closer to other campus entities that provide students with support systems, including the Office of International Students and Scholars.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the themes that emerged from observations and interviews conducted with 30 self-disclosing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender undergraduate students who make use of the services and programming available at three Midwestern LGBT resource centers. Upon analyzing the interview data, a number of themes surfaced. The five themes to be discussed are (a) perceptions of campus climate, (b) first impressions, (c) the role of LGBT resource centers, (d) what are students taking away, and (e) importance of LGBT resource centers. Various subthemes for each primary theme were identified in order to communicate the nuances of the main themes. Each theme and its subthemes will be discussed to expound the various ways in which participants communicated their statements concerning these themes. After findings are presented, the next section of the chapter will present a cross analysis of similarities and differences about the major themes relative to the three research sites. Lastly, a summary of the findings will close the chapter.

Perceptions of Campus Climate

Using a semi-structured interview protocol, participants were asked to communicate their understanding of the campus climate toward the LGBT community. This particular question generated several subthemes that relate to the notion of campus climate perception. These subthemes included good overall, Bloomington as liberal oasis, indifference, the not so good, passing privilege, transgender student perceptions, and climate as a result of the center. The

LGBT resource centers at all three sites for this study were established as direct responses to campus climate concerns, regardless of reported instances of discrimination and harassment.

Good Overall

The majority of participants at the three sites indicated that the campus climate toward the LGBT community is generally positive. In fact, one student interviewed indicated that she had selected her institution based on the school's positive reputation with regard to a strong and active LGBT community. In recounting her experience searching for a college, Katherine selected the University of Illinois specifically due to its prominent LGBT community. She shared,

When I was looking at the colleges I wanted to go to, the LGBT community was one of the biggest deals for me because at that point I had just come out. I came out senior year of high school. I wanted to go to a college that was very LGBT friendly. And when I was looking at U of I, I found out that U of I had an RSO [registered student organization] called Building Bridges, which is an RSO for people who identify as LGBT and Christian. When I found out about it, I was very surprised, because I had no idea that such a thing existed. I felt like that was the main thing that really I wanted. Except for the fact that it's a really good school, that was the one thing that made me really want to come here.

Students at the University of Illinois communicated the perception that the institution maintains a positive campus climate with regard to the LGBT community. In fact, the University of Illinois boasted a score of 4.5 out of 5 for their campus climate, as published by Campus Pride (Campus Pride, 2014). Regarding climate, Katherine stated,

I feel like U of I is pretty LGBT friendly. . . . I spend a lot of my time here [in the LGBT Resource Center], so I feel like that's why it's very friendly. I really mostly associate myself with a lot of LGBT people. I haven't experienced any hateful type of things from being gay. It's a pretty good climate.

Similarly, Kaleb shared his point of view that the climate at the University of Illinois is positive, indicating, "Personally in all my interactions, I've never had a problem with anyone." It is important to note, however, like that of Katherine, his positive experience is based on a tendency to self-segregate. Kaleb continued, stating, ". . . but I also have very limited interactions with different groups of people as well." On one hand, both students perceived the campus climate as being quite warm and welcoming. On the other hand, at least in part, this perception of a positive climate is influenced directly by the company they choose to keep.

Students at Purdue University, which maintains a Campus Pride score of 4.5 out of 5 for campus climate as well, also perceived their campus climate to be positive (Campus Pride, 2014). Tom, a non-traditional student, described an absence of anti-LGBT behaviors and attitudes on the campus, stating

For the most part, where I see it, just from my observation, I don't see that much discrimination at all, if any. If somebody is known to be gay, I don't see people backlashing at them or hating on them because of their sexual preference or anything like that. I can't say I've seen any discrimination. I know it's possible to have a few people here and there, but I haven't run into it yet.

Another Purdue student, Allan, reiterated the idea that Purdue has an accepting campus climate, due largely to the community of friends he established. When asked about his perceptions of the climate, he laughed, saying,

It's always a funny question because like I never personally feel like any discrimination. I don't know if it's maybe . . . sometimes I think it's part of my personality, but I've never really had somebody be like "f-ing fag, you need to get out of here." No one really has come to me like that. So when people say it's a really conservative campus, I'm like I don't know who y'all are hanging out with, but the people I hang out with are cool. But then again these are the music kids and the theatre kids.

Bloomington as a Liberal Oasis

Whereas University of Illinois and Purdue University students perceived their campus climates to be largely accepting of the LGBT community, students at Indiana University were most consistently positive in their assessment of campus climate. In fact, at the time of the study, Indiana University maintained a Campus Pride score of 5 out of 5 (Campus Pride, 2014). Some students expressed feelings of pleasant surprise that Indiana University features such a prominent LGBT community. For example, Steven expressed his excitement to learn about LGBT events in the area, sharing,

I feel very comfortable living here. I mean, I was surprised to learn when I was being recruited here they have an LGBT film festival and I was like, that's kind of weird. Like a small town in Indiana, like I wouldn't have ever expected that. So, yeah, I've had no problems here so far.

Courtney shared a similar sentiment, citing the open-minded nature of the residence hall community she lived in:

I would say it's fairly good. Definitely better than where I'd come from. And the people that mainly I am with and hang out with were—I live in a thematic community for religion, history, ethics, and philosophy—so most of the people in there are pretty open-

minded and open to discussion and stuff, which I find pretty good. So I've had a pretty much, I'd say, an overall positive experience.

Moreover, Xander credited the positive campus climate to the progressive nature of the campus community and its location. Regarding Bloomington specifically, he said,

Overall, I'd say the campus climate is very accepting. Bloomington itself is a really progressive town, I think in large part because of IU's influence. It's really great and the residence halls, pretty much the entire residence staff is trained extensively to deal with LGBT issues and prevent any problems from arising and dealing with problems if they do arise. So that creates a very good climate to feel secure going to school here.

For the students of Indiana University, the campus climate plays a significant part in their decision to remain at the university. Xander continued sharing that "if it were less accepting here, I would have been much more inclined to leave and go someplace else." It is important to note, however, that Bloomington's status as a liberal oasis is due to its cosmopolitan status.

Additionally, there may be an issue of relativity at work as well. Some of the students came to Bloomington from more conservative or rural areas, which likely influenced their perceptions of the city as being more liberal; however, had the students come from more metropolitan locations such as Chicago or New York City, Bloomington and its climate for the LGBT community may have been viewed less positively.

Indifference

Students at all three universities, however, communicated that what is perceived as a positive campus climate may have more to do with a general sense of indifference toward the LGBT community than true acceptance. Kevin, a student at the University of Illinois, maintained that the university has a rather accepting climate. However, he followed up

expressing that some people just don't pay much attention to the LGBT community. In reference to a recent protest concerning trans-inclusive health insurance policies, he stated,

I guess just the uncertainty in not knowing where people stand on things and when you want to take part in events that we have here. . . . I mean, for the most part I think people are either just accepting, or others are indifferent, like, "I don't care. It doesn't affect me."

Similarly, Brian, also a student at the University of Illinois, described the climate saying, "I would say it's relatively warm. It's not overwhelmingly accepting."

Students at Purdue University communicated a sense of indifference as well. For example, Wendy shared her experiences, stating, "I personally haven't felt much pushback for being in the LGBT community. But I definitely know a lot of people don't talk about it. It's kind of, if you don't see it, then we don't say anything." Allan acknowledged the same indifference toward the LGBT community. He recounted an experience in a local bar, jokingly stating,

You go to the bars or something and then some straight boy's feeling themselves that day and, "Oh dude, can I ask you a question?" "Yeah, you can ask me a question." "Are you gay?" "Yeah!" "Okay, that's cool, as long as you don't hit on me." And I'm like "Dude, you're not even my type. I'm out of your league!" . . . Like I'm not just some penis floating around just trying to insert myself in things.

Even students on the liberal campus of Indiana University conveyed that some sense of apathy toward the LGBT community existed on the campus. Heather shared her perception indicating that this indifference is particularly prominent among first-year students, especially those who are unfamiliar with the LGBT community:

I feel like LGBT isn't blatantly talked about, but I don't feel like it's ignored in any way. I don't feel like it's shameful to be part of this community. I don't think it's a problem. I feel like most everything is accepted at IU, and you're kind of looked down upon if you're snooty about it. But in the same way, I feel like all freshmen that come in aren't prepared for or as accepting and as open-minded as IU is until their sophomore year. Then they're like, "This is really great. You can be whoever you want to be." In high school, you really had to be the norm.

Matt described the campus climate simply as "either very accepting, or very just indifferent." Nevertheless, it is perhaps Anon from the University of Illinois, who best articulated the general quality of indifference toward the LGBT community. As he attempted to make sense of it, "I think [the LGBT community] is being less and less celebrated. I think LGBT culture isn't really brought up much anymore, and I think the student body is moving more toward a post-gay culture." Unfortunately, however, this does not appear to be the case as many participants described instances of anti-LGBT harassment.

The Not So Good

Despite a general sense that the campus climates for the three sites were positive, nearly half of participants reported incidents of either direct or indirect harassment on their campuses. Those who experienced negative behaviors indicated that they were most often isolated occurrences. Moreover, the types of negative behaviors varied significantly. Some expressed a general sense of discomfort among heterosexual students. Brendan, a student at Indiana University, indicated that although the campus climate is "fairly good" and he was never harassed directly, some of his friends had been called derogatory terms:

I know I've had friends who have had instances where they've been walking around and people have called them a fag from a car. I've never had anything like that happen to me. No one's—after coming out—no one's really said anything to me or been particularly mean to me or anything of that nature.

Nevertheless, he indicated that some appeared uncomfortable due to his sexual orientation, stating, "There was one girl from my floor freshmen year who probably wasn't all that comfortable with it, but for the most part she was pretty much fine."

Courtney expressed her perception that the Greek community at Indiana University was not as accepting of the LGBT community as one might expect on a campus that is viewed to be liberal. Although he has not experienced any harassment from such groups, he broached the subject of discomfort stating,

And for fraternities and sororities, I think there's still a lot of heteronormativity when it comes to those kinds of organizations. Like I don't really see any fraternity or sororities, especially ones with houses on campus, being really friendly towards the community.

Adrian recounted similar discomfort toward the LGBT community on the campus of the University of Illinois. Although he expressed that the campus is generally accepting and safe, on occasion he experienced uncomfortable staring that he perceived to be due to his sexual orientation and that of his friends. He said,

I feel like if I was to go out, I wouldn't really get approached in a negative way. But I feel like people would stare. I remember I was leaving the dining cafeteria, and two of my friends were holding hands. They were both male students. They went up the stairs and people who were passing by just looked at them. They didn't approach them in a negative way. They were like "Okay, I guess." Then they walked down the stairs.

The most prominent form of harassment reported by participants was that of hate speech or derogatory language, often shouted from passing vehicles. Emily recalled one instance during her time at Indiana University when she experienced harassment due to her appearance:

There was one incident while I was walking to a class. I had a rainbow umbrella and I was wearing cargo shorts, which I guess isn't exactly feminine. And I have short hair. Someone on a bike came from behind and nearly ran into me and called me a derogatory word.

Interestingly, Xander, also a student at Indiana University, experienced a similar form of harassment, presumably the result of an umbrella as well. He recalled,

I haven't had any experiences directly related to the fact that I'm out. I have had . . . the occasional one from a passing car that happened up near Frat Row, shockingly enough. But I think that was related to a rainbow umbrella, of which I'm very fond. But that's pretty much the only thing I've experienced on campus.

Haley, a student at Purdue University, recounted an incident much like those reported at Indiana University:

I've had a couple of experiences that have not been as celebratory, like someone shouted dyke out the window from a car just passing by my first year. . . . And there were a couple of incidents in Krannert [School of Management] of like racial stuff and then I think there was an LGBTQ focused one . . . I think that was before my time, however, I had heard of it and wasn't exactly the most affirming of environments for me to initially get involved with.

In general, however, participants were able to dismiss most of negative incidents as a result of their isolated nature.

More disturbing to students who experienced harassment than instances of derogatory language were the various examples of sexual harassment that occurred on their campuses; such harassment was most prominent among female participants. Courtney shared her exasperation with perceptions of her identity as a bisexual woman:

I would say the only thing that's negative is that if I'm talking to a guy sometimes my friends will volunteer the information and be like, "Oh, yeah, she's bisexual." And then they get [the idea] into their head like, "Oh, she's just A-okay to have a threesome with another girl," like, "I scored the jackpot." So that definitely gets old pretty quickly.

Kelly expressed similar frustrations when her sexuality was questioned or made light of by peers. As she described herself as a "very femme" lesbian, she has experienced multiple instances of sexual harassment while working as a bartender on campus:

I bartend here on campus and every party that we've had had a lot of alcohol there and there is always that one person who is like, "Kelly, is this real? Is this the real thing?" Or like this last party, which was on Monday, they were just like, "Are you bi or are you gay? It's cool whatever it is. . . . Are you sure?" That's what's going on.

Kelly followed up by sharing that her boss acknowledged her discomfort and, after witnessing such behaviors, terminated an employee as a result of sexual harassment.

Only one student reported a form of harassment that escalated to assault. Jake R., a student at Purdue University, described his experiences saying,

Twice since I've been here at Purdue, people have shouted big slur words at me as I'm walking down the street. One time one of them [threw] a bottle of water at me, although it missed me. He had terrible aim. But so there are things like that. And then another

time, I was being accused because I was wearing too gay of an outfit. I don't know what that means.

Passing Privilege

Some participants indicated that although their assessments of campus climate are generally positive and they have not experienced any harassment firsthand, this is likely due to a phenomenon known as passing privilege. In essence, their appearance has allowed them to blend in to the broader campus community and to not attract attention resulting in harassment. Caryssa acknowledged the benefit of passing privilege saying, "It's harder to tell with me. I have that—I can pass so I don't really get as much flack as a flamboyant gay man."

Sarah, also a student at Purdue, described her experiences with passing privilege, which she attributes largely to her more feminine appearance.

So I'm a lipstick lesbian. I'm very feminine. Because of that I have something known as passing privilege. I'm not very identified as gay, often, which has its pros and cons.

Because of it I'm pretty welcomed on campus. I don't have any rude remarks said toward me. Typically, when people find out I'm gay, it's normally through familiarity with me. Because of that, it's led me to have a better experience. With some I've heard of some negative experiences, but mine has been always a positive one.

The benefit of passing privilege, however, is not unique to the female participants of this study. Jake R., although he has experienced harassment on the basis of his sexual orientation, expressed that the minimal nature of such occurrences is due to his ability to blend into the broader student population. He stated, "Well, I think, I have like passing privilege in a lot of spaces. So, I'm sure there's a lot of microaggressions that maybe I don't notice, because I don't get them every day."

Transgender Student Perceptions

By and large, the transgender participants interviewed indicated the most negative perceptions of campus climates at the three sites. As indicated in Chapter 2, Rankin et al. (2010) found that transgender students, faculty, and staff perceive college climates to be less accepting than other members of the LGBT community. Reasons for this more negative perception varied in the responses shared by participants, ranging from feelings of a general lack of understanding about transgender people to a fear for personal safety. Perhaps most prominent, however, were statements of frustration with regard to facilities and university policies. Tyler, a first-year student who began transitioning while attending Purdue, indicated that she did not know how to assess the campus climate, stating,

Okay, so this is coming from someone who's new here so I'm not entirely sure how hostile or non-hostile the campus is. As far as my experiences is I haven't—I myself, I switched over [transitioned]—to put it really blatant terms—I switched over this semester. I've been [living as a female] fulltime this semester even though I wasn't planning on it. So I, myself, haven't had any problems, but I can't really judge the entire campus.

Tyler communicated, however, that there has been some discomfort living in the residence halls. “When you're a girl and you're living in a guy dorm and you're sharing a bathroom with 40 other guys, you have to huff through that.” Fortunately, Tyler also shared that faculty and staff at Purdue have been very helpful and that her living arrangements for next year should be better, stating, “But, for example, in housing I had to talk about accommodations for next year and it's been painless so far.”

At the University of Illinois, Stephanie expressed the belief that, in general, campuses exhibit a lack of understanding about transgender people and the challenges they face. Although this does not necessarily suggest that all campuses are transphobic, this state of ignorance about the transgender community can prove to be an obstacle for transgender students. In terms of her experiences as a transgender student, she said,

One of the big things was that I didn't feel like as though trans people are as represented within the [student] organizations and sort of the climate on campus, which is a common trans problem. . . . Aside from the standard problems of lower representation of trans people, I haven't really found that many problems. There're problems like trans health care and legal names showing up, small issues like bathrooms. We're working on them now. And those are really the only problems that I've faced.

Stephanie followed up, however, that her generally positive experience is tied to the fact that she self-segregates and interacts mostly with other members of the LGBT community:

I haven't experienced any discrimination, which I find astonishing since I'm one of the most publicly out people that I know. But I've noticed that within the last year and a half, I have systematically sheltered myself very deeply within the queer community. So for the year and a half, I can't really attest the campus climate because my climate has been 100% queer, except for the last five straight people that I hang out with. But before that, I was always in a mostly queer atmosphere, because I lived on the one of the most queer dorms on campus. I always find it very friendly even when I didn't identify [as transgender].

Jay, also at the University of Illinois, initially described the campus climate as mostly positive, stating,

Well, for the most part, it is pretty good. There have been some incidences relating to less accepting individuals or situations, which I've seen or been a part of as the person who has been on the receiving end. But overall I've been actually pretty impressed with people being accepting. It's pretty relaxed.

Nevertheless, he continued by recalling challenges he has faced with regard to restroom facilities, which in one situation cost him his job. "I have lost a job over bathroom issues. I have been walked in on—this happened actually more freshman year. It hasn't happened as much recently."

Beyond challenges of using campus facilities, some participants reiterated the need for more public awareness of transgender people. Jake B., from the University of Illinois, described his campus climate as "very warm and friendly and welcoming" overall, but acknowledged that for the transgender portion of the LGBT community more could be done:

There's definitely a lot of ignorance especially about the trans element of the LGBT community. I think that's not just at this school, but in general I think that's something people don't know as much about as they should, or as the trans community here would like them to. However, the people that I've come across and have been in contact with are very much supportive and intrigued, and try very hard to be respectful. I couldn't have asked for anything better.

Kelly expressed this sentiment as well and described the campus at the University of Illinois as "Really open. Definitely for lesbian and gay people I feel like it's very open." However, she also acknowledged that the campus is less receptive to transgender and bisexual individuals.

I think there's a little bit of like biphobia from both sides of it. I'm like if you're gay you may not want to date someone who's bisexual. If you're straight, you're less likely to

believe that they are bisexual. And . . . I feel trans is a very misunderstood topic and it's very hard to explain. I was out sitting down talking to someone for 10 to 15 minutes. It's really hard to explain what trans encompasses and how that separates and what all that means and how it happens. People pretty easily understood gay though from my experiences.

Only one participant expressed any uneasiness about being transgender on campus. Nate, from Purdue University, assessed the campus climate to be positive overall; however, he followed up that he felt some distress when in certain parts of campus:

I definitely wouldn't walk in a classroom and be "Hey guys, I'm queer." Like, I would definitely be more, you know, quiet about it. But I wouldn't say that there's any outright hostility. There's some bigotry, sure, like, "Oh, that's so gay." But I, feel, like that's more an Indiana thing in general because it's a lack of knowledge. But I like don't ever feel threatened necessarily. I mean, the only time I've ever felt threatened was definitely, like, in the island, which is where all the fraternities and sororities are.

Only students at Indiana University perceived the campus climate for transgender individuals to be positive, which is consistent with the perception of Bloomington and Indiana University as disproportionately liberal compared to surrounding areas. As stated by Bryant H., "I have a few trans friends who have had a really positive experience with bathroom usage here because they have gender neutral bathrooms pretty much everywhere. That's something that's been great." Similarly, as a member of the transgender community, J perceives the campus of Indiana University to be very welcoming to transgender individuals. He said, "I'd say it's very tolerant. I mean, tolerance is not even the right word, because it's mostly accepting in any form of the word." J continued, stating that the climate is not only accepting but also went on to share

the university has facilitated his transition through trans-inclusive policies and procedures. He stated,

Well I have changed my preferred name through some school systems so I am seen as J on ledgers and stuff for our classes, so that's definitely very good to see. While the process for legal changes isn't as easy, that's definitely nice to see. And if there's any confusion, I usually email professors before classes and they're very understanding about it as far as this is the preferred name. I don't specify anything as far as calling sir or ma'am or something, but they definitely understand and tolerate it.

As implied by J's comments, however, it is important to point out that the perceptions of campus climate even among transgender students varied. Although some aspects of the campus climate serve as sources of frustration, discomfort, and fear, other aspects were perceived to be more positive, particularly when facilitating transgender students' processes of transition.

Climate as a Result of the Center

A particularly strong subtheme emerged with regard to campus climate in the interviews with students from Purdue University. As a new center with a very short history, students were able to report changes in campus climates first hand. Jake R., for example, credits the LGBTQC as the catalyst for the change in climate, saying, "I think before the center was here, there was less institutional knowledge." Wendy expressed a similar point of view with regard to her comfort being a member of the LGBT community at Purdue, stating,

As a student, I have felt that since we've gotten the LGBT center, I feel more confident in myself in coming out and feeling like I wouldn't get as much pushback as if we didn't have a center, and it wasn't as most people in the Midwest don't accept the LGBT community.

Significantly, she credits this confidence as a result of the establishment of the center, saying, “And so, since we have a center, I feel like there’s more of an acceptance on our campus and so, with that, students are more accepting of the LGBT’s lifestyle.”

Haley, who acknowledged that change is occurring, expressed quite poignantly the influence of the LGBTQ Center on Purdue’s campus climate. She said,

I think it’s a changing environment, changing scope for LGBTQ students and studies for that matter. Things are getting better, more affirming and more celebrating of the LGBTQ community. It’s taken a bit but I mean obviously we have Lowell here and he’s a wonderful resource for everybody so . . . I definitely think it’s changing for the better, which is a good thing.

First Impressions

Participants of the study were asked to recall how they learned about the center as well as their first impressions upon entering the space for their first visit. Throughout the responses students revealed that they experienced a wide range of feelings during their initial engagement with the LGBT resource centers on their campuses. Some experienced a range of positive emotions, but others found the experience of visiting the center to be overwhelming. The theme of first impressions will address the ways in which research participants came to learn about the center, statements about location and the physical space itself, emotional responses to visiting the center for the first time, and concerns about how they would be perceived as a result of using the center.

Learning about the Center

Throughout their responses, participants referenced the point at which they realized that an LGBT resource center existed on their campuses. Few participants were aware of the centers

on their campuses before attending their first day of classes. Those who did have knowledge had searched for information about the campus climate for LGBT student via the colleges' websites and were led to the resource centers' webpages. Bryant M. expressed that he had prior knowledge about the center simply because he grew up near the campus of Indiana University:

I'm sure I knew about it for a while just being from Bloomington. I would've probably just have driven past it or, you know, been on campus and seen it and acknowledged that it was there several years ago. I just kind of knew about it and decided to pop in and see what it was all about.

Jay, whose parents are on faculty at the University of Illinois, indicated prior knowledge of the center because he grew up in the area:

I had had some knowledge of the center through high school because I went to high school here. I did [visit] attend here technically before school started, but it was after I made the decision to attend here. I just came in here during the summer when no one was here and just checked it out.

Beyond prior knowledge due to growing up near the campus, some students learned about the center through exploring university webpages or through interactions with friends who knew of the center. Bryant H. learned about the center at Indiana University after searching ways to become more engaged in campus life. He stated, "I think I was looking for volunteer opportunities on the Internet before I came, and this [volunteering at the center] was one of the things that popped up that sounded really good." Adrian, like Katherine mentioned before, used the web to determine if the University of Illinois had resources for LGBT students. He recalled,

When I was applying, I was looking it up. I knew that I wanted to be out in college. I came out to my first friends the summer after I graduated. When I was applying to

colleges, I was looking at the resource centers and the events that they have for different schools. That's when I first heard about [the center].

Tyler recounted a similar story about searching for the LGBT center at Purdue University:

I looked up Purdue LGBT when I was looking at coming here and there was the center.

In they fall they just had a small page and I had a little picture. That's pretty much all I knew. I knew there was a resource center for [LGBT people] but that's all I knew until I came up here.

A number of participants indicated learning about the center through interactions with friends who either used the center or knew of its existence. Kaleb recalled his first visit to the center happening when a friend asked him to join her:

It was my friend that I mentioned earlier, she brought me here and it was like on a whim, she's like, "Oh, let's go check this out." And I was like, "Okay, I'll go with you." And then it was different seeing real-life queer people. Like this isn't television. I just remember meeting one of the former assistant directors; I think she was the first staff member here and she was, like, pretty welcoming. You know, "Hi," and it was a good experience.

No participants mentioned gaining an awareness of the LGBT resource centers from recruitment or orientation. Several participants, however, at all three institutions indicated that they learned about the centers through welcome-to-campus events. Jake B. recalled attending Quad Day at the University of Illinois where registered student organizations set up booths to promote their clubs or organizations. In searching for a community, Jake B. said,

I sat out on Quad Day in search of something trans-related, and didn't really know anything about what was available here. Pretty much I went out in the middle of the

summer and went with a group of friends and looked for anything rainbow. When I found it [the rainbow], that was a pretty good indication of where I needed to be. And I heard about CUT*ES, and I was told about the center and told about the location. I was really excited to check it out, and that's how I heard about it.

Matt learned about Indiana University's center simply by walking by and noticing the rainbow flag hanging from the porch of the center:

It had to be just walking by it honestly. Going to class in my first few weeks here, or not even going to class. Just hanging out with friends and seeing "What happens there? We need a building for that? We need a house for LGBT student support services?" So I saw it, and it took me months before I actually came in here. I don't remember the first time I came in here. It was probably reporting on an issue. Knowing that there was a LGBT student support services alerted me that this was a community that definitely had a lot going on in this world. That sparked my interest on reporting issues. That got me in the door. I found out about it by walking by it.

For the upperclass students at Purdue University, many learned of the center by watching the process of creating a center unfold on their campus. Allan recalled his experience witnessing the preparations for the center's first day of operation:

I'm on the Facebook pages. I'm on the Purdue News. It's all over, "Purdue hires LGBTQ Center [Director]," or Purdue is getting this. And then it's not even saying Purdue, it's like we are getting this and from my point of view like we're getting a Center because of me being a part of the organization and all my friends come from this, like we are being represented now.

Location, Location, Location

A number of participants made reference to the location of their centers during their interview statements, particularly with regard to the facilities in which the centers were housed. Some comments were quite positive and often reinforced the welcoming nature of the center. Other statements were negative, especially those in reference to size and location. For example, Steven expressed that the appeal of the center at Indiana University is tied directly to its location in a house near the campus. Specifically, he commented,

I thought it was just so cool that they turned an old house into [a center]. This is so wonderful. I mean . . . it has a lot of character, a lot of history, and that they turned it into this [a center]. It's pretty cool.

This sentiment was reiterated by a number of students at Indiana University, who remarked that the physical structure of the center is warm and inviting. Bryant H. said, "I thought it was really homey, very comfortable, welcoming. I can see people wanted to come here now to get help." Fellow Indiana University student Emily described the center, saying that during her first visit "it was very warm and welcoming. Everyone had a friendly face and was eager to meet me and encourage me to come here."

The hospitable environment of the LGBT center at Indiana University, however, has been achieved at Purdue University and the University of Illinois even though the centers are not located in a house. Brit described the center at Purdue during her first visit as "welcoming, inviting, comfortable" whereas Nate indicated, "as soon as you walk in, you're like, this is home." Students at the University of Illinois described their center much the same way. Katherine said, "I liked it. It was very homey. It was a really nice space, and very simple. Everybody is very friendly and welcoming. It was very LGBT."

Although the center at Purdue has successfully created a welcoming environment, a number of students did express frustration with the size of the facilities dedicated to the center at the time of the study. Tyler, Caryssa, Brit, Jake R, and Allan all described the space as “small.” The ways in which they interpreted the size of the center varied somewhat from student to student. Jake R., for example, interpreted the small space of the Purdue center as representing a lack of interest in LGBT students on the part of the institution, stating, “It’s small. I thought, it’s really small, but then I saw all the stuff and it was pretty interesting. Mostly I was probably just, ‘Wow! It’s really small. They probably don’t care too much [about the LGBT community].’” Allan echoed the sentiment, saying this about the space:

Small! I wanted it to be bigger and when we first got here, we didn’t have all the furniture yet. So we are like, “Where’s all the furniture?” And then Lowell said we’re going to get a better couch and dah, dah, dah . . . but I mean I think it’s a little small for like what the idea of it is, if you want “X” amount of kids, “X” to infinity amount of kids to come in here. The goal is to obviously get as many people in here as possible but this is not quite the appropriate space for it.

As indicated in Chapter 4, however, the center has been relocated to a different space since the time of participant interviews.

Students at the University of Illinois communicated a different concern about the LGBT center location on their campus. As the center is hidden away along a remote hallway on the uppermost floor of the Illini Union, Stephanie shared her difficulties locating the center during her first few visits:

I remember distinctly as a freshman trying to find this place and I just couldn’t. Maybe it’s the fault of the union’s construction. This place is built horribly. The first few times

I tried to come up here I try to take up all set of stairs, because I couldn't pick the right set of stairs.

Stephanie also mentioned that in addition to the problem of its location, the center has also remained closed during posted hours on a number of occasions. She revealed, "I came here once or twice my freshman year and it was closed." Nevertheless, when Stephanie encounters this situation now, she simply obtains a key from the Illini Union information desk and opens the center herself.

Emotional Responses to First Visit

When discussing their first interactions with the LGBT resource centers, students revealed a wide range of emotional responses to entering the space during their first visits. The reasons for these responses varied considerably from student to student and were driven by a number of factors, often in combination. For some, the people they met during their first visits left strong impressions while others were struck the number of people embracing and using the centers. Others, however, discussed personal challenges associated with visiting centers.

Students at Indiana University communicated that the people they met during their first visits were welcoming, helpful, and inviting. For example, Emily indicated that the people she met during her first visit to the center "had a friendly face and [were] eager to meet me and encourage me to come [to the center]." Xander resounded the sentiment. Although he was nervous to visit the center initially, "I left feeling much more comfortable than when I entered." Similarly, J said,

First walking in the door there were a lot of people because it was the open house and I'm not a very social person. I'm usually more to myself. . . . Doug was here talking to people and I ran into him and he's like, "Welcome. Come see things," and it was pretty

cool. It's pretty amazing to see, like, even from this space and this time to an open house where people are all around. It's definitely very welcoming.

Bryant M. shared,

Everyone seemed really nice. It was when I first met Doug and one of the secretaries here. They all seem very nice and my first impression was, it was just a very nice place to sort of hang out and talk to people and you know, be able to meet new people throughout it.

Most striking, however, was Matt, who felt during his first visit that he had discovered something special in the finding the center. He stated,

Somebody definitely used to live here. It definitely used to be someone's home, which was great because now it's our home. First thoughts of walking in—the door chime—every time I walk in. It's a cool looking house, unique. Right away, you realize there are people here whose job it is to help you feel comfortable. That hit me like a wall. Like “Wow! I should feel comfortable. I should come here more.”

Participants from Purdue University expressed that they were impressed by the new LGBT resource center. In particular, students commented on the historical décor as well as the friendliness and openness of the staff. Nate shared that his first interactions with the center brought him face-to-face with the center's director. He stated,

When I first came to the center, and Lowell gave me a tour, I was super impressed with all the history, because as a history major, that's my life. So we have Holocaust Armbands. We have all of these buttons from different marches on Washington and posters and pictures . . . all of this history sitting around us and to me it's the best thing ever.

Some students visited the center for the first time during its open house. These students expressed the impression made by the number of people present for the event. Wendy recounted,

When I first entered, I was shocked at how many students were in there and there was also, I don't know if she was a grad student or a professor or something like that, but there was somebody who was in the Chemistry Department. She was like "Hey, I'm just hanging out in here having fun with you guys." Then also having Lowell and Makeba in there [as] full-time staff.

Haley shared her impression of visiting the center for the first time during the open house:

I guess it was when they were opening it, the opening reception for this space. I think that's the first one. It's really busy. It was very, yeah, very crowded. The welcome reception I think had everyone in here. Well everyone was in here and then people were out the hall on both sides and down the stairs. Lowell had to stand outside and talk down the stairwells so everybody could hear.

Not all participants, however, conveyed positive experiences with regard to their first interactions with the centers. For some, visiting the center for the first time proved to be overwhelming. Some participants shared that they felt nervous as a result of meeting new people although others experienced feelings of uneasiness due to the unfamiliar and uncertain environment. For example, Brendan from Indiana University said, "It seemed fairly busy, so that was a bit overwhelming at first. But it was also really nice to know they were very friendly people, so that helped as well." Similarly, Xander described his first visit to the Indiana University center saying,

It was overwhelming. I wasn't sure what to expect at all when I was coming in, so it was kind of nerve racking. I didn't realize how big it was going to be and then I walked in, but pretty much the moment I came in it got much, much easier.

Courtney, who visited for the first time during an open house, recalled a similar feeling, but one which was replaced with a sense of excitement. She stated,

I mean, there were a lot of people here, because, it wasn't really like a party per se, but there were definitely a lot of people hanging out and around. I didn't really know who to ask questions to, but it was nice to see so many different people and so many members of the community just out and about and able to congregate together.

For Brit, visiting the center at Purdue University was an overwhelming experience due to the number of people making use of the center. In need of information for a project, she went to the center. She expressed, "There are tons of people here. That was cool and that was also intimidating because I didn't know any of them." Wendy, indicated feeling "slightly nervous" during her first visit to the center. In part, this was due to her involvement as a member of an LGBT student organization that met in a more isolated location, one that she described as "kind of a scary looking situation since it was in the basement." She indicated a feeling of nervousness approaching the new and more public center. Nevertheless, she followed up stating, "But since we have our own space over here . . . it's a more relaxed environment and feels more open."

Students at the University of Illinois also expressed sentiments of anxiety associated with their first visits to the LGBT center. For example, Anon commented that he did not feel welcome in the center and that he did not "fit in" with the group of students who generally use the center. In particular, he described the group as "dominated by a certain subculture, like the traditional, classical, not pre- or post-gay culture, the activist kind. That was my first thought."

He went on to describe the center in general as “very niche. . . . It feels more like a niche for the activist LGBT students.” As a result of his feelings of discomfort, Anon prefers to utilize

social networks geared toward gay men, gay women, and bisexuals, and transgenders [sic]. I’ve hopped on the Grindr, and Tender, and Scruff. . . . They’ve created a virtual community space that I think far surpasses the physical space that’s been offered by LGBT centers.

Similarly, Brian communicated that he experienced initial anxiety due to the space being “really loud. . . . It’s a little bit overwhelming at first.” In contrast, Adrian indicated that his nervousness was simply due to the unknown. He said, “I was nervous. I didn’t know what to expect.” Kaleb also communicated a sense of nervousness as a result of not knowing what to expect.

There was a sense of anxiousness, like “Am I going to fit in.” I was worried over nothing for myself specifically, because the first time I thought, “The other people that are there, they’re kind going to judge me for not ever having come out or anything.”

What Will They Think?

Participants at each site attributed their first visits to the center as a second coming out experience. For some students, they simply did not know how others on campus would interpret the act of visiting an LGBT resource center. For others still, the first visit was their coming out, a brave first step in their journey of self-discovery. Heather expressed fear that she would be inappropriately labeled if someone saw her enter the LGBT center, which served as a major source of anxiety during her first visits to the center at Indiana University:

I learned about it when I started hanging out with J, because he’s like “I’m at the LGBT office.” And it’s like, “Oh, that’s the place on campus I’ve driven by on the bus. Cool.”

He’s like, “No, you should come in.” I’m like, “What do I do?” When I first walked in, I

walked in through the back door. I wasn't okay with it yet. I knew J was trans, but I didn't know that we were going to become a thing. All I knew was he was a friend. I didn't know what people would think if I walked in the front door. I didn't want to be known as a lesbian, or whatever—even though I'm on the rugby team, which is a huge stereotype. We are assumed to be homosexual—marching band and rugby, that's what you get. So I always came in the back door.

For Tom, first going to the center at Purdue University was equally as stressful. He also feared the possibility of being outed. He stated,

First I was scared because I was afraid of seeing somebody there that might have closely knew me, or going inside the place and having someone in my classes see me do that and all of a sudden—I come from a hometown where the rumor wire spreads faster than the internet—and that was my initial fear. “Oh, my god he went to the gay center. He must be insert derogatory comment here.” And things like that. So that was my first fear, but after a while, it took me a little while to finally get comfortable with it and not care anymore.

Similarly, Jay expressed the potential fear of unexpectedly disclosing one's identity as a member of the LGBT community by visiting the center. Based on his experiences and interactions with those who use the center, he indicated that “people have been a little bit nervous about going to the center, because it does requires you a degree of either outing on oneself or comfort in ones identities.”

The Role of the LGBT Resource Center

During the interview process, participants were asked to discuss their understanding of the roles that the LGBT resource centers play on their respective campuses. Students cited a

number of different roles that the centers played. The present theme will review these perceived roles and explore the importance of LGBT resource centers at the three sites. Subthemes connected to this category are historical knowledge, perceived roles of the LGBT resource centers, services and support offered, community, center as safe space, engaging with the community, education and outreach, giving visibility and voice, and changing the climate.

Historical Knowledge

Despite the prominence of the LGBT resource center on the experiences of the participants interviewed, few students had knowledge of the history associated with the establishment of the center on their campuses.

Of the participants from the University of Illinois, only one had knowledge of the center's history, in spite of the fact that the center celebrated its 20th anniversary during the fall of 2013. Regarding the history of the center, Stephanie shared,

We just had a 20-year [anniversary], really big deal and I was there. The center's been around for about 20 years. It started I think in an office, in one of those little offices in that space. As the office for LGBT concerns and they got a lot of people going because we're concerned about LGBT people. And they didn't want them here and then it grew. I can't remember the name of the first director, Curt something I think. And he was here for a long time and I think until 2000.

Similarly, only one student at Indiana University was able to recall in any detail the history of the establishment of the LGBT resource center on the campus. An employee of the office, Xander stated,

I should be so much more versed in this. In I think later '80s [or] early '90s was when the push was to start the center. I know there was a lot of controversy about who was

going to be funding it. It was a very big struggle to get this building and get this office founded and I think it came down to its being funded by private funds. Not [using] university funds was one of the concessions that allowed it to come to be.

He continued, adding,

It started out in this building, I know, so it's been in the same location for quite some time, but it was a very modest beginning with a small little office space within a much more active building and has grown since then.

Finally, he indicated,

I know it started out as the GLB Center and has grown and its services to offer help to the transgender and transsexual community, which is great and it's now the GLBT [Student Support] Services Office and we have an entire thing of scrapbooks that I really should look at soon with all the news clippings throughout the years. But that's pretty much what I know at this point.

Similarly, Brendan was aware of student involvement in establishing the center:

From what I believe happened, there was a larger petitioning of students who felt there needed to be more diversity on campus in the early '90s. As such, they petitioned for more diversity programs, and this sprung from that.

Matt was aware that the center operates using private funds, but knew little beyond that:

I am aware that it was funded by private money, because just in conversations that I had with Doug there was a lot of controversy over public funding for an LGBT student support office. I don't remember who, but somebody paid for it, I think. I hope I have that right.

Lastly, Steven was aware of the controversial nature of the center's founding, but many of the details eluded him to the point that he understood the center's creation from a historically inaccurate perspective.

I know Doug started all this, but I don't know, I forget if it was in the '70s or the '80s that he started it, but I know from what he told me there was a lot of backlash and controversy when the center first opened, because yeah, it was open. If it did start in the '70s or '80s, I mean, in the Midwest during that time, I mean, that would definitely cause controversy. . . . I know that, or at least I think I know that the center is privately funded. I want to say that the state government did something that made it so that they wouldn't receive public funding.

Most participants from Indiana University, however, simply acknowledged that they had not learned about the history of the center. Bryant H. indicated, "I actually don't know as much about the history as I probably should. I know at some point there was a controversy about adding the T to the name. Other than that, I really don't know a whole lot." Likewise, Heather stated,

I don't know much at all. All I know is [the center is] important now. I'm really completely dumb about how it started [and] who started it. I know there's a poster of crazy important people on the wall, which is cool to see. Other than that, I don't know much.

Even at Purdue University, many participants were unable to recall the history associated with the establishment of the LGBT Resource Center. Only those who were on campus at the time of the planning and implementation of the center, as well as those involved in the process of hiring the director had historical knowledge, which was most often quite minimal. Tyler, who

matriculated following the center's establishment, only knew that the center was a new fixture at Purdue. She indicated, "As far as I know, it's been up here for maybe a year, but I don't know. As far as the history, no, I don't have much."

Nevertheless, some were able to share their knowledge of the center having witnessed its creation. Most could recall only a few details of the center's creation, but others maintained a strong working knowledge of the center's history. Haley recounted her involvement in the process of hiring the director:

So we got the center. . . . I actually interviewed Lowell my first year here, but he met with like a bunch of student leaders on campus and through that we actually got the center with him, so [it's] kind of a paired deal, but it was brought about through a lot of student activism and a lot of talking to administrators and student-led activities to get the center to even be here as a resource.

Likewise, Wendy shared the history of the center as reflected through her boyfriend's involvement in the process.

Because my boyfriend was in charge of actually getting Lowell to come here, I've learned a little bit about the big push from the Student Alliance trying to get a center and a safe space for people because there were other people in the LGBT community who had felt some very big push back from the university.

Nate shared his knowledge, stating,

I know that it was a primarily student-led movement with the Christian Union, which has now become the LGBT Student Alliance. And I know that there was a faculty and student council that got together and worked on all of the legislation, and bringing someone in to run the center, and starting the center up. But other than that, I know that

it opened in 2012, like June or July of 2012 and it's had a lot of visitors, [which was] surprising for the first year.

It was Allan, however, who was able to recall the history of the center in the greatest detail. He stated,

I know that Purdue is the last school on the Big 10 to get to implement a LGBTQ Student Center. I wasn't too privy upon like the ins and outs to create the center. I knew we were getting the director and the center together. So it wasn't that we were going to have a director and there's nowhere to put him and we're getting a new room. It's kind of we're getting this whole big package of a director and a center all at once. . . . I'm glad. I don't know who said anything about it, but obviously I'm glad that Purdue it choosing to be a little bit more progressive. And the results speak for themselves, I think, but I don't necessarily know too much about how it got started.

What Do They Do?

The roles of LGBT resource centers as perceived by the participants were multiple and varied significantly. Most indicated that the role of the centers changed depending upon who sought out the programming and services available through them. For some, the centers represented a source of community and a place to feel safe. Others interpreted the role of the center as a source of education and enlightenment, often with regard to changing the world around them. Significantly, no participant indicated that LGBT resource centers were singular in their purpose. This is perhaps best reflected in the statements shared by Stephanie regarding the center at the University of Illinois.

The center here provides community and resources and a space for students. . . . We do a lot of education here. We do a lot of outreach and talking to people and putting those

programs all sorts of lovely things. We could stand to be a little bit more visible in some parts of the campus community. . . . We're basically like the queer Wikipedia community contextually. If you are queer and you need something [at the University of Illinois], we will find somebody for you who knows what you need and who knows how to get that, obviously not illegal. But I also think it's first and last in that sense. For queer people who are comfortable with who we are, who are coming here, and just looking for a community and friends—boom! Got it! For queer people who have been here for a while, or who had come here and are completely uncomfortable of who they are, maybe just came out and maybe they just realized or are thinking about starting coming out, or who are just in a bad place because they are out now and aren't accepted. [If] they are considering bad things, they can come here and find a safe place to be and start bringing back their self from the edge.

This idea of was reiterated by Bryant M. regarding the center at Indiana University. He, however, focused more on the LGBT center as a resource for information and counseling purposes. Bryant M. stated,

I know [the center sends] out a weekly newsletter, talking about all sorts of things or events coming out here and clubs that are related to this. I know they have the HIV free test every Thursday. I know it's also just a support center if you ever need to come in and talk to someone. I mean, they've got the library where you can loan out the books and the movies and everything like that.

Xander affirmed many of Bryant M.'s ideas, acknowledging the diversity of services available at the center at Indiana University. He outlined his understanding of the center's role saying,

As far as I understand it, although we're the GLBT Student Support Services Center, we're really here to offer services to all students on campus and all members of the Bloomington community who'd like to reach out to us. We focus our programs and resources on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues, but that doesn't mean that we aren't here for the students on other parts of the sexuality and gender identity spectrum, like asexual, or intersex, or pan-, or anywhere under the queer umbrella.

He continued stating,

And allies are a big part of who we service. We have this wonderful library. It is a huge part of what we do so that allies or even people who'd never considered themselves allies, and often people coming for class projects can use the library to learn more about the LGBT community and its history, and by the end of it do consider themselves allies, which is really rewarding. So, pretty much we're here to kind of deal with the issues from a few different angles, like providing knowledge and resources, like that and then also providing direct support to individuals who are having specific problems through counseling services that we provide and also creating programs and housing support groups and things like that.

In commenting on the mission of the center at Purdue University, Jake R. shared his understanding, stating,

Well, I don't think I've really seen a mission statement, but I would guess that a mission is to create safe space and then spread awareness and create programming to do that faithfully. Safe space. Awareness. To counsel people who are coming out. Maybe they don't know they should come out because their parents are like, you know, uber-Christian, and they're paying for all the college. Lowell, who can connect you with

financial support—I think he has a lot of connections within the university. I think he can help you, like, swim through the bureaucracy.

Haley reiterated many of Jake R.’s statements:

So it definitely functions across the spectrum of the university. It serves as a resource for LGBTQA people and all those who identify under the spectrum as well as provide other sorts of resources, such as programming and guides to whom to come out to, stuff like that. As well as affirming and inclusive professors and stuff like that. Just providing a safe space within here.

Support and services. As demonstrated by the comments above, participants perceived the LGBT resource centers on their campuses to be providers of service to students in need. However, the nature of the services identified in the responses varied greatly depending upon the nature of the need. Specific services referenced included support services (often in the form of someone to listen or someone to point one in the right direction), counseling services (both psychological and sexual counseling), and testing services. J outlined these multiple roles in his discussion of the center at Indiana University saying,

I don’t know the specific mission, but as far as I’m concerned they’re just helping anybody who approaches. They try to do a little outreach but you can’t really force people to do things they don’t want, so it’s just a matter of saying, “We offer these things.” I know they have the services. As far as counseling, that’s free with the intern. . . . Kind of a voice for those who maybe don’t talk, but at the same time it helps support those who do so a host for the calls that are made to representatives as far as helping or nixing bills and that sort of thing. So it helps even community-wide . . . it’s something that people can come to as a gathering space as just support in general.

Steven perceived the center much the same way, citing a multitude of support services available through the Indiana University center:

I feel like the biggest mission of the center is to help the closeted kids, because I know that they have several anonymous student support groups. They also have free HIV testing. They try to have a very inclusive and open atmosphere here that would make it comfortable for someone who's closeted to come out and seek help and to talk about things. So, I think that's probably the first and foremost mission of the center.

He continued identifying some of the specific support groups available through the center, saying, "They do have a closeted support group. They have a group for people of color. I think a bisexual group as well." Moreover, Brendan shared,

As someone who's been sitting out front sometimes, people just want to talk. And I'm always ready to lend an ear and be there and listen. And then, I feel like we definitely do help benefit the community.

Matt communicated the perception that the center also functions to endorse students when needed. He stated,

It has a responsibility to back students, LGBT students who are trying to make a difference in the community or starting an event, focused on being LGBT. [The center] should be there. They should be right behind them, or helping them through it in the community.

Nate acknowledged the center at Purdue as an invaluable source of support, particularly with regard to the willingness of the staff to answer questions and help students obtain information. He stated,

It's just a really cool place to come and hang out, or you can go talk to Lowell. Honestly, if you have a question, go ask Lowell or ask Makeba. If neither one of them knows, they'll find someone who knows and find the answer for you.

Sarah, however, interpreted the support provided by the center at Purdue from a financial standpoint, indicating,

I think it provides a link between student and faculty that can be directly a direct path. Additionally, I also think it brings an opportunity to have funding for a lot more things. Just the events that the center holds alone are a lot bigger than any student organization could organize. For instance, in March Laverne Cox is coming from "Orange is the New Black." While it's a great thing, I don't think it's something that students could have put on by themselves without the [center's] support.

Participants at the University of Illinois, however, identified a number of additional ways that the LGBT center provided support, focusing instead on how the center helps students develop a sense of identity. For example, Jay stated,

But there are some people who have not [come out], who really need space to learn more about themselves and to identify. And the center provides a space for people to learn more about themselves. That's often a part of university education that's neglected. We tend to really get focused on the academics . . . and we've ignored the personal and the notions on identity.

Similarly, Kevin acknowledged that the center provided an important service for those questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity:

I think it serves as a place for people who are in still the closet. They can come kind of break down their walls, get comfortable enough and learn that people are here for them

and people support them and love them no matter what and help them with whatever kind of issues their facing.

It was Brian, however, who most succinctly expressed the idea that the LGBT resource center at the University of Illinois serves a principal role of support. He said simply, “it’s a really good space for people that just need a little bit of support.”

Counseling services. The majority of participants pointed out the importance of the counseling services made available through the centers at Indiana University and Purdue University. At both centers, professional counselors as well as counseling interns maintain designated times for counseling sessions. Counseling hours vary from a specific day per week to a few hours throughout the week. In particular, Steven acknowledged the significance of free counseling available via the center at Indiana University, stating,

The counseling center is really good and everything. It’s kind of good to have someone who’s been through the things you have been through. So to have that here and to know that you can talk to someone who’s been through the same things that you’ve been through, they can walk you through their experience, but they also have the necessary training . . . in theoretical counseling skills.

Nate recounted his experiences with the counseling services available at Purdue, stating, “I know people from CAPS, which is the Counseling and Psychological Services at Purdue. They come over like once a week and so does PUSH, which is our Student Help Center.”

Health testing services. Another role identified by a number of students is the availability of free HIV testing, which is offered at both Indiana and Purdue Universities. In particular, Nate emphasized the importance of such services through the center at Purdue University, stating,

They do free HIV/AIDS testing and things like that too through the center. . . . We have our lovely basket of condoms and dental dams and lubricant. And you have little pamphlets of things to know and there're all kinds of literature that you can read.

Although participants at the University of Illinois did not identify providing such testing as one of the perceived roles of the center on their campus, one did state that he perceived the center as a resource for sex education. Anon stated,

I think one of its purposes is for sex education and outreach, basically reaching out to current students and connecting with them with resource for sexual health. I know there're all kinds of handouts about the health center and whatnot.

Community

A number of participants at each site also indicated that they perceived the LGBT resource center as an important tool for establishing community. In part, this is associated with the perception that the centers function as a safe space where they can go without fear of judgment or persecution. Additionally, participants indicated that the spaces were where one can meet others from the LGBT community as well as individuals who identify as allies or advocates. In turn, the community-building role of the centers also encompassed a social element, which, as perceived by some, extended to the community beyond the campus.

Safe space. Participants from the LGBT resource centers at Purdue University and the University of Illinois acknowledged the idea that the centers functioned as a safe space. Meaningfully, students cited this role was being codified as part of the mission statements for each center. As expressed by Wendy,

The mission of the center [at Purdue] is, to have a safe space for students to come, hang out and have a sense of belonging. It's located on campus, so if you want to take a break,

you can come hang out here between classes, eat lunch. Makeba will have open door policies most of the time, so you can go in there and just chill with them and so, you're not just going back to your room and feeling depressed because you have no friends.

Brit reaffirmed this idea, stating that the principal purpose of the center at Purdue was to create a safe, inclusive space for all students regardless of sexual orientation, I'd say. And then to also provide information and raise awareness to LGBT issues. I believe for the LGBT community, the center plays a very important role. It's like a place where you can go and you're not worried about whether or not somebody's going to question your gender identity, your sexual identity, or bother you with that kind of stuff.

However, she followed up stating, "... but I think outside of the LGBT community I don't think the center plays much of a role." Nate shared his understanding of the center as a safe space, saying, "it allows LGBT students on campus to have a safe place to come and hang out and just chill." Moreover, Wendy perceived the center much the same way, indicating "I think it plays a big part into the LGBT community, not only as we have like a home for our community, but also it's a really great safe space."

Participants at the University of Illinois also identified the use of the center as a safe space to be a primary role for the facility. As communicated by Brian,

It's nice and it's really comforting to have a space I could come to where I know rules are in place to keep it a sort of a safe environment, to make it a place where I'm not going to have to worry about microaggressions or maybe identity shaming of any kind, because it's actively, for the most part, stopped here.

Kelly resounded the same idea, stating "Well, the mission is to, from what I understood of it, is to reach out to all LGBT students as a way to give us a safe haven and to kind of help spread the

word of acceptance.” Likewise, Kevin shared his perception that the center serves as a safe space, stating, “I think its mission is provide just a place for people who identify as queer can come and feel safe and they can just talk about issues that they’re going through and their experiences and share those with people.” He continued,

I think for the queer [community] it just serves us a security blanket and just a community in a place where you can go and a safe haven just to get with everything else and just get everything off your chest and just calm me down.

Similarly, Jake B. expressed,

From my understanding, it’s supposed to be a safe place for all students-specifically those of the LGBT community and its allies. It’s to make us feel safe, gives us a place to talk and share and feel supported, and somewhere to come with our problems.

Moreover, Adrian expressed that the LGBT center served as a space where “you can be yourself and not have to worry about fitting into a specific social level or something.” Katherine defined the center, asserting,

It provides a safe space for people. Mostly for LGBT students who can’t really find a safe space or people who identify as LGBT, because sometimes it’s hard to find a space or a group of people or just a place where you can talk about LGBT stuff.

Lastly, Anon shared his understanding that the center serves as a safe space, but the mission has become outdated:

I think it was maybe somewhere in its mission to provide a safe social community space for queer students. I think that would maybe be more relevant in the 2000s and 1990s. But nowadays, I think that that part has become sort of obsolete.

Only one student at Indiana University indicated that a perceived role of the LGBT resource center is to provide a safe space. According to Bryant M., “their first obligation is to be a physical space where people can come and feel safe.” Although function as a safe space may be part of the mission of Indiana University’s LGBT center, most students did not appear to use the space for social purposes. Rather other aspects of the center took precedence in the minds of those interviewed from the site.

I’m not alone. A number of participants expressed that a role of the center was to provide or at least assist in the building of an LGBT community on the campus. Some shared that the center served as the source of their network of friends, and others expressed the idea that the center helps unite the various groups that comprise the LGBT community. For instance, Brendan discussed the center at Indiana University, stating, “I definitely feel there’s a good social aspect to it. It’s a nice place for people to kind of meet other LGBT folks.” Moreover, some interpreted the centers as connecting people from the LGBT community based on similar interests as well as addressing issues of identity intersectionality. For example, Anon responded that the center at the University of Illinois

reaches out to current students and connects them to interest groups, like I was connected to Building Bridges. I know there are other social interest groups [that are] also connected to the LGBT resource center.

Furthermore, Haley commented on the role of the center as an agent for addressing intersectionalities, sharing that the center at Purdue

definitely helps support and include many different communities because obviously there’s a lot of different intersections of identities that both come here and are facilitated and work with each other really. So I think that’s a major component is just connecting

different populations on campus. But otherwise they're just a general support for the LGBTQ community.

Caryssa outlined a similar role for the center, stating,

I believe whenever you have some minority office or room or house or whatever, like the LCC, it's always good to have that one island in the middle of this big-ass university where you can be whoever you want to be and be comfortable because everyone here has gone through some form, something similar, or identify in the same way or whatever. So having this here is really beneficial to the students because it allows them to not only grow as a person but too. It makes them feel like they're not alone.

Engaging with the community. An additional role of the LGBT resource centers was identified by one participant, who shared the perception that the center is charged with connecting the campus LGBT community with that of the surrounding area. Brendan acknowledged that the center at Indiana University helped LGBT students with members of the community living in Bloomington, particularly those in the area high schools. He stated,

I know that there are also students who don't attend IU, but still are able to use some of our services, and high schools in the town also have been able to make good use of our being here as well.

Bauder reiterated this connection with the community and local high schools in particular, saying,

Bloomington, to my knowledge, was one of the first cities in the nation to have both high schools with a gay-straight alliance. Again, we had a hand in talking to the school board president at that time and working with some of the schools to talk about the need to provide safe space for high school students who got caught up in the conversation about

that. I kiddingly say that we are the one-stop shopping place for LGBT issues on the campus and in the community. The mayor's office will call us when there's an issue.

The Human Rights Director . . . will call us when there's an issue. Sometimes it involves a student, but oftentimes it just involves the citizens. We're seen as kind of a community resource as well.

Participants at Purdue specifically addressed the close relationship between the LGBT center and the LGBT community of West Lafayette. In particular, Wendy recalled the local pride event that occurs during orientation week as a notable celebration of LGBT culture saying, "So, on campus, it's actually during freshman orientation that Lafayette and Purdue throw a pride of [LGBT culture]. . . . It's the first weekend." She went on to describe the importance for the two communities to interact. "It's for both communities to come together, and so I think that's one of the best things that we've had to celebrate our community . . . that we have for allies and LGBT students."

Education and Outreach

Participants articulated their perceptions that the LGBT resource centers on their campuses were also responsible for education and outreach initiatives. Again, the nature of the respective education programs identified by students varied greatly. Some viewed the centers as places where people can visit to obtain information. Many of the participants touted their centers' library collections as vital information resources on their campuses. Others expressed their view that the centers were available for individuals to ask questions informally.

Regarding Indiana University, Courtney outlined her perception that the LGBT resource center serves as a warehouse of information regarding the LGBT community at large. She stated,

I think it's definitely a good center for resources about different groups and different programs that aren't necessarily just for the center. And I think it's kind of like a place where all the different LGBT groups on campus can put their stuff so other people can come here, like [in] one location, and find out about a whole lot of different things. And then obviously, there's the library, which is good for movies, fiction, or if you're doing research.

Bryant M. shared,

I believe it's a good place for either the students that are just questioning, or just wanting to learn about the whole community. It's a good place to come in and learn about it. It's a good place for people who are already in the community to have information sent out to them about events and stuff like that.

In particular, Steven focused on the importance of the library collection:

I mean, they have a library downstairs full of books and movies for that are LGBT theme, that you wouldn't really find anywhere else. I mean, if you just take a look at all the stuff they have downstairs, I mean, you wouldn't find that in any local library. I mean, yeah, you might find some stuff, but [not] like the complete volume of it. So, I think that would be for students who maybe are so in closet or questioning, but also for students who identify as LGBT and they want to read and watch things that are tailored to them. So, in that respect they help kind of like the students that are already out.

Tyler expressed the value of the center at Purdue University and its library collection for educating individuals and the campus about the transgender community. He stated,

I think it's a pretty good place for people to find resources for trans people. I guess people who are gay or lesbian and need to talk about those kinds of feelings, too. It's a

really good place to just come and absorb information and by being here you're allowed to absorb who you are. It's a good place to find. We have all these books and movies that people can read if they have any [questions] . . . And then we have Lowell who you can talk to for pretty much anything, I feel like. I feel like most people can just talk to him, not using him, but he's like a counselor. So I think it's pretty much most things that are LGBTQ related.

Jake expanded upon the idea indicating that the center can help students navigate the campus.

Discussing the helpful and informative nature of the staff, he said,

[There's] just a collection of the resources that it's really accessible. Like, you know sometimes if I'm trying to get something done on a big campus like this, you have to go to this office. [Then] you have to go to this office and if you would've known just to go to one place at the beginning, you could've saved yourself an hour of walking. But I think if you could come here, you can get that information and then you can have a little fun as well because you can relax.

Adrian expressed very similar perceptions about the LGBT resource center at the University of Illinois, emphasizing that the center is for the entire campus community:

It's for LGBT students, but everyone's accepted if they want to get extra knowledge about LGBT. It's here for everyone, but LGBT students tend to come here because it's an LGBT resource center. But anyone can come here and learn about the LGBT culture.

Brian, however, communicated a slightly different perception, one focused on activism and outreach to educate the campus community about LGBT issues more proactively:

[The people of the center] work a lot with the campus community as a whole, just to be out there and to be a part of the culture here. . . . There is a pretty large activism

component, I would think to the center here. They try to make sure and I don't necessarily mean actively facilitating demonstrations or anything necessarily in that respect. But just encouraging students to think consciously and correctly about the things that are happening in our community, about the things that we're hearing from other people, and sort of being critical of that to an extent that can be helpful.

Giving Visibility and Voice to the Community

All in all, a significant number of participants shared the perception that the centers fulfilled an important task of empowering the LGBT. Some expressed the belief that the simple presence of an LGBT center provides much needed visibility while also serving as the voice of the LGBT community on campus. Bryant H. offered the opinion that an LGBT resource center serves as a powerful symbol of LGBT support at Indiana University. He said, "I would say its purpose is just having that presence that says it's okay to be GLBTQ on this campus. Even if people don't that utilize it, just knowing if there is a comfort I'm sure." Xander shared a similar view stating,

I think of it mostly in terms of the wider sphere of campus, as being kind of the voice for the LGBT community. It's kind of a consolidated representation of all facets of [the LGBT] community that can show up at different panels or at meetings, administrative meetings. It's an organizing force where it kind of provides a central hub for all sorts of different LGBT student groups who would otherwise probably not be in contact with each other or know how to get in contact with each other. The office will then connect as kind of a central location to kind of bring them together so that is kind of a power numbers thing and helps make the operations of different groups more effective and efficient.

Likewise, Courtney stated,

I think it is a nice, physical statement that Indiana [University] is LGBT friendly and that it's not like there's just like a GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] that meets once a week in like Valentine [Hall]. It's a really physical statement in saying like we have so many resources here. We have our own house. The university takes us seriously. There's a presence on campus, which I really like and appreciate.

Steven, furthermore, commented on the awareness such a center brings to the community.

The center also does try to raise awareness on campus, like they had Judy Shephard come here, like in the fall. So, and I went to that lecture and I mean, the center was packed. I mean, it was a pretty big auditorium. I think Doug maybe mentioned that he wished he'd booked a bigger one.

Changing the Climate

Students at Purdue University focused on not only the role of providing visibility and a voice to the LGBT community but also the role of the center in eliciting a better campus climate for LGBT students, faculty, and staff. Having witnessed the impact such a center can have, the power to change campus climate was a subtheme of Purdue participant responses. Tyler indicated,

I know specifically [the center is] pushing to do a lot of just—like I said, unisex bathrooms. Just helping the campus in general spread the knowledge of LGBT people and who they are and what they go through. I know he's done a lot for that.

Caryssa opted for humor in voicing her standpoint on the role of the center,

[It's the] beacon for all the LGBTQ people on campus. It's like the HQ for all the gay shit we want to do. That's a terrible way to put it, but if we want to pass a new—I don't

know—write something new. To get more unisex bathroom on campus or something that's more inclusive for our community, then this is the place to start and everyone feels like this is home turf. This is safe.

Sarah indicated that the center also helped to unify the voices of the individual subsets of the LGBT community.

I think the center's purpose is kind of to provide a resource that combines a link between student and faculty. Up until now we haven't really had that. We would have faculty members who were supportive but not necessarily someone who would 100 percent stand behind us. Obviously, all the student organizations need an advisor and, therefore, you have some sort of support through faculty, but this was definitely a difference in the types [of changes] that it made.

Sarah continued,

The drastic change that Purdue actually acknowledged and someone was not only just giving their time, but someone was dedicating their job to this issue and making sure that not only were students welcoming and feeling welcomed and invited but also students were comfortable here. It provided them a safe space that if they needed to have time away from the rest of campus they could.

Nate commented on the role of the center in raising awareness of the LGBT community by serving as a visitation site for first-year students:

[The center] plays a really important role, especially for LGBT students, because I know that tour groups come in from the exploratory studies class and they have to do a survey on each center, each cultural center, and they usually make a day of it. It's like a little scavenger hunt in the center.

It was Allan, however, who best articulated his understanding of Purdue's center as a symbol of the LGBT community and the need for changes that acknowledge their presence on campus:

One [part] of the center's mission is to get as many activities and just show our presence on campus. Lowell's doing an amazing job of getting interesting speakers here and getting all these different activities to show why this is important. "You should watch this movie because of this" and then we're going to talk about and then we're going to have this type of discussion. And then we're going to bring in this expert and then . . . The issues we're having don't come around once a year. This isn't like "tax time" issues. These are our lives that are being affected daily and these people are coming to change it. I think the Center does an excellent job of showing (a) there's a problem, (b) why there's a problem, and (c) here's some potential solutions, (d) what do you think? I think that's what the mission is. That's what I understand the mission to be is to just show you, hey, you've got a question, come ask us. It's not here we are in our cage. Here we are in this open field. Come join us in this open field and let us explain to you as we walk along this open field what these things mean. That's what I understood the mission to be. It's just to be an excellent presence on campus.

As activism was perceived as an important role for the LGBT center at the University of Illinois, participants interviewed also commented specifically on the center as a catalyst for change as well as a symbol of awareness. Katherine said about the center, "I feel like it's to show that LGBT people exist, to make a point that we are here." By the same token, Kevin described the center as a marker of the community's presence on campus, saying, "The presence of a resource center for queer people just like shows that this campus is about diversity, inclusion and about tolerance." Kaleb continued this idea, stating,

My understanding is that [the center] is to provide awareness and a space for constructive change, because they do a lot of programming that brings awareness to different issues. It's an outlet for a group of people that have a voice and that's huge. They do lunch discussions every other week like tackling different issues, AIDS to science and being queer in the science field, and other off-the-wall things are amazing, but I honestly feel that it's a space for change.

He followed up, stating, "I feel like it has that higher capability to be that space that pushes for queer recognition, queer quality, do the whole spectrum has fortunately it has become more represented recently." Kevin emphasized the center's role in providing the LGBT community visibility:

[The center] helps to promote visibility of the queer community to the general public. Everyone knows it's here and we were walking on the door with anyone like you don't have to be queer to come in here. You can just be an ally who wants are more, or someone who just wants to learn. . . . I think it serves as both a tool for us and as a tool for non-queer people.

Jake B. shared,

I think that the center does a lot for awareness and making us heard and known and giving us a place to voice our opinions and communicate that throughout, not just the center and the gay community, but the entire campus.

Regardless of the role that participants perceived the centers as fulfilling, the interview responses revealed that the LGBT resource centers serve an important role in their lives. Three responses in particular demonstrate the varied nature of student perceptions. As indicated above,

Matt understood the center at Indiana University to serve as a safe space; however, he continued outlining a number of other valuable roles that he believed the center to play:

I think their first obligation is to be a physical space where people can come and feel safe because, granted, IU does have a lot of spaces that I can come and relax. But this is a place you can come if you have any insecurities about being gay or a lesbian or transgender, and knowing that they have the resources to help you if you're having problems. That is the first obligation. The second is bringing students together, finding connections, finding people who understand you, friendships. Third, promoting students, giving them opportunities to gain skills, especially if they're interested in LGBT activism, or administration, or literature, or if they want to learn more. Then [fourth] is kind of being an activist in the community itself, sponsoring events outside of here. Maybe reaching out to people who wouldn't normally know about this community.

Allan described the center at Purdue much the same way:

I think it almost depends on who you ask. Obviously more to the LGBTQ students it is a haven, it's a resource, we have all of these great programs, there're books for me to read, and especially like oh I'm questioning, I don't even know what's going on. Here's all of this positive affirmation that I can be myself and to other people.

Finally, Stephanie summed up her perceptions of the various roles associated with the University of Illinois' center:

It's a safe space for community. It has a bank of resources, the first and last place where you can find folks that you needed. And above all, aside from community and all that, a place for education. Like if you were an ally, you always wanted to learn how to be a better ally, or more about different kinds of queer people, come here. You will find them,

or you will learn about them. And even if you don't come here, we go to other places. We put on programs all the time. We get to meet queer people. We do a lot of that, working with other parts of the campus, and we try to make sure that everybody knows about queer [culture] and how to deal with that, and how to respect them.

What Are Students Taking Away?

Although participants identified a number of roles that they associated with the LGBT resource centers on their campuses, interview responses also revealed that most students used only a few of the services. For most, they used only one or two services, which varied from participant to participant. Therefore, it was necessary to determine those roles the centers played in experiences of individual students. Subthemes included are student experiences with LGBT resource centers, participating in activities, atmosphere, usefulness of facilities, impact on students, impact on LGBT student organizations, validating identity and belonging, and a home away from home.

Student Experiences with LGBT Resource Centers

In general, participants interviewed were regular users of the services and programming of the LGBT resource centers on their campuses. As such, most were largely familiar with the missions and roles of the centers as communicated in institutional documents; however, as demonstrated in the previous section, the degree to which they were able to articulate those roles varied significantly.

At Indiana University, many participants served as volunteers in the LGBT resource center. Bryant H., Brendan, and Emily each indicated that they rarely visited the center outside of the hours they work as volunteers. Most of their contact with the center, therefore, was linked to facilitating the day-to-day operations of the center. However, some participants expressed

satisfaction and fulfillment gained by helping the LGBT community through their contributions as volunteers. For example, Xander indicated although he visited the center almost exclusively through his work as a volunteer,

My experience is great. It's been fulfilling for me personally. Previously, I didn't feel like I was very involved at all in the LGBT community. It was a part of my identity in high school, but not really a large part. I was more nerdy and just did kind of academics and theater and stuff, and didn't get really involved in our GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] or anything like that, so this was the first thing I'd ever done that specifically was devoted to helping the LGBT community and in that regard, it has been a really great experience.

There have been specific times when it's just felt really fulfilling and there are faces that I get to see one-on-one, where I know for a fact that it's helping people, but at the same time, there are other times when I'm sitting in front of a computer five hours at a time. "So many emails! Why is this happening?" But I think that's more just working in an office job, so having the human element to things has really helped my feeling of self-worth I guess. Knowing that I've given back.

Beyond fulfillment through volunteering, participants identified other aspects of the center at Indiana University that factored into their experiences as students. For example, Matt discussed his use of the center for testing services as well as academic purposes for his journalism coursework, although he uses the center only once per month:

I met a lot of my sources for stories here. So meeting a lot of people for the first time. I've been to a discussion group that focuses on something about queer theory. One of my past professors invited me, and we just had a really great discussion here. That was an

academic aspect. I just got an HIV test here free, helping me stay healthy or at least knowledgeable about my health. That's been nice, because there really isn't any pressure from anywhere else, telling me I should be tested.

Despite the location of Indiana University's LGBT resource center in an actual house, very few students indicated the center as social space where they could go between classes. J, who indicated that he occasionally made use of the free counseling services as well, shared his comfort using the space as a location to study between classes or lounge:

I'm usually here three days a week just to study or hang out. There's never been a bad experience from meeting the people who volunteer at the front desk or talking with Doug. It's always been really pleasant to be able to come in here and either study or grab a cup of coffee, whatever it takes basically.

Similarly, Bryant M. shared his used of the space as a place to be social, especially with regard to the staff:

Usually when I come in, I'll just chat with Doug or occasionally I just come in and read one of the books here just if I need a place to chill out for a little bit. I don't feel like going back to my dorm quite yet. Also I sometimes just sit and talk with some of the secretaries and to know them better.

One student in particular identified the usefulness of the center's library facility and its central role in her experiences with the center. Heather (IU), who visits the center weekly with J, discussed her process for learning about the transgender community. She stated,

I didn't know anything about [the transgender population]. [Transgender boyfriend] has had to walk me through a ton of stuff. That's one of the reasons I like this library. We can get books on it, and I can read books. I'm like, "I don't understand this. You're

going to have to explain it to me.” He’s like, “I brought these movies because I was at the movie, and I saw them. I thought maybe they would help you. I saw this on Netflix, and we can watch it. Here’s this book I got from the library.” Things like that, where I can learn about it, but not have to ask stupid questions.

In contrast to the role students acknowledged at Indiana University, those from Purdue University indicated more frequent use of the center. As a result, many such as Caryssa, Allan, and Brit indicated that they used the space multiple times per week; Sarah and Brian indicated that they used the center almost daily, and Nate stated that he visited the center multiple times per day. Furthermore, nearly all cited the particularly positive nature of their experiences with the center. Moreover, the reasons for participant visits were largely consistent and focused most often on the center as a social space and as a source of community. Tyler, who visits the center multiple times throughout the week, discussed its role as a safe place to be social:

It’s a pretty social area, at least this specific lobby here and then people can talk to Lowell pretty much about anything, I feel. If you just go to his office, then you can talk to him like a normal person, because he’s pretty open, too. So it’s been a really nice experience to have a place where you can go and know that most people won’t judge you on things you can’t help in your life and that people will understand, to an extent, what you’re going through better than people who aren’t in here. So it’s real nice.

Caryssa also indicated that she used the center frequently as a social space and commented on the value of the relationships she established through the center. She stated,

There’re always new people that come in that I don’t see and since I’m usually here. I have a break Monday/Wednesday/Friday for three hours. I have to fill with something so I come here and there’s a nice couch. It’s good on my ass. So there’s always this regular

group of people. There's her and there's Nate, who left previously. I'm blanking on names. The regular people who I come here to see and I get excited to see. So that's always nice talking with them. Then I always feel that comfort knowing that if I ever am going through something difficult there's someone here to help me. I have used it quite often.

Jake R. reiterated the role of the center as a social space, saying,

I almost never have time to read, but like sometimes I grab a book or something or a movie. That's been pretty nice. But normally I just come here and just kind of hang out with people in here. Or sometimes, I can't really get any work done, because there's really people here, but if I need to like snack for a second, I would come in here between classes or if I need somewhere to avoid the cold, I come in here.

Brit communicated the importance of the center as the source of her network of friends as well as its role as a safe space:

I've made a lot of friends here. We watch movies. I've read a lot of those books. It's kind of like, it's supposed to be a safe space and I feel like it is but it's also just kind of a place where you can unwind and not worry about everybody else and you can just come here and have fun and you know that there's not going to be any issues, you just come in and chill and it's fine. It's also been a great place for resources. I love talking to Lowell. I love talking to Makeba and stuff like that. It's nice.

While emphasizing the idea that the center functions as a safe social space free of judgment, Nate also discussed the value of the center's staff to the community of students who use the center:

It's just like any family. You're going to have your squabbles. You're going to have your people that you don't like, that you don't want to be around. But you know that while you're here at the center, that since there's two people—like two adults here and not like college adults, like adult adults—that you're always going to be safe and you don't have to worry about anything like that going on. But like just the sense of family, it's just really strong.

Tom shared his experience with the center as a tool for understanding other parts of the LGBT community, particularly transgender identity and needs. In describing the impact of the center, he stated,

I would have to say very much enlightening, because I was probably, I won't like it here, I probably still had some fears and derogatory things to think about, even like transgender people before I came to the center, because I think it's more of a lack of understanding than anything. And the more information I got from people the more and more I started to understand them, I would say I started becoming more comfortable. I know better than anything. It's just like we're all in that program. We're not all programmed the same or programmed to do exactly what society is telling us that we're supposed to be programmed to do. It's been very enlightening for me, I guess. I've learned a lot more.

Like those at Purdue University, participants at the University of Illinois commented on their experiences with the center and its role in creating a safe social space as well as a welcoming and often knowledgeable community. Stephanie, who uses the space every day, stated about her experiences,

I guess I immediately felt awesome and accepted. And it was nice coming back here after summer, after I came out. I didn't have to tell them, they knew through Facebook and

whatever else. They found out and they knew and so I didn't need to come out to them again. It was like they took that burden off of me, because I was already out. There are few places where I feel more accepted than I do here.

Kevin also discussed his use of the center as a safe place to lounge during free time. He shared, "I never feel judged. I don't feel hated here . . . I feel at home and relaxed. I can de-stress here. I use this place if I have an hour to class where can I go to do some homework. I'll come here." Jake B. echoed the social role of the center,

I'm here pretty much every day. We hang out. A lot of us sit here and do homework for a lot of hours. A lot of us sit here and pretend to do homework and actually sit on many various forms of social media. That's become the norm. We listen to a lot of music, a lot of musicals. *Frozen*! It's a gay center, so that's not entirely surprising.

Finally, Jay, who volunteers three days a week, discussed the importance of the center as a resource for building community, stating, "It's a nice place. It's usually a mix of people hanging out, chatting, studying, sleeping, etc., which is nice. It's really developing as a community, which is really wonderful to see." In particular, Katherine discussed the center and its community as part of her daily routine:

I come here every single day, and it's a normal thing to go to class and go to the center.

It feels weird when I don't come to the center for a day, and it's weird if I don't see these people every day. It's like a part of my day. It's very homey. It's very chill. It's just very chill because we all like each other. We all respect each other somehow.

Participating in Activities

Participants' engagement with the LGBT resource centers often referenced involvement with specific activities coordinated through or sponsored by the centers. The level of

engagement with the activities of the centers varied from campus to campus. Students indicated involvement in activities ranging from “very actively involved” to “not involved at all.” At Indiana University, Brendan coordinates a weekly activity at a local LGBT-owned establishment. As he stated,

I’m fairly involved. I put on Friday Night Bagels, as well as just other events. We have some coming up later this month and next month as well there. They’re pretty much lectures for professors who study LGBT-related things and whatever area of field they’re in. We actually have somebody talking on intersex health conditions.

However, Matt indicated a less-active level of involvement in the activities of the center, saying,

By involved, I mean I attended them. I didn’t help organize them. I might have reported on them before [as a reporter for the school newspaper] just because that’s what I do. But involved, I would say that my involvement has been just attending.

He continued sharing that he does, however, serve as a volunteer: “I just volunteered for Freedom Indiana. I knew it was here because I had reported on it.” Bryant M. also indicated a less-than-regular degree of engagement with activities of the center, sharing, “I’m semi-involved. Not the biggest person, but I occasionally go to things there or, you know, read their newsletter and come to some of the things they advertise.” Nevertheless, most students at Indiana University indicated that their participation was limited to service as volunteers. As expressed by Courtney, “I wouldn’t say I’m super involved in any of the events, I mainly just volunteer here.”

At Purdue University, in contrast, most participants indicated that they tried to attend as many events sponsored by the LGBT resource center as possible. Haley shared, “I show up to

pretty much all lectures that I can given my schedule. I try to help out as much as possible when requested to do so.” Allan expressed satisfaction with being involved in the planning of such activities, saying, “But I do thoroughly enjoy being a part and helping out. I actually came up with some really cool stickers for National Coming Out Day one year and so that was great.”

Likewise, Brian stated, “I try to attend as many of them as I can. I haven’t been super involved in the organization aspect of them so far. I’d like to.” Wendy shared the importance of the center in coordinating LGBT-related activities:

I try to go to most of the events that the center sponsors. I’ve become part of the email listserv that we have for the center and so, there’re constant reminders of things that are going on that are really helpful. Also, a lot of the guest speakers we’ve had from the center, they’ve been so enlightening. And I think if we didn’t have a center, I would still feel like I would have to conform to societies a little more.

Participants from the University of Illinois also indicated a high level of engagement with the activities sponsored through the LGBT resource center. Stephanie stated,

I try to do a lot of the stuff in the events that are sponsored by the center. The people that I meet here are wonderful members of the community. I try to get involved as much as I can.

Katherine indicated a similarly high level of involvement, saying, “I’m pretty involved. I would say I’m one of the most active students here in the LGBT community. I try to do as much and attend as much of the events that we throw, as much as I could.”

Atmosphere

One aspect of the center that attracted students to use the facilities, particularly with regard to serving as a safe social space, was the atmosphere of the center. For some the

ambiance of the center is tied to the welcoming nature of the staff and others who use the space, but others commented on issues of décor. Regardless, for participants, the LGBT resource centers were among their favorite places on campus. Xander described the center at Indiana University, saying,

I know exactly where I'm headed and I walk in with a purpose. . . . It's always been one of my favorite places on campus. I think in large part it's been Doug and . . . the other staff members here are just really great people to work with and just to be around and so they make into this really great place to hang out or work. And so, especially on cold days like this, it's one of my favorite parts of the day to come in.

Some students at Indiana University also commented that the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the center appealed to them as well as the welcoming nature of the staff, both of which prompted them to use the space. J shared,

It's usually always quiet so it's a nice place to just be able to focus on whatever you need to do or just hang back and relax. Like walking in this morning, I was obviously the second person in the door and I'm glad that Doug gets here just a couple minutes before, otherwise I'd be standing out in the cold. So it's always nice to see that someone like Doug is always here consistently. He's always here to talk to and is always going to say hey or hello or talk to you when you walk in. It's definitely very caring, very warm as far as come in and talk or just do your own thing. So it's just welcome to whatever.

Courtney stated,

It definitely feels pretty calm and low-key, which is really nice. It doesn't feel like I'm walking into an office building to get information. It feels like I'm going somewhere where I see other students, I can just kind of be myself. I don't feel like I have to be like

uptight or worried about if anyone here's going to judge me. I think it's a very accepting climate I'd say.

Heather described the space simply as safe. Continuing, she indicated,

Overall, I can come in here no matter what. I can sit in this library and cry. People are going to come in and ask me how it's going. I can tell them to go away, or I can tell them to sit down. I can talk to them about it. It's warm because there's coffee in the back. Doug is always bringing food and is like, "It's up in the front office. Go talk to people. Go hang out." There's a TV upstairs. I sit here and I eat lunch because it's quiet. It's warm. I can do whatever I want.

The atmosphere at the center on the campus of Purdue was described much the same way. Participants referenced the peaceful and comfortable nature of the space. Caryssa described atmosphere, saying, "I feel like even if I'm alone in here, I can just relax so that's always a plus." Tom shared the sentiment, saying, "Very relaxed. Everybody gets along with everybody pretty much. . . . Everybody gets along and everybody's accepting to everybody, very supportive of each other and stuff like that. It's a nice friendly atmosphere." Wendy, on the other hand, described the atmosphere of the space not as quiet, but as being more cheerful. Specifically, she said, "So, when I'm in there, it's always a cheery, happy place."

Tyler characterized the space also as accepting, indicating the value of the center's role as a safe space to her experiences.

For the most part you can just kind of relax and just talk about things. People here, I've noticed, are a lot more open about a lot of things whether it's sexually or not. So you've got a nice little safe space where you can just really just kind of talk about anything and most people won't care. So that's nice.

As usual, Allan had the most to share about the atmosphere of the center. In particular, he emphasized the importance of the staff and the student community as well as the casual and intimate nature of the space:

Super casual. Like I said it's very informal. . . . Like I said when I come in it's very chill. I'm always laughing. Like I haven't come in here upset or haven't left upset. . . . I genuinely care. Lowell will ask me how I'm doing. He genuinely wants to know and they have genuine insight and I know that if I have any sort of issue it's probably four other people who just experienced it last week in here that can help me out.

We bounce ideas off of each other. Just very supportive, open and caring. . . . I complain about the small space, but this intimate space kind of force you to interact with people, because it would be awkward if you're sitting 10 feet from someone and y'all haven't talked for 20 minutes. It kind of forces you to make new friends.

In closing, he also shared his happiness that the center attracts faculty from the LGBT community:

What I like about the center is also that we have a lot of faculty that comes here . . . faculty and staff come in and chat with us and I've met more LGBTQ staff than I've ever met being on campus.

Characterizations of the atmosphere for the LGBT resource center at the University of Illinois varied most among participants. Some indicated that the center is similarly quiet and welcoming. Jake B. shared that when he entered the center he experiences "relief, mostly relief." Regarding the space itself, he described it as "warm. Definitely warm and welcoming and inclusive. That'd be the best way to describe it." Continuing, he said, "It's like I've been out all day, going to classes. And I come here and it's like I have a couple of hours to relax." Kelly

described her experiences, saying, “It feels really good. . . . It’s like joking around usually. It’s nothing serious. A lot of music is played like today. So it’s just a lot of people just hanging out.” Some participants, however, opted to use more abstract language. For example, Stephanie described the center, saying, “I can’t describe it using any word but queer. . . . A lot of times it’s more quiet, fewer people here but very, very friendly, very, very welcoming, regular and accepting and above all is really queer.”

Some participants, however, shared that their experiences were not always positive. Brian, for example, said, “It’s very loud, but it’s friendly. It’s a little bit intimidating for people who are coming in for the first time so I try not to be a part of the overwhelming noise that can be often offending here.” He continued, indicating, “but once you become comfortable here, then it doesn’t take long. It’s a really, really safe space and it’s really, really good for students that are here.” Jay shared a similar idea, saying, “There have been some points where they have been somewhat cliquy, but I think we’ve gotten through that for the most part.”

Usefulness of Facilities

With regard to the facilities available at each LGBT resource center, nearly all participants at Indiana University indicated that they perceived the physical space of the centers to be useful. This was particularly true due to the larger space available in the center. Xander shared his perspective, saying,

I think the facilities we have are very useful. In large part, the library and the counseling, I think, as far as having a designated space, are probably the two most useful parts of what we have to offer here within the building, because obviously, the counseling can be a very tricky thing to navigate when you are of like the 18- to 22-year-old range. When you’re not a minor, but you’re not necessarily completely independent of parental

influence and you don't necessarily have the financial means to seek counseling and psychiatric and psychological resources on your own. So I think that having free, well-trained counselors in the office is a huge thing for many students. That can be confidential and completely up to them, their choice and no one else needs to know that they're using those services.

Also, I think the library, as I said before, is a huge informational tool for GLBT students and straight students who want to know more about the GLBT community. And, the scrapbooks. I looked at them a lot when I used to be here. Those are kind of a catalog of the GLBT community over the past 20 years here in Bloomington that provides a really localized look. So just having a space to keep and store all of those materials in one place, I think, is very important.

Bryant H. commented specifically on the usefulness of the library as well:

I use a lot of library quite a bit, and it's been really great to have because these are resources you wouldn't find anywhere else. Even at regular libraries, you wouldn't have all the pride films. Those've been very helpful. That's the biggest resource I utilize here. I would say it's very useful—again, that presence on campus and having a place you can come to get counseling or find books to read about how you identify.

Matt indicated that the space was a useful place for groups to meet, but that there were limitations:

It wouldn't be useful for maybe a large group assembly because of the physical limitations. But I think for the events that I've attended here, it's been absolutely perfect. It's intimate, safe. It's nonthreatening, and it's open. You can come here and talk about anything. I think other people feel the same. I think my friends and peers feel the same.

Participants at Purdue University and the University of Illinois were less direct in their statements about the usefulness of the facilities associated with their LGBT resource centers, however. Jake R. said about the center at Purdue, “I think the biggest resource is this actual room [the common area] and facility wise would be the gender-neutral bathroom. And I feel for people who seek those out, it would be very useful in that regard.” Jay said this about the University of Illinois center:

For the most part, all people who come here to view the center as a place where they can take naps, or maybe people hang out with friends. Plan things. It isn't really necessary for people who feel nervous to come here. The resource center still provides an intangible or tangible, but not physical space for them, because they can find resources and say this is a confidential meeting. This is a non-confidential meeting. These are resources that you can access without going there yourself.

Impact on Students

Nearly all participants expressed that the center had had a positive impact on their lives as students. Brendan described what he perceived to be the significance of the Indiana University center on the campus community as a whole.

I think ever since it opened in I think it was 1994, I think it's had a very positive impact on the community at-large, or the campus at-large. I mean, just the number of students who come here on a regular basis or even just those who stop by every once in a while, I've never heard anyone upset that we're here on campus. It's just been very positive.

Stephanie described the value of the University of Illinois center in establishing a sense of community:

It's given me a sort of like a base of operations really. I never would have known where to go. It's let me build more community and lets me meet more queer friends. It's let me become part of an actual queer community and started a community of my own.

For Haley, the center at Purdue served as a source of knowledge regarding the LGBT community:

It's definitely allowed me to learn a lot more about the community as a whole through the lecture series and speakers. Also a great source of support, inclusion, stuff like that. It's good to meet a lot of new people here, just generally stuff like that.

J, however, commented on the value of the free counseling services offered at the center at Indiana University:

Just as one that utilizes the counseling because I know there's a psychological service center in the health center but they charge after the first or second session so to know that this is free, while it's not qualified professionals, it's still something, to be able to sort of gear things in the direction you might want. But no, I definitely appreciate the whole counseling that's available.

Some participants commented on the value of the centers with regard to academic success. For some, the impact of the center was tied to its function as a place to study, but for others it was about finding a community of people with whom to study or awareness of fields of study not previously considered prior to making use of the center. For example, Nate said this about the Purdue center:

I feel like if the center hadn't been here, I don't feel like I would be doing as well in school. I feel like my grades would be a lot lower, because I wouldn't have a place to go.

Like, I don't like being in my dorm room. I study in my dorm room, but, like I said, I like, study with the door shut. Like, nobody comes in. Nobody knocks.

Jake B. indicated,

I think it has a lot of impact because it gives me a place to go. As a student I can come here for resources, and I am able to have a place to focus and do my homework and actually get things done, instead of being by myself in my room where I will only get distracted.

Kevin discussed how the center at the University of Illinois allows him to study who share the same major, or in the same courses:

I think you meet people who are in the same academic environment as you are and you can kind of, "Oh, man that's just awful!" "I know right." But you can also, "Hey, let's get together and study." . . . Or just do homework. I mean it's just kind of a meeting place for people who are in the areas who are taking the same classes as you are, or who take in the same class that can help you.

For Kaleb, the academic impact of the University of Illinois center related to exposing him to a field of study he might not have considered otherwise:

It got me interested in, because I've never heard of what a GWS [gender and women's studies] was before coming here and I came in as a physics student. Then I switched to humanities and it felt so much better. Then here I learned about the gender and women studies program and it affected some of the classes that I've taken, and I'm like from there just getting interested in issues regarding class, disability status, and so much more.

Others commented on the impact of the center in creating a sense of or increasing their interests in activism. Brian discussed the importance of the LGBT resource center at the University of Illinois saying,

I think the center has made me realize how important it is for me to be a little bit more active, both politically and from a social justice perspective. Leslie, the director, always, I feel like she encourages the students to come here regularly to think about what's going on and to really make sure that we're okay with what's happening and to do something important. So I think the center has made me more willing to participate in things that I might not necessarily be extremely comfortable with demonstrations—like what was happening today—or just be in an executive board position. Just coming to college, I knew that I was not prepared for leadership of any kind. I'm really, really bad at meeting people. I think as far as the pressure is concerned, because I just don't work well with that. But I sort of stepped up to the plate and I've really, really benefited a lot from that.

Brit also indicated that the Purdue center promoted a greater sense of activism:

I think the center, the people in the center, have really opened my eyes to what I want to do with my life and my passion, which is being an activist and helping out LGBT youth and people. It's really fostered a lot of growth and been very challenging, because I come in and I learn different stuff every day. Maybe not every day but often, with gender identity and sexual identity and it's really inviting. People are fine to answer questions and if you ask them, they know and you know that it's not coming from a place where there might be any kind of negative stigma or connotation or anything like that. And it's also a learning institution.

Matt, however, indicated that center had little impact on most students. He believed this to be because many are unaware of the potential benefits of the center at Indiana University, its resources, or that the center even exists. He said,

Most students it doesn't affect just because a lot of students are I feel indifferent. That's not a bad thing. I think to the students who care and have questions, it makes a world of difference. I just imagine this building as maybe another administrative building.

And that's something I think a lot of people don't even know about this place. They know that they can come here, but they don't know that there is a library here. I think it's made people comfortable and even excited to talk about being LGBT and what that means in this world. It's definitely provided a place to do that.

Impact on LGBT Student Organizations

While participants expressed that the LGBT resource centers positively influenced their experiences as students, students at Purdue and the University of Illinois also indicated that the centers were important to LGBT student organizations as well. Some participants commented on the value of the center in serving as a space where student groups could meet. For example, Nate stated about the Purdue center,

The center has pretty much been the reason why the organizations I'm involved in have existed. Without like, this part of Lowell and other people at the center—I wrote the constitution for both organizations—so without that kind of help and that kind of background information and that knowledge, I wouldn't have been able to do that. It wouldn't have been a possibility. So, like without the center, some of those organizations wouldn't exist.

Haley said this about Purdue's center's role in coordinating events:

The LGBTQ Center is a great place of both funding and general moral support for many different types of events, like the Out at Work Conference that we're putting on. It's heavily supported by the center both in contact with employers and other sorts of things, like volunteers because a lot of people end up coming here, student leaders on campus, and we get connected to those individuals and how to get their manpower out there, person power.

Similarly, Brit stated,

I'd say the center goes hand in hand with the Alliance because it offers a lot of support and I associate the center with Lowell because he kings this place. So, I'd say, with the Alliance it does a lot, but when I did Boilers OUTloud and first started gathering stuff for that, like the coming out monologues or the vagina monologues for LGBT and whatever individuals. So once we started putting stuff like that together I'd come in here and I'd look up books and I'd really try to learn more so I could do a better job at putting on that performance.

One student, however, expressed her satisfaction that the LGBT student groups remain separate but engaged with the center. Caryssa shared,

I like that the center is separate from the LGBTQ Student Alliance. Recently I split from that group because it's just going to hell. I don't know. It was just too all over the place, there're power struggles, and it's just bad. So I always like coming here because Lowell is always the voice of reason and will advise the Alliance, or whatever LGBT group, on anything and tell them to their face, "You're being an asshole. Please, stop it." Not like that. Much more eloquently, because Lowell is eloquent, but I just like that it's related in

the sense that he'll advise them and it can go back and forth, but separate because it's not full of a bunch of dumb teenagers fighting over shit.

Stephanie indicated her belief that her student organization, CUT*ES, would not exist without the assistance of the LGBT resource center at the University of Illinois. She said, "It would not exist without the resource center. I know that for a fact, because I started that. It wouldn't have happened. No way now. Not any sort of a chance whatsoever." Kaleb commented on the value of the office as a meeting space, saying,

Because this is here we have a guaranteed space where we can meet and have these organizations and just meetings whether they are social meetings, educational meetings, advocacy meetings or whatever the topic maybe at the day, but definitely it is incredibly helpful.

Brian reiterated the importance of the center on the LGBT student groups at the University of Illinois:

The center plays a very, very essential role to a lot of the LGBT organization on our campus. The seven non-housing organizations are all sponsored by the LGBT Resource Center and they host a weekly meeting called the round table for all of the executive board members. I believe it's only the presidents and the treasurers that come every week and they sort of discuss the state of the union as far as how students are doing, what's going on in the organizations, upcoming events, and large events that involve the entire community.

Validating Identity and Belonging

Another recurring idea that participants communicated about their experiences using the programming, facilities, and services of the LGBT resource centers related to the idea of

validating their identity and providing a sense of belonging. For example, Wendy explained about the center at Purdue,

So, when I'm in the center, there're usually at least two or three students that are in here, if not more. And it's just amazing how open of an environment you can have. For example, I go in there sometimes and don't know who's sitting in there, but we can have conversations about random things and sometimes I don't get their names, but you just have an interaction with somebody, it feels really nice to know that there're other people out there like you.

Adrian said simply about the center at the University of Illinois, "It helps me figure out everything, I guess. I knew, but it helped me feel like it was normal." J indicated that the center at Indiana University was responsible for his retention as a student. He shared this about its importance:

It is a big factor for me, yes. I guess I considered but because I didn't see a very strong community, or just looking at like the top accepting sort of campuses. To have this one on the top five if not first or second [accepting campuses for transgender students], that was a big factor and I have never really considered transferring.

Tyler shared the same idea with regard to the center at Purdue, saying,

It would have swayed me more [to stay], because this kind of setting is what I was really hoping for, to meet people who are like me and also have the resources to help me figure out who I am.

Moreover, Emily shared her perspective about the center at Indiana University, saying,

Well, with my roommate and suitemates, I'm not exactly open about that sort of thing because I don't know what their views are. I feel here is a place away from home to be more open about that sort of thing.

A Home Away From Home

Significantly, most students expressed the idea that the LGBT resource centers function as a home away from home. Frequently, this idea was communicated through descriptions of the centers as maintaining a "homey" atmosphere. Such was the case with Brendan, who said this about the center at Indiana University: "I would say we have a very homey atmosphere here. It's one of the things I love about this place. I think it's also professional as well, but it's very homey, and feels really nice." Similarly, Matt indicated, "It's a great place to feel like I can come in here anytime when it's open. I'd say [it's] just calm and homey and supportive." Heather reiterated the value of the Indiana University center's location in an actual house, saying, "Aside from it being a physical house, it's like home away from home."

Although Sarah did not use the word "home" to describe the LGBT resource center at Purdue University, she shared, "I think it's very inviting, like I said. I definitely spend almost all of my time on campus here when I'm not in class." Likewise, Tom described the center saying, "Yes, I would say it's probably [a home away from home], if I'm not doing schoolwork. It's a great place to come and relax for a little bit and talk to people." Tyler also commented on the atmosphere of the center:

I come here pretty much most days of the week depending on my schedule. I'll come here just between classes, just to hang out with people because you meet a whole array of people here. It's just a nice, little, relaxing hang-out space where I can do homework.

It's more than just a place to come meet people. It's sort of like a small dorm away from my dorm.

Similar statements were made about the center at the University of Illinois. Although Kelly described the center as "safe [with] a homey feeling," and Brian said, "I kind of feel like I'm coming home. It's a very, very complacent space for me." Finally, Kaleb said about the center, "I kind of feel at home a little bit. It's a very comfortable space and I try to help make other people feel that way, but I definitely feel it's a nice space to be in."

Is the Center Important to You?

The importance of the centers in the experiences of students was emphasized through a number of the participants' comments. As with other themes, the reasons students viewed the centers as important to them varied from providing a community and a social space to fulfilling the role of safe space and information resource. When asked if the center at the University of Illinois was important to him, Kaleb cited its role as a source of community. He said,

To me personally, yes. It's a place for community and that's something like community of people that I know or accepting and understanding and that we can be supportive of each other that's so important for these four years that you're supposed to be off on your own, figuring out your own life, and [the center has] definitely helped in that.

The same idea was shared by Brian, who said,

It's important to me because it's a social space, and it's a social space outside of the typical spaces. It's more intimate and it's less distracting so I don't have to deal with being around a lot of people all at once. I can just come here and just be around a few people and not be overstimulated or overwhelmed.

Jay expressed similar ideas about the center as a way to expand his already accepting group of friends. Regarding its importance for building community, he said,

Both in terms of I mean, as myself I came here because I want to make friends. I felt secure about my own identity and that was never really quite a contention for me. Like everybody's accepting, you know, my friends are accepting.

Beyond the issue of community, some participants also expressed the importance of the centers as ways of getting to understand their developing identities. As Kevin stated, the center was instrumental in helping him to come to terms with himself:

I just feel like if I went to a school that didn't have [an LGBT resource center] I would still be in the closet and I will still be really depressed. Maybe I would be hurting a lot and I would feel alone, like I don't have anyone to talk to about this, like you would have to actively search for people who often identify as queer.

As expressed by Kelly, the center was helpful in finding others who understood her and that she was not alone. She said, "[The center] made such a huge difference. Obviously, when I started coming here, I felt so alone just because there was no one else who really understood how I'm feeling." Tyler expressed the same value regarding the center at Purdue:

It's important to me, really important to me because, like I said, I can come to a place and know that I can talk about pretty much anything, LGBT related or not. It's a place where people can understand what I'm talking about in terms of transitioning, or lesbian issues, love issues.

Some shared that the LGBT resource centers were important to them because they made them feel more comfortable being part of the campus. For example, Matt described the importance of the Indiana University center, saying,

I think just knowing it's here gives me confidence that I am a member of this Bloomington community. There are other people that are LGBT, just knowing that. I have that feeling even when I'm not here. Just knowing that it's sitting on Seventh Street, just across from Dunn Meadow, just chilling. That's in the back of your mind, even if you're not thinking about it. The fact that you know that is kind of a symbol of the community here, I think.

Nate expressed that the center at Purdue helped him to feel safe on campus and to be who he is. He said the center allowed him

[to] know that I am safe and that I can be myself here. Even if that means I'm a little, you know, feminine at times or much more masculine at other times, I can be me and nobody's going to judge that.

Caryssa indicated that the Purdue center fulfilled a much similar role, saying, "It makes me feel more comfortable attending school here." However, perhaps it was Brit who best expressed the value of the center for making her feel as though she belonged on campus:

Because it was that one place when I was a freshman where at the end of my freshman year when I was like, "okay I need to leave this place," it was that one place where I came at the end of my freshman year and I was like, "okay well maybe I'll continue to give Purdue a chance." It's not a bunch of engineers and a bunch of really close-minded conservative people. There's a lot more to this campus, you just gotta do a little bit of digging and now I find the resource center to be a place where I can just go and unwind. They have all the books and all the movies that I like, so that's nice.

Participants also indicated that the LGBT resource centers fulfill an important role by providing them support and functions as an important resource for the LGBT community. Sarah said this about the Purdue center:

The center is definitely important to me. Even if Lowell wasn't here, I still think the center would be an important asset to have. The center provides a safe zone for students who aren't comfortable. The center provides an outlet for people who need to talk, too. The center provides resources for people who might not know everything or might not have access to things. While my parents were very understanding, not everyone's are and the center provides a lot of talks, videos, any sort of thing you could imagine that you might want access to that you might not feel comfortable getting on your own.

Allan communicated the importance of the center not just to him but also to LGBT students who come to Purdue in the future:

And so it's extremely important to me because Lowell is important to me. Makeba is important to me and I know that they're important to other people and I know it's just not me. I know that they are providing a support system for other people and then if the time comes and somebody needs me to be a part of that support system then they will invite me to that support system and I would hope that somebody else would feel that I was important that way.

But I just know that there's a need for it and so of course it's important. It's important to me because I need it. I need to know that if I have a problem I can go somewhere on campus. I'm already a minority a thousand ways and I'm left-handed. It's kind of hard out here and it's extremely important to me for that reason because

everybody should be able to go to talk to somebody if they need to and it should be specialized in the sense of LGBTQ if there's a need for that.

Two students indicated that the center was important to them because it allowed them to contribute to the LGBT community in ways they did not initially know to be possible. Brendan said about the Indiana University center that

it's been really nice getting to work here and getting to meet everyone and getting to feel in some ways like I'm helping the environment here on campus. I don't really do all that much. I kind of just update websites and direct people the right way. But it still makes me feel like I'm doing something good for the LGBT people on the campus.

Courtney likewise expressed the importance of the center in promoting the LGBT community, saying,

I think it's really important, because a lot of times I think the LGBT community is underrepresented. Like some people will say like, "Oh yes, we're super LGBT friendly," but when it comes to actually doing things, that's where they fall short and I think having a center really shows that you're dedicated to helping the LGBT community.

Most importantly, however, for some participants, the role of the LGBT resource center was described as literally saving their lives. Jake B. indicated that the center at the University of Illinois has become essential resource; he shared, "It's very important to me. It's become crucial in my life." The center had a particularly dramatic impact on Tom, who discussed his experiences with the center at Purdue, saying,

I think it's very important. If it wasn't here, heaven forbid, I'd be dead right now. I'd probably still be killing myself over my sexual identity right now. I wouldn't have

Lowell here to explain to me why, explain that my condition was going to be okay. I wouldn't have had that. Yeah, I think it's very important.

The Importance of LGBT Resource Centers

During the interview process, participants were asked to discuss the reasons they believe LGBT resource centers to be important and necessary fixtures on college and university campuses. Although personal experiences with the centers were the central focus of the study, the participants who use the centers at the three sites were in a unique position to communicate the value of such centers to students. This theme also explores their perceptions of what LGBT student experiences would be like in the absence of LGBT resource centers as well as in situations where LGBT student services are fulfilled through multicultural centers.

Why LGBT Centers Are Necessary

Regarding the importance of LGBT resource centers, students cited a number of reasons that such facilities are valuable assets to LGBT students. Some shared the belief that LGBT resource centers are a necessary tool today in order to educate the broader campus and surrounding communities about the needs and challenges of LGBT people, as well as address the issues of discrimination and inequality that the LGBT community often experiences in conservative areas. Brendan's view that LGBT resource centers are necessary focused on representation and inclusion:

I feel like we are a large part of the community here, and on other campuses as well.

Inclusion should be a major part of any university. It just seems kind of pigheaded not to have something like this.

Xander communicated his egalitarian point of view:

I think for the time being it definitely is. Ideally, in the future, it wouldn't be quite so necessary to have a force to make change because changes would already have been made, but that is not the case quite yet. Although great progress has been made. So I think that for now and for the foreseeable future it's very necessary for there to be a resource center in a community like this with tens of thousands of students coming in from all sorts of different backgrounds. Many of them are dealing with things that they know don't have the knowledge structures to approach with new feelings, questioning their identity and possibly coming from areas where there's not a lot of information for them. So I think that having a resource center is pretty essential in this context for those students.

I suppose I think of the nature of the center changing, at least, and it would be great to see it become more of a culture center than a resource center, but I also think that with other minorities the path to liberation, I don't know if that's the right word, to equality I guess, is a very long one. I don't know if I can think of any minority that has achieved it quite yet. There's still a massive amount of inequity for the Latino community and the Black community and the gay community and lesbian community, men and women across the board. I really just can't think of anyone who has wrapped things up, I guess. But I think it would be ideal if a GLBT center could become something that was more about history and a cultural thing than how to help people just deal with being something.

Kaleb emphasized the necessity of LGBT centers as a response to the climate for the LGBT community and the need for education.

The way things are now, yes. I mean ideally, there would be at time when it wouldn't be necessary, but I feel like there's not enough recognition or understanding or whatever you want to call it for there to not be one. Students come in and learn things because you have people to come in from different classes to do interviews and they've never been exposed to any of this before, but they know to come here. So, if they can learn, that's huge because it's like a ripple effect, which is huge.

Jake B.'s perspective on the value of resource centers focused on the tendency for LGBT students to feel isolated in a largely heteronormative environment:

I definitely do. I really do because especially for the LGBT community, I think almost all college students, but us specifically. It is really easy for the gay community to feel isolated or alienated just because it is something that in some places is still not understood and not as accepted as it is here. But it's important for those kids to have somewhere to go and feel safe and welcome and not judged.

A number of participants focused on the importance of culture centers in general as ways of helping underrepresented communities thrive and to educate the campus community about diversity. Nate expressed his point of view, stating,

Oh hell, yeah. Like, hell, yeah. I can't be more excited about that. It's important to have a space for your LGBT students, just like it's important to have a space for your Black students or for your Latino students or for your Native American students. Like, it's a culture. The LGBT centers are much more encompassing [of] culture because not only can you be like gay, but you could be Black, transgender, you know, whatever.

Caryssa also emphasized the impact of intersectionalities for members of the LGBT community, saying,

I visited the LCC and even though I'm Latina. I'm a mix. I don't feel as welcome there. I mean I am. It's not the people there it's just myself, my identity. I'd be like I'm gay before I'm Mexican or Columbian or whatever. It's the community that I would go to first and I'm sure there're people who feel that way because being gay, it's more ostracized than being Black or Hispanic. People will kill you for that. I mean there're obviously people who are so racist and terrible, but there are countries around the world where they'll kill you for being gay. There're people trying to ban gay marriage and all that shit. It's this hostile outlook on the gay community so having this place here is just one small step for people to just feel comfortable.

Matt echoed the idea, saying,

Yes, I do. That kind of coincides with my belief that there should be cultural centers for all minority groups because we are a minority group. Each minority group has their specific needs and their specific interests. Having a presence here gives us as students the kind of green light to really explore that and feel comfortable doing something.

Stephanie was perhaps most emphatic about the necessity of LGBT resource centers as a representation of LGBT culture:

Oh god, yes! For all reasons that I've said, yes! The community and the atmosphere and just the resources that our center provides are staggering. I can't actually picture what I would be doing with my life if the resource center weren't here right now. I'd probably not be doing much. I really think it's a vital piece of every campus's atmosphere, just like a women resource center, just like a cultural center, like an African American cultural center, or an Asian American cultural center. It's one of those necessary groups

of cultural centers that oppressed populations need both because we are oppressed populations and because it's difficult to find a community.

Some participants were not able to fathom the idea of not having a resource center, particularly due to the role the centers played in helping them come to terms with their developing identities. As stated by Tyler, "I think it is absolutely necessary. I can't imagine what it would be like for people to not have one." He continued,

A lot of people, when they go to college, in my experience, when you go to college you find yourself. Anybody, you just find yourself and for LGBTQ people, college is one of the few ways to finally be yourself or finally discover who you are. Accept that you're gay or trans, lesbian, or any other thing in between. So to not have a center is, it's a really stupid decision on someone's part to either not allow or not have a center at all. . . . I mean you go to a college for an education, but anybody can tell you that you go to college to have this social experience, to find out who you are, and to not allow people to find out who they are is absolutely demeaning.

Steven reiterated the idea, saying, "Because college is, for a lot of people, it's the first time that they can be themselves and it's good to have a resource center on campus that can help them through the whole process, whether it's coming out."

The prospect of not having a center was difficult to imagine for one participant in particular. Heather was quite emotional in responding:

Even though some of the times, this feels really empty. I think it's not utilized a lot. The people who do utilize it, it's vital. It's very important. It's very safe. It's necessary for survival almost in a way, just because there is free counseling from the intern. You can come sit here and be okay and be with people who are like you or are an ally and accept

you and love you, regardless, especially for people who have problems at home. If there's not even a support center on campus, where do you go to find somebody else?

Furthermore, Sarah shared her concern that future generations of students will come to take the center for granted, not having witnessed the impact of the center in transforming the climate at Purdue University. Regarding the necessity of an LGBT center, she said,

Absolutely. If you had asked me that question a couple of years ago I don't think I necessarily would have said that but definitely seeing a change from before and after. I think I'm one of the few students who gets to see that change and see the difference that it's made. I think a lot of students coming in now kind of take the center for granted and might not always appreciate everything it has to offer because of that. As I said, sometimes here before the center was a lot of people are like, "Oh, well that's okay. This is how it always should have been." And while it should have been this way it doesn't mean it always was.

Only one individual believed that LGBT resource centers are not an essential part of a college campus. Having shared that he did not feel he was as welcome in the LGBT community and that his identity was not accepted by his Asian culture, Anon stated that he prefers building community through social media:

Necessary? I don't really think so. I think perhaps in the past, but nowadays because of social networks geared toward gay men, gay women, and bisexuals, and transgenders [*sic*]. I've hopped on the Grinder, and Tender, and Scruff. It's not mobile, but even Reddit, there are sub-Reddits geared toward the gay community. They created a virtual community space that I think far surpasses the physical space that's been offered by LGBT centers.

Imagining Life without a Center

When asked to imagine a campus without an LGBT resource center, many students expressed difficulty doing so. A number of participants expressed concerns of feeling isolated and losing a sense of community, which was a major source of support for some. Others questioned whether it would be possible for LGBT students to develop a clear sense of identity or educate the broader campus community about LGBT culture. Kelly indicated that she would likely not have established the community of friends, saying, “I would still feel very alone.” Likewise, Stephanie expressed concern that she would be more isolated as well. She shared,

It’s nice to have a bigger community of queers and I wouldn’t have found that without the resource center, ever. I wouldn’t have come to my experiences smoothly. I would have not been so widely accepted. I would have to do a lot of educating on my own, both of myself and both of others, and so I wouldn’t be as much as well-educated as I am now. Nowhere near as good. Nowhere. I wouldn’t have been anywhere near as good.

Kevin indicated that the lack of community would have impacted his ability to come out and be comfortable with his identity. He stated,

It would not be as positive as it is now. I’m just happy just being in life right now. . . . I wouldn’t have any comfort to come out and just say, “This is who I am” without having all these support systems behind me and having the friends that I’ve met through the resource center. So, life would suck. It would suck big time.

Some participants expressed concern that they would likely have struggled with their sense of identity had the center not been available to facilitate the process. Kaleb stated that if he had no center or community to turn to, he would not understand his identity:

I think I would still be a kind of confused person with a lot more anxiety just over not understanding my own identity, or not being able to explore my own identity, or just having friends that have gone through the same because this is where I met them.

Likewise, Wendy expressed,

If there wasn't a center on campus, I know I would not feel as confident as being an out person in the community. Because the center has brought such a sense of community and acceptance for LGBT students that without it, we would still be a very non-liberal—I feel like our school has become more liberal since we have an LGBT center.

Jake B. stated he would likely not have come to terms with his identity as a transgender man:

My trans-ness would be probably a lot less of a predominant part of my identity. I would probably just put it on a shelf somewhere. Having the center and this community has really given me the ability to take pride in that and try to make a difference and feel less like it's something about me that I have to hide.

Some students indicated that they would likely not have remained at their institutions if the center did not exist. Tyler expressed that she would not have attended Purdue had there been no center. She stated,

If there wasn't a center then I probably wouldn't have come here in the first place, but if I came here and there wasn't a center, I'd feel like I probably would be stuck in a rut like I was back at home with the whole transitioning thing because this summer has really helped me find a lot of what I needed. But not just professional resources like counseling, but it's the social setting in the center that has really helped me just absorb the community and absorb who I am in general. So to not have this kind of social setting, it would suck.

Brit had the same outlook:

I don't think I'd be here, to be honest with you. Because the center is kind of like that last hope for Purdue and all freshmen go through the terrible, "I don't like this place, I don't fit in." I came here not knowing anybody and then they came in here and it's like okay well these people are interesting. These people are open and I want to get to know them. This was before I even came out as a lesbian or had that thought; I was in a heterosexual relationship, so the center's really opened my eyes up to a lot of friends, but also what I want to do with my life and what I care about and what really matters to me.

Although Xander did not indicate that the absence of the center would have influenced his decision to attend Indiana University, he was concerned that his experience would not have been quite as positive. He said,

I don't think it would have been as positive as it has—not nearly. The center has been a place for me to kind of process what's going on in the community as a whole and that affects me individually. So I don't think I would be nearly as knowledgeable about things as I am now without this resource here. I also don't think I would be as comfortable on campus as I am, because even before I came here freshman year, I wasn't feeling like anybody wanted me to go back where I came from or anything like that, or get out of town, it just kind of made the difference of knowing that having this here means that there's a place where people aren't indifferent to the specific challenges that you're facing as a GLBT student, so having that resource here has made a huge difference for me.

Caryssa reiterated the idea that the center provides a level of comfort that would be missing in its absence. She shared,

This sense of comfort this place brings me is something that can't be provided by any other minority group or just a simple group of friends, because this is like, "I'm gay, I'm proud of it, and we're not going anywhere."

Only one student indicated that his experiences would have remained the same without the center. However, he credited presence of another campus entity concerned with human sexuality. He said, "I'm not sure if I would have noticed the lack of center because there's the Kinsey Institute and the strong gender studies program. He followed up, saying, "I don't know if I would have realized I was missing something, but now that I've had it, I would definitely notice if it was gone."

LGBT Student Services as a Facet of Multicultural Centers

Concerning the idea that LGBT student services are sometimes housed in larger, more-encompassing multicultural centers, participants were again asked to consider how their experiences would have differed if the LGBT centers on their campuses were consolidated into such a facility. Responses were overwhelming in opposition of such a scenario. However, student apprehensions did vary slightly. Some students expressed concern that the LGBT community would lose its voice without maintaining designated space. Pointing out that the issue of a multicultural facility has been part of recent discussions at the University of Illinois, Stephanie said,

Well that's interesting because there is talk of that on campus. . . . There has been talk for years on campus about combining the resource centers and cultural centers on one building, into one nice, new state of the art building. I don't like that. I think it's very ghettoizing. I think it erases the bit of community that has been created in the bits of spaces that have been, that the little cultural houses have created over the years, that the

resource centers have created over the years. I think it's horribly problematic and I don't think they shouldn't do it all. And if they started doing it I will be in the front lines telling them "Shut the fuck up! Don't do what you're about to do!"

Jake B. stated a similar point of view:

Honestly I think that I would probably be a lot less involved. The fact that this is just for a very specific community, and that's the goal and aim, I think makes it a lot closer, a lot more comfortable, a lot homier. I like having it as just meant for the LGBT community.

Adrian expressed that he would be less comfortable using resource if they were part of a larger multicultural center:

I don't know. I don't feel like I would be as comfortable if it was part of a lot of different cultures because different cultures aren't as accepting of LGBT people. I don't know. I wouldn't go as much. I would probably have checked it out, but I don't think I would be a big part of it as it is just one place.

Haley also expressed uncertainty about losing the designated space for LGBT people:

As being part of a network of multicultural centers I don't know how I feel about that exactly. I definitely think it would be a good hub to discuss like diversity issues in general, however, I think we have some unique concerns that can only be addressed in a space that would be safe for everybody, LGBTQA identified. So I definitely think a separate sort of space is needed for that discussion. Obviously, I'm not opposed to like multicultural everything but I definitely think there is a space in which to discuss that sort of thing.

Some participants commented on the ways in which LGBT identity is understood by other cultures, some to the point of persecution. Caryissa stated,

It would be a little weird just sharing a base space with other minority groups just because there's kind of a discord between people of color and being gay. It's pretty much vilified, especially by Hispanics. You hardly see any gays. They're all super in-the-closet, or you have to have children. That's why we have 20 people in our family . . . but because of that there might be an underlying tension if we all share the same space. So it would be just a little weird. You'd have transgender people walking down that hall and then people would be glaring at them and shit. We need our own private space. All minority groups can share a space . . . [but] we need to be protected more because we are hated more.

Kelly also expressed concern over the safety of LGBT students saying,

No, because at the resource center is very integrating, but once you go to a multicultural center where there can be so many different kinds of people that's not a safe space. First I want to know who is gay or transgender. That's just a safe place for people who aren't White, male, transgender, heterosexual, but so like you don't know if they had issues without the LGBT community. You don't know how they're going to take the fact that you might be still confused about your own sexuality or your gender identity.

The issue of race relations factored into the responses of several other students who believed that they might feel uncomfortable or ostracized as Caucasian students. Wendy shared, I think if it was a large group with multicultural, I don't think that I would utilize the center as much primarily because we have a Black cultural center and a Latino cultural center on campus and I've been in at least the Black cultural center and I know there's almost a stigma that if you're not an African American student, then being in the Black cultural center is kind of like, well, why are you here? So, if it was all together, I think it

wouldn't—people wouldn't feel as safe in there and they wouldn't feel like they could be themselves

I feel like I would not—if I heard the word multicultural, I wouldn't assume that it had anything to do with LGBT community, I would assume that it was for people who were from different countries or for the Black community or, like you said, the Latino community and I wouldn't really necessarily, immediately be like, oh I bet there's an LGBT service center there. I would just assume that it was just for strictly ethnicity.

Likewise, Tyler expressed her concern that a multicultural center would not offer the same safety that an LGBT resource center does:

I probably would, but I feel like it would be better for a place like this to be a little bit outside, specifically a kind of safe space would be better outside of a multicultural center. Specifically because while the gay community certainly has a culture of its own, the people in that community need a safe spot where they feel like they can—a safe space. I feel like if a center like this would be in a multicultural center it would be a bit less hangout, a bit more formal in terms of this is the gay community, but that's just my opinion.

Sarah indicated a similar position saying, “Due to the fact that I'm White, I feel I might face certain opposition from certain groups.”

Nevertheless, some participants did discuss their willingness to make use of an LGBT office if it were part of a larger multicultural center. Jay said, “It would be nice to see things working together as a system. Yeah, I think I'd still be here.” Xander expressed his excitement about the possibility of exploring intersectionalities:

The one thing that would be interesting in a larger multicultural building is . . . I think a benefit of that would be the interaction between different marginalized groups, which I'm very interested in personally, how marginalized groups relate to each other and I think having a shared building would be beneficial to that. But I do think having a separate building has its own benefits of being more accessible to students.

Jake R. was excited about the prospect of learning about other cultures:

I feel that may be even better because it's like, you can meet more people and they got like a safe place so, and like, that situation would be like a very large building with like, different centers all mixed together?

Anon, however, was uncertain about such an arrangement, but saw potential benefits, nonetheless:

I'm not sure exactly. Maybe I would use it a little bit more because then it's like a shopping mall. I could stop by the Asian culture center and do my shopping at the LGBT center. I might visit it a little bit more.

Of particular note was the response of one participant who indicated that a multicultural center would make it easier to seek the services of an LGBT resource center but also not have to disclose her sexual orientation, or gender identity. Heather stated,

If they were all support centers in one building, I would be just as likely—if not more likely. If you're going to a support center in some way, you need that support. I feel like if you are coming from a place where you don't feel as supported as you need to be, you're going to understand other people in the same position, regardless of what they're going through. Whether that's true or not, I'm not certain; but that's how I would feel.

When asked if she would be comfortable walking into the center with her transgender boyfriend, she added, “I’m not certain I would. [Transgender boyfriend] aside, I’m not certain I would, because I told you even then I walked in the back door.” She went on to add,

I would, because in my mind I would justify it as, “They don’t think it’s me. They assume it’s him. Or they assume it’s her.” I guess, legally, I would be able to show that off in my head and be okay with it. I’m walking too confidently for them to think it’s me. It’s hard. It’s so hard. This is all strictly my background talking, because it’s still, I go home, and I’m a different person. I don’t have a boyfriend at home, certainly not one who plays on the same rugby team as I do. Would I feel comfortable walking in with [transgender boyfriend]? Yeah. I wouldn’t feel labeled. That’s still kind of a hard point for me in a way, because I can’t be labeled because of my parents.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to understand the role that LGBT centers play in the experiences of LGBT students who seek out services and engage in programming offered through such centers. This chapter provides an analysis and interpretation of the five major themes that emerged through this study. These themes were perceptions of campus climate, first impressions, the role of the LGBT resource center, what students are taking away, and is the center important to you. As a result of these themes, eight key findings emerged for discussion: (a) LGBT resource centers fulfill a number of roles for LGBT students; (b) LGBT resource centers enhance the experiences of LGBT students who seek out their services, resources, and programming; (c) the staff of LGBT resource centers influence the ways in which students interpret and understand their experiences with the centers; (d) LGBT resource centers provide a sense of visibility and voice on campus; (e) LGBT resource centers reinforce LGBT student identity; (f) the location of and community associated with the center impact the atmosphere of the LGBT resource center; (g) despite their presence on campuses some LGBT students have no or only limited involvement with LGBT resource centers; and (h) the placement of LGBT resource centers within larger multicultural centers may impact how centers are utilized and perceived. It is also important to note that the results of this study are unique to the institutions in question, which is consistent with qualitative studies.

Roles of LGBT Resource Centers

On the basis of the research findings, it is important to note the ways students interpreted and made use of the LGBT resource centers on their campuses varied significantly among participants. This was particularly true with regard to the reasons students sought out services, resources, and programming. With regard to the idea of center as a resource, some participants expressed the idea that centers were important as part of their support networks. In some instances, support referred to an attentive listener, often someone who could function as an empathetic listener, share information about the college environment, or provide useful advice on any number of issues. To others, the idea of resource focused on information resources, such as those located in the library collections at each center as well as LGBT-related information in the form of pamphlets or brochures. In general, the idea of LGBT centers serving as educational resources was nearly universal. The center was the obvious place for participants dealing with issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, because the directors and staff of the centers were knowledgeable and concerned about the personal and educational well being of students. As such, it was seen as essential for LGBT resource centers to maintain an up-to-date and functional library space that allows students to learn more about LGBT history, culture, and identity. Moreover, the availability of counseling and testing services, particularly when free, presented opportunities to receive these services when needed, from individuals presumably sensitive to the unique needs of LGBT students. Unfortunately, the availability and perceptions of such services beyond those offered through LGBT resource centers was not explored as part of this study.

The varied nature of student interactions and experiences associated with the LGBT resource centers that participated as part of this study are consistent with Sanlo et al. (2002) and

Zemsky (2004), who indicated that the composition of LGBT student communities and their needs differ from campus to campus. As a result, the nature of the services and programming available through LGBT centers varies as well. Although Sanlo et al. (2002) emphasized that information, counseling, and referral services are commonly associated with centers, not all LGBT resource centers have the funding, staff, and resources available to offer such services the same way or to the same degree. Nevertheless, participants at all three sites associated their LGBT centers with the availability of information, counseling, and referral services as available, even if they did not exploit such services themselves. Moreover, as Zemsky indicated, LGBT resource centers are often responsible for services and programming beyond information, counseling, and referral, including such services as recruitment initiatives, scholarship programs, new and first-year LGBT student orientation programs, LGBT student support groups (often addressing issues of intersectionality and the needs of specific LGBT sub-communities), leadership and mentoring programs, and LGBT social, cultural, and educational events, to name only a few. Nevertheless, it is a challenge for LGBT resource centers to meet the needs of LGBT students, and they must, therefore, work to be as inclusive as possible. Regardless, the diversity of roles associated with the LGBT resource centers for these students was consistent with the phenomenon of LGBT resource centers presented in the secondary literature. Additionally, these differences were reinforced by the administrative structures in which the individual centers operate; some centers were divisions of diversity and inclusion offices while others functioned as entities of offices of student affairs.

Another important role associated with the LGBT resource center is its role as a “home away from home.” As demonstrated by L. D. Patton (2004) in her study of BCCs, Black students interpreted their BCCs on their campuses as a “home away from home,” citing a number

of reasons, including the atmosphere of the centers, the community of people using the space, and the familial nature of the office staff. Although the ways in which the idea of home manifested in participant interviews for this study varied, nearly all indicated that the LGBT center functioned as a safe space where they could relax or “chill.” By comparing the space to home, students suggested that the space was a welcoming space where they could exist without concern of judgments, or fear of physical or emotional hostilities. In essence, the LGBT center was a place where they could be themselves without having to make concessions with regard to their sense of identity as a member of the LGBT community, something that some communicated was difficult in other spaces on campus. Students could simply be who they are among others who identified similarly.

Also central to the role of the LGBT resource center was its ability to provide community. This is particularly important for LGBT students who are often understood to be an invisible and silent minority (Rankin, 2005; Rhoades, 1994; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). A sense of community, in turn, fulfilled a number of needs for students who made use of the LGBT centers. Above all, finding a community allowed participants to feel as though they were not alone, which was particularly important for students struggling with their identity as members of the broader LGBT community. In doing so, students realized that there are others experiencing the same kinds of issues they were. Additionally, the function role of LGBT resource centers as a source of community represented a source of friends who also identify as LGBT. Establishing a network of LGBT friends was important to participants, who commented that such friendships provided support vis-à-vis shared experiences.

All three LGBT resource centers highlighted in this study effectively fulfilled a number of roles for students. However, the degree to which individual centers did so varied based on the

mission of the center, how students interpreted the intention of a specific center, and the degree to which the centers were organized to function in multiple ways. For example, all three centers functioned as social spaces and safe spaces; however, the degree to which students interpreted a specific center as a “home away from home” was informed directly by the mission of the center.

The GLBTSSSO at Indiana University was least often described as a home away from home. Rather, most students commented on the “homey” atmosphere of the center. The mission statement for the GLBTSSSO does not include in its purpose a statement about functioning as a safe space or social entity. Participant statements reinforced this fact, many of which indicated their use of the center to be tied directly to their work as volunteers. However, the location of the GLBTSSSO in a physical house created the atmosphere that a number of Indiana University participants equated to home.

Enhancing the Experiences of LGBT Students

As a result of the many roles that centers fulfill for students, LGBT resource centers enhance the experiences of students who seek out resources, services, and programming. The ways in which this enhancement occurred were once again several. Some participants indicated the presence of an LGBT resource center made them feel like they mattered in the eyes of the administration and that the institution was invested in their success and happiness as part of the campus community. Not only did participants view the center as a place where they could learn about their identity, they saw the center as a celebration of LGBT identity. By feeling as though they are valuable parts of the university community, students experienced greater happiness with regard to their perceptions of campus climate. Subsequently, students were more likely to remain enrolled in their institutions knowing that the LGBT resource centers were an available

resources to help them perform better academically. In recounting her experiences at Purdue, Brit shared that she decided to return to campus as a result of the LGBT center, saying,

I think that it's important making connections with people. I almost transferred to IUPUI last year, like I had everything set up and sent in, but then I was like okay, I'm going to give it a little bit more time. Then I did and I enjoyed it, but originally it was my classes with the women's studies classes. My first class I took in women's studies was the LGBT studies class. It was phenomenal and I loved it. Then I slowly started coming here and I started making these connections that really kind of began with women's studies, but then ended up becoming the people [of the LGBT center]. That definitely, the connection, is what it's all about.

Beyond the aforementioned ideas of establishing a sense of community, providing a dedicated safe space, and educating the campus and surrounding communities about LGBT history, culture, and needs, all of which were key concepts cited by participants that enhanced their experiences of as students, many indicated that the LGBT resource centers enriched their experiences in other ways as well. Moreover, these methods of enrichment varied based on the mission of the specific center. For some, the center represented a place to obtain valuable leadership skills, particularly on the campus of the University of Illinois, where students indicated a strong commitment to activism and advocacy. Brian recalled the importance of the center at the University of Illinois in building his leadership skills, saying,

Just coming to college, I knew that I was not prepared for leadership of any kind. I'm really, really bad at meeting people. I think as far as the pressure is concerned, because I just don't work well with that. But I sort of stepped up to the plate and I've really, really benefited a lot from that.

Stephanie shared her experience helping to advocate for the needs of the transgender community at the University of Illinois, stating,

One of the big things was that I didn't feel like as a trans person as represented within the organizations and sort of the climate on campus, which is a common trans problem.

That's why I started CUT*ES, because I wanted to give transpersons a voice and have a community of their own. I think it works spectacularly.

On the campus of Indiana University, students also cited the value of the center as a place to volunteer or work as an intern, which provided important job experience that would benefit them upon graduation, and likely sooner.

Staff of LGBT Resource Centers

An important theme identified by participants was the value placed in LGBT resource center staff. This finding is consistent with L. D. Patton (2004), who found that the staff of BCCs were important to the experiences of Black students at PWIs, often influencing their decision and supporting them in an environment where they see themselves as different and underrepresented. The LGBT student participants of this study likewise positively expressed their opportunities to interact with staff to discuss their problems. Staff were described as invested in the experiences of students and genuinely cared about their personal and academic success. For many, this presence of caring individuals in a dedicated space reinforced the idea that the LGBT resource center is a home away from home for some LGBT students. This was particularly true of center directors. As all three identify as members of the LGBT community, participants acknowledged the importance of their ability to speak and relate to the experiences of the students with whom they interact. However, based on interview data, references to the value of support staff members were frequent or prominent. Although it is unclear why support

staff members were referenced only infrequently, it is possible that this phenomenon is a result of their non-LGBT identities.

Although professional staff was not the focus of the current study, two of the directors were able to provide some insights into the experiences of LGBT students who seek the services available at LGBT resource centers. One staff member in particular described the value of the work associated with the LGBT center and the role of the staff in accomplishing that work, especially as it related to creating a welcoming and caring environment:

It's like the pebble in the pond kind of thing. I'm very proud of the work that goes on here. I think it's pretty easy to provide a safe place, and I work very hard at making sure when this place was renovated a few years ago we kept the homey atmosphere here.

Some of the students who come into our office don't feel welcome in their own home. I want them to feel welcome here. We do that, and they feel welcome.

Regardless of the specific work, this comment and others shared in conversations with staff communicated the welcoming nature of the centers and the value the staff placed on creating such an environment.

Participant interviews revealed only two exceptions regarding the importance of staff. Of the three research sites, only one support staff member factored prominently into student comments. Students identified the administrative assistant at Purdue University, Makeba, as positively impacting their experiences at the center. Specifically, students commented on the open-door policy she maintains and her willingness to talk to them when they need help or an attentive ear. Participants referenced the support staff at the remaining sites only once.

Providing Visibility and Voice

A fourth finding of this study relates to the role of the LGBT resource center in providing visibility and voice to the LGBT community. As outlined in Chapter 2, researchers have generally demonstrated that LGBT students, faculty, and staff perceive and rank campus climate lower than their heterosexual and gender-conforming peers (Rankin, 2003, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Reason & Rankin, 2006). The perception of campus climate, therefore, can greatly influence the ways in which students understand and interact with the campus environment. Participants commented extensively on the campus climate for LGBT students. Although nearly all students interviewed expressed their view that the campus was fairly accepting of the LGBT community, subsequent comments revealed that the campuses still experienced examples of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia and the multiple ways in which these phobias were manifest. Additionally, when examples of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia did not occur regularly, it was easy to forget about them. As such, these experiences did not appear to greatly influence participants' assessment of campus climate. What emerged was an understanding of the campus climate as generally positive for LGBT students, but that they were also not immune to various forms of harassment (e.g., microaggressions, hate speech, uncomfortable staring). Transgender students in particular communicated fear for safety and frustration due to lack of understanding. This finding is consistent with those of Rankin et al. (2010), who found that transgender individuals are four times more likely to experience harassment on college campuses.

Nevertheless, students perceived campus climate to be positive as a result of the LGBT resource centers. Many students commented that the presence of an LGBT center not only communicated not only a sense of investment in LGBT students but also served as a reminder to

administrators of the LGBT community when implementing policy and developing resources. Students also expressed comfort in knowing that there was a professional staff member available to advocate for them when issues affecting the LGBT community surfaced. Not only do LGBT centers serve as a symbol for LGBT students of their place on campus, but they also serve as an indication for other members of campus that the LGBT individuals are valued members of the campus community.

Moreover, the participants who made use of the LGBT resource centers often communicated an interest in doing so based on an interest in LGBT history and culture. In essence, they sought to establish relationships with the centers because they focused specifically on the LGBT community in its various forms. Such involvement included participation in sponsored programs, activity with a designated gay pride month, and involvement with LGBT student organizations that maintained partnerships with the LGBT center. Through the center, some learned about academic programs dealing with issues of women, gender, and sexuality, which often maintained some type of relationship with the LGBT resource center. Such was the case for Kaleb, who said,

It got me interested in, because I've never heard of what a GWS [gender and women's studies] was before coming here and I came in as a physics student. Then I switched to humanities and it felt so much better. Then here I learned about the gender and women studies program and it affected some of the classes that I've taken, and I'm like from there just getting interested in issues regarding class, disability status, and so much more.

Through such activities and associations, LGBT students communicated an ability to explore topics of interest to them.

Interestingly, few participants were able to recount the history associated with creation of the LGBT resource centers on their campus, often in spite of recent and upcoming celebrations of historical milestones (e.g., 20-year anniversary festivities) or participation as employees and volunteers. Given the interest in understanding LGBT history and culture shared by some participants, it was surprising to learn that so few students were knowledgeable about their center's history. Extensive scrapbooks outlining the activities of the center year by year are available at Indiana University, and a general timeline of events associated with founding of the center is available on the center webpage at the University of Illinois. Even at the recently established center at Purdue University, few students could recall the events that led to the creation of the center. Although participants communicated an interest in learning more about the LGBT community, the trend appears to focus mostly on personal identity, national and international events, and popular media issues.

The lack of historical knowledge of the establishment of the LGBT resource centers represents a missed opportunity for center directors to emphasize the importance of having an LGBT center on campus and its significance for communicating to the broader campus community the value placed on LGBT individuals. As L. D. Patton (2004) communicated about BCCs, such centers were perceived by African American students to be historical symbols of Black student presence on campuses. Consequently, Black students expressed a need to retain such centers as vital components of college and university campuses. Ensuring that LGBT students likewise understand the significance of LGBT centers as well as the challenges associated with establishing such center is imperative. Imparting this knowledge helps students understand the history of local LGBT movements and reinforces the value of the LGBT center as a symbol of LGBT student presence and vitality on the campus.

Affirming LGBT Identity

A fifth finding of this study involves the role of the LGBT resource center in affirming a positive LGBT identity for students who utilize the services and programming of the centers. Tatum (1997) asserted that identity development is a complex, multidimensional process “shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts” (p. 18) that coalesce over the course of one’s lifetime. Erikson (1968) indicated that this process involves “simultaneous reflection and observation” and is “for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful or elated, ‘identity-consciousness’” (p. 22). This sense of identity consciousness is tied directly to the acknowledgement of identity traits that are associated with either the dominant or the subordinate social group. In turn, subordinate identity traits differentiate one from the dominant social group, which is the group that “holds the power and authority in society relative to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used” (Tatum, 1997, p. 23). Likewise, these identity traits that differentiate one was subordinate also distinguish one was having a quality of “otherness”: race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability. Accordingly,

each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it: racism, sexism, religious oppression/anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, respectively. In each case, there is a group considered dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership) and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged). (Tatum, 1997, p. 22)

Furthermore, members of marginalized communities often find themselves as part of one or more dominant groups while simultaneously as members of one or more targeted groups

(Johnson, 2006; Tatum, 1997). The culmination of these privileged traits has resulted in what Lorde (1995) has described as the mythical norm, which in the United States is most often the thin, young, White man who is also heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. According to Lorde (1995)

it is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. (p. 446)

In essence, one's identity is tied directly to power hierarchies that may or may not be consciously acknowledged and that resonate a complex system of privilege and disadvantage reinforced by the presence or absence of individual identity markers.

Critical race theory and its various splinter discourses, in turn, examine the relationships between various identity markers and cultural power structures in an effort to understand and change such relationships (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). According to Carbado (2002), "taking identity privileges for granted helps to legitimize certain problematic assumptions about identity and entitlement. These assumptions make it difficult for us to challenge the starting points of many of our most controversial conversations about equality" (p. 221). Thus, in order to transform society and its institutions, one must first acknowledge and challenge his or her various privileges, specifically those qualities perpetuated by the mythical norm. With regard to the LGBT community, the discourses of queer theory and queer-crit position in place of whiteness, which serves as the primary privileged group in terms of race, the privilege of heterosexuality, which Carbado (2002) characterized as "the 'what is' or 'what is supposed to

be' of sexuality" (p. 233). As such, those who are not heterosexual are inherently disadvantaged by society.

However, not all symptoms of disadvantage are overt; sometimes discrimination, in its various guises, manifests subtly in the form of microaggressions. As defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) within the context of race, microaggressions are "small acts of racism, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, welling up from the assumptions about racial matters most of us absorb from the cultural heritage in which we come of age in the United States" (p. 2). In the context of sexuality, microaggressions manifest as subtle acts of homophobia and heterosexism. Regardless of whether discriminatory acts occur as microaggressions or more overt acts of prejudice and intolerance, they serve as obstacles to those striving to navigate their roles as students.

In many ways, LGBT resources centers, like other culture centers, serve as identity spaces or counterspaces where students can challenge the mythical norm. As Lozano (2010) indicated, marginalized students can feel included on their campus as part of a specific subculture while feeling simultaneously excluded from the greater campus community as a direct result of those identity markers that brand them as marginalized. As revealed in Chapter 2, Reason and Rankin (2006) asserted that students require a non-discriminatory environment in order to be successful. Therefore, in an effort to address these feelings of alienation and isolation, marginalized students will often seek out a community of students who identify similarly (Lozano, 2010). This community, in turn, serves as the non-discriminatory environment needed to be successful. Therefore, LGBT resource centers (and other types of culture centers) provide spaces where students can shed their marginalized status and build a community that fosters a positive identity. Moreover, these centers empower marginalized

students with opportunities to construct counterstories that likewise challenge dominant historical and cultural narratives that often lack references to people like them (Degaldo & Stefancic, 2001).

In this study, a number of students expressed the importance of the LGBT resource center as a means of learning more about their sense of identity and understanding their role in the LGBT community better. Such was the case for Heather, who shared that she learned to better understand how she fit into the community. She said,

I didn't know anything about [the transgender population]. [Transgender boyfriend] has had to walk me through a ton of stuff. That's one of the reasons I like this library. We can get books on it, and I can read books. I'm like, "I don't understand this. You're going to have to explain it to me." He's like, "I brought these movies because I was at the movie, and I saw them. I thought maybe they would help you. I saw this on Netflix, and we can watch it. Here's this book I got from the library." Things like that, where I can learn about it, but not have to ask stupid questions.

This was particularly true for members of the transgender community, a community that some participants expressed as largely misunderstood even within the broader LGBT community. Tyler described the impact of the center on her experiences, saying, "It was nice being at the center just in the social area, not necessarily in a professional setting, [which] has helped me figure out more of who I am." Through the resources and services available through the centers, LGBT students have been able to learn more about themselves and how they fit under the LGBT umbrella. However, too frequently LGBT resources neglect certain aspects of the community; often bisexual and transgender students feel marginalized even within the LGBT community due to lack of understanding or uninformed assumptions about their needs and identity. B. Beemyn

et al. (2005) and G. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) emphasized that transgender students in particular feel marginalized since their inclusion as part of the LGBT community is based on issues of gender identity and expression rather than those associated with sexual orientation. As indicated in Chapter 5, Kelly shared her perception that bisexual and transgender students are more marginalized than gay and lesbian students saying:

I think there's a little bit of like biphobia from both sides of it. I'm like, if you're gay you may not want to date someone who's bisexual. If you're straight, you're less likely to believe that they are bisexual. And . . . I feel trans is a very misunderstood topic and it's very hard to explain. I was out sitting down talking to someone for 10 to 15 minutes. It's really hard to explain what trans encompasses and how that separates and what all that means and how it happens. People pretty easily understood gay, though, from my experiences.

By having trained counselors available (or via referral) as well as a variety of print and media resources in the center library, many of the participants expressed that they were able to discover more about themselves and their identity as members of the LGBT community than they previously thought possible.

Location and Community Impact on Atmosphere

Based on participant interviews, a sixth key finding relates to the importance of location and physical space to the impact of LGBT resource centers on LGBT student experiences. It has been already discussed that LGBT centers often function as safe and social spaces for the LGBT community. As such, the centers in the study either worked to establish a welcoming atmosphere that invites people to use the space or created designated common or social spaces where students can lounge or commune; some have worked to achieve both. Nevertheless, at

times there is a noticeable separation between center roles communicated in mission statements and intended uses of LGBT resource center spaces. For example, the placement of the LGBT center at Indiana University suggests an interest in creating a social space; however, as outlined in Chapter 4, the creation of the center was rather contentious and the space has remained primarily a resource and services center rather than functioning as a social space. Based on observations, few individuals visited the center during the research period and some student volunteers indicated that the center often remained empty beyond staff, interns, and volunteers. In fact, only one student used the space as a lounge between classes, sharing that he believed that the space was not utilized enough. As one volunteer shared, the center was often visited during the winter only as a place where students could warm themselves between classes.

Based on the reputation of the center at Indiana University as well as the space available due to its physical location within a house, it was surprising to see such little activity happening within the center. As a long-standing and reputable center, one might expect the LGBT center to be bustling with activity; however, this was not the case. Rather the space remained rather quiet, receiving only occasional visitors. With the presence of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction on the campus of Indiana University as well, it seems probable that individuals beyond the regular campus community would exploit the resources available through the center. While again this is perhaps the result of the center's creation as a resource center rather than as a culture center, the space has the possibility to lend itself to fulfilling other roles beyond those associated with the center currently; however, this would likely require some re-visioning of the space available and reorganization of office spaces specifically. As shared in Chapter 5, Xander stated that there were many days when he "[sits] in front of a computer for five hours at a time." He went on to indicate a desire to see the LGBT resource center become

something more than its current role, saying “it would be great to see it become more of a culture center than a resource center.” Furthermore, after expressing his perception that the center helps to address issues of equality, he continued by saying, “I think it would be ideal if a LGBT center could become something that was more about history and a cultural thing than how to help people just deal with being something.”

Similarly, participant responses revealed the importance of LGBT resource centers’ location. The LGBT center at the University of Illinois is located along a short corridor in an isolated portion of the uppermost floor of the Illini Union. Given its placement in an active location, such as the student union, it appears that more thought could have been given to the specific space designated for the LGBT center. Its current location makes it difficult to find, a detail communicated by one participant in particular who cited difficulty locating the center during the first three attempts. Moreover, the student indicated that the center frequently remains closed during hours of operation. As a result, the student started to open the center herself in order to make use of the space. Although the pseudo-isolated nature of the center may be appealing to LGBT students who have not yet widely disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity, the seclusion of the space as well as inconsistent staffing was frustrating for those who wished to engage with the center.

Additionally, participant responses indicated that the allocated space for LGBT resource centers must be appropriate to the intended function of the centers. As demonstrated by comments from students at Purdue University, the space was perceived to be too small. One student in particular acknowledged that the space would not likely accommodate the number of students anticipated to use the services of the center. He went on, however, to say “this intimate space kind of forces you to interact with people, because it would be awkward if you’re sitting

10 feet from someone and y'all haven't talked for 20 minutes. It kind of forces you to make new friends." Nevertheless, it is essential for LGBT resource centers to receive the appropriate space necessary to accomplish the goals of their missions, programming, and services. Once again, it is important to acknowledge that the LGBT center at Purdue has relocated to a larger and more easily accessible facility since the time of data collection.

Finally, it is important to note that some participants at the University of Illinois indicated that the students who frequented the center had the potential to dissuade new students to make use of the services and programming of the LGBT resource center. Specifically, participants identified issues of cliquishness as well as excessive noise, both of which were characterized as discomforting and off-putting for new visitors of the center. At one point, one female newcomer was observed entering the space, but she immediately walked out of the facility after appearing overwhelmed by the noise radiating from the common area. On another occasion, students working on homework elected to sit in the hallway. When asked why they were sitting in the hall rather than the center, the students indicated that it was simply too loud for them to think. As such, the reference to noise levels explains the tendency of the administrative assistant to keep the door to her office space closed. On the basis of these comments and observations, it is important that LGBT resource centers maintain an appropriately appealing atmosphere as well as one free of alienating behaviors in order to guarantee that students in need of the services of the center are able to access them when necessary.

Limited Student Involvement

Another important finding of the study addresses the nature of student involvement with LGBT resource centers. Despite the large student populations of the universities in this study, it was clear that only a small number of LGBT students engaged with the services and

programming available through the LGBT resource centers. This is consistent with L. D. Patton's (2004) study of Black culture centers. Although a criterion for participation in this study was student use of the LGBT resource center, participant responses revealed a wide range of engagement levels. Many students on campus, including those who participated, made only limited use of the centers and their resources. Although some were frequent users of the centers, some visited as little as one time per month, and one student expressed a preference to use the online services of the center as well as social media (e.g., Grindr, Tender, Scruff) to access the information and community they desired. Those who used the LGBT centers less frequently cited a number of reasons, including lack of time, active schedules, and involvement in other student organizations, often LGBT student groups on campus or the surrounding community. Regardless, those who did use the LGBT centers frequently indicated that the centers were an important fixture in their experiences as well as, for some, reasons for continuing enrollment as students at their universities.

LGBT Resource Center Verses Multicultural Center

The final finding of this study involves the relationship between LGBT resource centers and the potential placement of LGBT student services within the context of a multicultural or intercultural center. Participant responses were decisively strong when communicating the idea that previously established LGBT resource centers should remain autonomous entities on campuses. Once again, the reasons given in support of this position varied and included concerns about the loss of LGBT visibility and voice, fear for personal safety if asked to operate in an environment with other potentially unaccepting culture groups, some of which maintain strong anti-LGBT values, and a perceived concern among White students that they would not be welcomed in a space specifically intended for marginalized groups. In particular, this concern

resonated strongly with students at the University of Illinois, who indicated that the possibility of consolidating the LGBT resource center into a new, state-of-the-art facility had been discussed recently. Although some students indicated that a larger, updated space would be welcomed, there was concern that there would also be a loss of community as a result of such a move. It is important to note, however, that the three research sites for this study had independent LGBT resource centers, which likely influenced the comments and perceptions shared by participants during their interviews.

CHAPTER 7

LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of self-disclosing, undergraduate LGBT students at four-year Midwestern Research I universities. This study focused on how LGBT students understood the role and purpose of, made use of the programming and services available through, and interpreted the significance of the interactions with the LGBT resource centers on their campuses. LGBT resource centers slowly became fixtures on college campuses beginning in the early 1970s and have served as a safe space for LGBT students since that time. Nevertheless, little research has addressed the topic of LGBT resource centers in the 40 years since their creation. This chapter provides a closing summary of the study as well as outlines recommendations for institutions with LGBT resource centers, student affairs professionals, and future research.

Limitations

Three limitations define the current study. First, as the center directors recommended some of the participants, there is likelihood for a degree of nominator bias. As a result, it is possible that directors referred only those students who would speak positively and knowledgably about the centers. Fortunately, this does not appear to be the case; however, it must be acknowledged as a possibility. Had other individuals been consulted to identify potential participants, a more diverse pool of students could have been established. However, as each LGBT center had only one person in a director role, it is unlikely that others could have

been consulted to make recommendations. Nevertheless, to counter this nominator bias, I employed a recruitment letter and asked each student interviewed to refer other LGBT students to this study; research participants were obtained through a combination of director nomination, the recruitment letter, and student recommendations.

A second limitation is the amount of time available at each center. A more extensive study would have permitted interactions with more students of varying experiences with regard to their interactions with the LGBT centers. On one hand, weather conditions impacted traffic within the center as well as influenced the visitation schedule for each research site. Additionally, an opportunity to visit additional LGBT resource centers throughout the Midwest would have enriched the findings of the study. This is particularly true due to the greater than average concentration of LGBT resource centers in the Midwest region of the country.

A third limitation of the study involves participant disclosure of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Unlike other marginalized groups, which are often visibly recognizable, members of the LGBT community are often less easily identifiable. In fact, LGBT students are often considered an invisible and silent minority (Rankin, 2005; Rhoades, 1994; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). Therefore, it was essential to the study that students identify themselves for participation as well as utilize the services of the LGBT centers on their campuses.

Recommendations for Institutions with LGBT Resource Centers

Several implications for institutions of higher education emerged as a result of this study, particularly those that have established LGBT resource centers on their campuses. Based on participant responses, LGBT resource centers are an important fixture in the university experiences of undergraduate LGBT students. As such, universities must provide the resources

and support necessary to maintain and enhance services, resources, and programming. Additionally, institutions must ensure that LGBT resource centers have adequate space and budgets to successfully complete the work they are charged to do as outlined by their mission statements and the needs of those who utilize the centers. By keeping the centers appropriately funded and allocating adequate space, universities demonstrate a vested interest in helping LGBT resource centers remain permanent fixtures on campuses as well as meeting the needs of LGBT students. Moreover, by providing the resources that support personal and professional development related to the mission of the institutions, LGBT centers can function as important recruitment and retention tools, especially when competing with other institutions with reputable LGBT centers.

Based on the historical documents related to the establishment of the LGBT center at Indiana University, administrators must be prepared to cope with opponents of such facilities and advocate for their presence on campus as well as their value to LGBT students and broader campus community. Administrators must be prepared to discuss issues of climate on their campuses, which are largely heteronormative and heterocentric as well as homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic that make learning and development for LGBT students difficult. Subsequently, administrators must be able to not only justify the presence of an LGBT resource center, but to also maintain that position in the face of adversity. Campus administrators must work with LGBT center directors to guarantee that strong policy is established to support the presence of LGBT centers. They must also be proactive and anticipate challenges related to establishing and maintaining LGBT resource centers. Moreover, administrators must acknowledge that while policy to promote diversity and inclusion may already be in place, active measures must be taken to guarantee that such initiatives are implemented effectively across the entire institution. As

such, LGBT resource centers communicate an active investment in the needs of the LGBT campus community and can facilitate diversity initiatives.

As LGBT resource centers and other culture centers are the often the target of program prioritization efforts, there is potential for these centers to be consolidated under the auspices of multicultural centers. Such centers are “one-size-fits-all” approaches to acknowledging the presence of historically marginalized groups on campuses. Although most multicultural centers are designated to serve the needs of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other ethnic minorities, some also provide support for women and LGBT students (Mena, 2010). However, as L. D. Patton (2004) indicated, combining multiple culture groups into a single culture center may erase the rich history of the groups, often resulting in a sense of cultural homogenization. In turn, the message communicated to the groups supported under the umbrella of the multicultural or intercultural center is conformity. Such a center assumes that the needs of a wide range of students can be met the same way. Administrations, therefore, must recognize that historically underrepresented groups have rich cultural heritages and histories of oppression that may be difficult to recognize and celebrate through the singular programs of multicultural centers (L. D. Patton, 2004). This is particularly true for the LGBT community, which is persecuted in some cultures. By maintaining an independent LGBT resource center specifically as well as other individual culture centers, university administrators communicate a sense of commitment to diversity as an important campus value. As evidenced by this study, students had meaningful experiences in these spaces that played a valuable role in the lives of the students who visited the centers. Therefore, institutions and administrators considering combining individual culture centers need to assess the implications of such a consolidation on student development and the needs of students who utilize the centers and rely upon their

services and programming. This is imperative for LGBT resource centers and other types of culture centers as well.

Finally, an implication of this study concerns the importance of staffing LGBT resource centers. As demonstrated by the present study, the staff members of LGBT resource centers play an important role in the experiences of LGBT students. Therefore, it is essential for the staff of LGBT resource centers to be knowledgeable with regard to LGBT history and culture as well as the developmental needs of LGBT college students. Additionally, these individuals must be familiar with issues affecting campus climate and university policies affecting LGBT students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, people hired to work in LGBT resource centers must be friendly and inviting and dedicated to creating an atmosphere in which students can feel as though they are at home. The directors of the LGBT resource centers investigated as part of this study were all members of the LGBT community, which participants in this study cited as contributing greatly to their work as directors. Regardless, it is essential for LGBT center directors and staff to relate to the challenges and experiences of the LGBT community. Moreover, staff must work to foster a healthy and productive environment for those students who make use of the services, resources, and programming available through LGBT resource centers.

Institutions must also be sensitive to issues of staffing in order to adequately reflect the diversity of the LGBT community; based on the diversity inherent to the LGBT community itself, center staff and volunteers should reflect that diversity. As some participants expressed, bisexual and transgender students are largely misunderstood and often underrepresented even within the LGBT resource centers. Therefore, it is important for institutions to consider this issue when hiring directors and other center staff. Efforts must be made to communicate the intentionality that the centers are available to serve more than just gay White men.

Representations of women, people of color, and even people of faith should be available to communicate the intention of LGBT resource centers as inclusive spaces for the entire LGBT community regardless of sex, gender, ethnicity, and the like. Doing so will help to prevent further marginalization of women, people of color, and people of faith as well as members of the transgender community.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

This study revealed a number of implications for student affairs professionals, particularly those who serve as the directors of LGBT resource centers. As indicated above, it is first essential for LGBT center directors to possess a strong working knowledge of the historical and present role of LGBT centers on campus. By understanding the circumstances surrounding the establishment of centers, as well as their role on the campus, both historically and in the present, directors are better able to articulate the value of LGBT centers and the work associated with them, particularly at a time when institutions are partaking in program prioritization efforts that can make them vulnerable. Additionally, these individuals must be aware of issues of campus climate as well as LGBT student development theories in order to be impactful in their roles as directors. Moreover, these individuals must be welcoming and friendly to maintain active relationships with LGBT students. Likewise, it is critical to guarantee that LGBT students as well as the larger campus community are aware of the services, resources, and programming available via LGBT resource centers. Such a presence helps to assure that services are not only reaching those who need them.

Additionally, LGBT center directors must regularly assess the needs of LGBT students on their campus to guarantee the LGBT centers remain relevant as campus entities. Since LGBT students are inherently different, a fact reinforced by the diversity of the LGBT umbrella itself,

programming must be planned to address the multivalent nature of the community.

Consequently, it is essential that the needs of these students be regularly assessed to assure the relevance of services and programming. Moreover, as the ever-increasing challenge of decreasing university budgets continues to affect program funding, LGBT center directors must work to assess the programming they develop in order to justify the continued existence of the programming well as the center itself (Marcy, 2004). Center directors must be accountable for the ways in which funding is used as well as the impact on students and the campus community, especially when their programs are being evaluated. It is not enough to state that centers and programming are important. Empirical evidence must be provided to validate such claims, including the tracking of center usage statistics and event attendance like that tracked by the centers for this study. Similarly, survey data assessing participant responses to programming help campus administrators quantify and communicate the relevance and significance of LGBT resource centers and the work that occurs in them. Therefore, center directors need to collect data that can inform the work of their LGBT resource centers. Compiling such data will aid in assessing the usefulness of programming and services offered through the center as well as help to reinforce the fundamental need for maintaining the LGBT resource center on campus.

LGBT center directors should also work to build relationships with a variety of campus units. By fostering strong relationships with other programs, centers, and offices, LGBT center directors can more effectively promote the mission of their centers. For example, working with the BCC, directors may be able to develop programming that addresses issues of intersectionality. Similarly, LGBT center directors may work with student success programs in order to better fulfill the needs of first-year LGBT students, particularly those struggling socially or academically as a result of process of transitioning to college. However, LGBT center

directors must also work to address the needs of students on their own as well since collaborative relationships may not always be available or productive. Regardless, the goal of collaboration must be fostering positive experiences for LGBT students as well as promoting the LGBT resource center as a valuable part of campus.

Another recommendation for LGBT resource center directors involves remaining cognizant of changes in campus climate, particularly when changes are perceived as potentially insignificant. As evidenced by participant responses, perceptions of campus climate may change when considering instances of microaggressions and other manifestations of heterosexism, homophobia, and discrimination. Therefore, center directors should work to remain in contact with LGBT students, faculty, and staff in order to understand how microaggressions are affecting LGBT students and the roles that LGBT resource centers play in addressing these microaggressions.

A final recommendation for student affairs professionals working at or in conjunction with LGBT resource centers involves reassessing fundamental student needs. Colleges and universities are settings where students generally work to achieve high-level goals. The role of student affairs practitioners is to assist students in reaching these goals. Unfortunately, for some LGBT students, these fundamental needs are not being met. Therefore, student affairs professionals should consider Maslow's (1954, 1970) hierarchical theory of needs as a way of informing their work with LGBT students. If college students are expected to achieve self-actualization through their work as students, meeting the more fundamental needs of safety, belonging as part of a family and/or community, and self-esteem and respect is paramount. As communicated by participants in this study, LGBT resource centers and the work they accomplish fulfill these needs. Students indicated that the LGBT centers served as safe spaces as

well as provided a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, participants expressed feelings of greater confidence by learning more about their sense of identity. Therefore, LGBT center directors and other university administrators must not only consider LGBT centers as facilitating students' efforts to reach self-actualization but also consider the ways in which they meet basic needs that may or may not be met in other ways.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study reveals a number of recommendations for future research. First, due to the limited time available to complete this study, a longitudinal study would provide invaluable information about the development and evolution of LGBT resource center programming as well as the impact of LGBT centers on undergraduate student experiences from a generational perspective. This is very much a possibility for the center at Purdue University, especially given its very recent establishment and active programming. Moreover, additional time would have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the three sites by permitting interactions with more students and more extended observation of the day-to-day activities of the centers. Additionally, the investigation of additional research sites throughout the Midwest as well as institutions in other regions of the country would have augmented the study significantly by providing data about a more diverse body of institutions and student types. Likewise, interactions with additional key informants, such as graduate students, alumni, administrators, and center staff, would have provided invaluable insight into the ways in which LGBT resource centers factor into the experiences of individuals beyond LGBT undergraduate students.

Another possibility for future research includes exploring the role that LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of non-LGBT students, such as allies. Issues that could be explored in such a study include the ways in which LGBT resource centers enhance multicultural

understanding, or the ways in which LGBT centers influence and inform LGBT activism and advocacy efforts by non-LGBT individuals. Allies maintain an important presence in some LGBT resource centers and student organizations. Therefore, it is possible to posit that interactions with LGBT resource centers are similarly impactful for such students.

Based on inconsistencies in participant responses concerning campus climate, additional research regarding campus climate is in order as well. In particular, an exploration of the impact of microaggressions would provide a more nuanced understanding of campus climate, especially on campuses reporting a generally positive climate for LGBT individuals. Similarly, exploring campus climate from the perspective of relativity would provide greater insight into how individuals from different areas perceive a campus's climate in comparison to another location. This would provide campus administrators and student affairs professionals with a greater awareness of how students perceive campus climate relative to their hometowns or some other location. Such research could assist those who assess campus climate by informing expansions or alterations to current campus climate survey instruments.

An exploration of intersectionalities between LGBT and other identity markers could also prove to be useful. Some participants indicated that their identity as members of the LGBT community superseded their identity in terms of race and ethnicity while others indicated a strong relationship between their sense of identity as a member of the LGBT community and their religious affiliation. Exploring such intersectionalities could inform our understanding of how students weight multiple identities in relationship to one another. Similarly, additional research may also explain why few students of color made use of LGBT resource centers, at least as demonstrated by this study. Such issues to be explored could include the climate of individual

centers with regard to race and ethnicity as well as the impact of homophobia on LGBT members of a particular racial or ethnic group.

Another recommendation for further research involves exploring the needs of student affairs professionals doing the work associated with LGBT resource centers. In part, this involves examining training currently available in student affairs graduate programs as well as professional development programs available through professional organizations, conferences, and workshops. Additionally, identifying current directors and asking what they perceive their needs to be would greatly inform the ways in which researchers understand LGBT resource centers as well as LGBT student support services in general. Moreover, research concerning promising and innovative practices in the direction of LGBT resource centers should be explored.

Finally, research that addresses the experiences of students who engage in LGBT student services offered as part of a multicultural center compared to those who engage with programming via independent LGBT centers would provide an understanding of how students navigate the sensitive issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in spaces often associated with race and ethnicity. Such a study could also provide insight into the issue of intersectionalities as well, particularly in situations where multicultural centers actively explore such issues. Furthermore, as some campuses are beginning to combine individual culture centers, including LGBT resource centers and offices of LGBT student services, into single multicultural and intercultural centers, research on such consolidations is necessary to determine the impact on LGBT students who utilize such programming and services.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine the ways in which LGBT resource centers inform the experiences of self-disclosing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who seek out their services at four-year colleges in the Midwest. Although LGBT resource centers have been fixtures on college campus for more than 40 years, no empirical data support their value in the experiences of LGBT students. Rather, only historical discussions of specific LGBT centers and anecdotal accounts of their importance exist. The findings of this study provide convincing evidence that LGBT resource centers play an important role in the experiences of LGBT undergraduate students. Although the presence of a center provides a sense of institutional commitment and a voice to LGBT students, the resources of the LGBT resource center help students develop a clear sense of identity as well as inform their understanding of LGBT history and culture. Additionally, LGBT resource centers provide valuable opportunities for LGBT students to develop a supportive community as well as a safe space free of judgment and fear for one's safety. Central to fulfilling such roles are the individuals who work in these centers and their ability to engage with students and promote a positive, inviting, and friendly environment.

Each of the LGBT resource centers visited for this study offer insights into the positive and negative experiences of 30 students. Based on student responses, each center was defined by challenges but also exhibited important strengths. On the whole, however, participant responses communicated that the centers were important to them for social, educational, and developmental reasons. As such, LGBT resource centers represent an important tool in advancing progress toward inclusion and equality, supporting student needs, and promoting LGBT culture.

Epilogue

Having completed this study and spent time with 30 amazing LGBT students, I have witnessed firsthand the importance of LGBT resource centers in the experiences of LGBT college students. Sitting with these students during the interview process, where many shared the intimate details of their lives, I was given hope that at last a time has come when LGBT students no longer have to struggle with finding out who they are while simultaneously trying to navigate life as a college student, a terrain that often challenges LGBT students in ways they were not prepared. In the experiences these students shared with me, I saw reflections of my own life as a student struggling with my identity as a young gay man. Some shared stories of loss of family ties, fear for their safety, concern that they would not be able to finish their degrees. However, others shared more positive stories and outlooks. There were tales of happiness stemming from the group of friends they found through the centers, the support they received from their extended LGBT families, hopes for a world where they can live their lives as who they are. I experienced so many ups and downs; the fieldwork was truly an emotional rollercoaster. After hearing the story of one student in particular, I wrote the following in my field notes,

I had to keep my composure until I got to my car. Once I was safe in the darkness of the parking garage, I couldn't hold back anymore. Tears began streaming down my face. The last interview got to me, as he shared his story with me and revealed his HIV status, it was all I could do to not burst into tears. I continued my questions and when I asked what his life would be without the center he said, "Without the center I would probably be dead." DEAD! He has been fighting his whole life to come to grips with his sexual orientation. Along the way he had even tried to commit suicide. He felt like the

evil, satanic voices in his head were trying to make him gay. I only wish that those who feel centers have no purpose could've been in the room while he shared his story. THIS PISSES ME OFF! How could anyone not see the need and importance these centers play in the lives of LGBT students? Why don't those in charge get out of their offices and talk to their students? It's not that hard and it would make a world of difference.

The process of writing the dissertation itself was difficult. The first three chapters challenged me in ways that I never expected they would. On one hand, there was so little information about LGBT resource centers that I often questioned whether I was going to be able to complete the project, or at least a project of value. Many times I found myself trying to connect a series of dots that seemed more and more distant from one another in an effort to understand the phenomenon of the LGBT resource center, a process that often took me into areas of study where I felt out of place. On the other hand, I wondered if anyone cared enough about the centers that had started to become important to me as a person and as a scholar to care about what I found or what I had to say. I don't know, but I certainly hope they do.

Based on my interactions with these students, I believe the significance of LGBT resource centers is truly profound. These centers have transformed campuses into places where LGBT students feel safe and want to pursue their degrees. They have helped LGBT students figure out who they are and how they fit into the world around them. And, above all, they have saved lives as I indicated above. My only wish at this point is that more colleges and universities will consider the needs of the LGBT students on their campuses and take active measures to assure their success. While I regret that my own institution has not yet made the effort to address the needs of its LGBT students, I am hopeful that there will come a day when they acknowledge

LGBT students and demonstrate that they are a valuable part of campus by providing such a center.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

LGBT Resource Centers: An assessment of Student Interactions at Three Midwestern Centers

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mr. Burr D. Hartman, II (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Kandace G. Hinton, (Faculty Sponsor) from the Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. Mr. Hartman is a doctoral candidate and this study is part of his dissertation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the role LGBT resource centers play in the experiences of LGBT students at four-year colleges and universities in the Midwest. While the specific motivations behind the creation of LGBT resource centers vary from institution to institution, it will be determined how LGBT resource centers meet the missions and visions of the institutions of higher education from the perspective of LGBT students. This study aims to explore and answer the following primary research question: What role do LGBT centers play in the experiences of LGBT students who seek out services and engage in programming?

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Sit for a recorded interview (approximately one hour in length) to discuss your experiences as an LGBT student and your interactions with the LGBT resource centers

Provide basic demographic information (e.g. age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, major, class standing)

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the Principal Investigator using a digital sound recorder.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Anticipated risks are not greater than minimal risk. In discussing issues of campus climate for LGBT students, it is possible that participants may experience discomfort, pain, anger, frustration, or sadness. Participants may worry that their responses may get them in trouble with the university or center directors.

Participants may feel pressure to conduct interviews since LGBT center directors will serve to identify potential participants.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Your participation in this study may help universities better tailor student services for LGBT students, particularly with regard to programming and services offered through LGBT resource centers. Additionally, this study will inform the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals as they undertake the writing of Counsel for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education standards for operating and developing programs for LGBT resource centers. There are no anticipated benefits for participants, however.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The Principal Investigator will take all reasonable steps necessary to protect the anonymity of participants at each stage of the research process. The researcher will store digital recordings of interviews conducted during the study on a secure, password protected external hard drive. They will not be accessible by other individuals with the exception of the Faculty Sponsor.

Transcripts of all audio recordings will be created during the research study. Transcripts will not be labeled using personally identifiable information. A password protected document containing interview transcripts will be sent by email to those interviewed for review and to make any changes necessary to clarify statements. Transcripts will be maintained indefinitely. Like their digital counterparts, however, they will be stored on a separate password-protected, external hard drive. Likewise, access to recorded transcripts will be limited to the Principal Investigator and Faculty Sponsor. Individual notes taken during interviews, as well as documents collected during the proposed study, will be maintained indefinitely by the researcher and treated with the same level of security as written interview transcripts.

The researcher will maintain the anonymity of participants in all presentations of the research findings, both written and oral, published and unpublished. Institutions, however, will be identified. The Principal Investigator will assure that identities will be kept confidential and, if any reference is made to specific comments, statements will be communicated pseudonymously as to prevent any identification. Toward that end, information that may indirectly serve to identify participants (names, locale, etc.) will be excluded from all presentations of findings.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You have the right to continue the interview so long as you feel comfortable with our conversation. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. The Principal Investigator will avoid any potentially sensitive topics and you do not have to respond to any questions you not wish to answer. Upon completing the interview, if you would like to be excluded from the study, you have the right to do so. In the event that you withdraw from the study, I will destroy all materials related to their participation immediately.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Mr. Burr Hartman, II (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Kandace G. Hinton (Faculty Sponsor). Mr. Hartman can be reached via the email address: (LGBTresourcecenterstudy@gmail.com).

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Date of IRB Approval: 2/4/2014

IRB Number: 545882

Project Expiration Date: 2/4/2015

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Information

1. What is your name?
2. What is your phone number?
3. What is your email address?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your major?
6. What is your class standing?
7. What year did you begin college?
8. What is your intended graduation date?
9. What student organizations are you involved in?
 - a. Do you hold leadership positions?
10. What is your ethnicity?
11. How do you identify your sexual orientation?
12. To what degree are you out?
13. How do you identify your gender identity?
14. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
 - a. Where are you from?
15. How did you choose to attend this university?
 - a. Had you visited the resource center prior to attending?

General Experiences

1. How would you describe the campus climate for LGBT students?
2. Describe your experiences here
 - a. What things can you share that represent difficult experiences as an LGBT student?
3. What things can you share that represent positive experiences as an LGBT student?
4. How is your culture celebrated or recognized at this institution?
5. Discuss some of the factors that have led to your retention here?
6. What are your support systems?

Historical Knowledge of the LGBT Resource Center

1. Can you tell me about your understanding of the historical background of the LGBT resource up to the present?
2. Describe when you first learned of the LGBT resource center?
3. When did you first visit the center?
4. What were your thoughts upon entering the LGBT resource center?
5. Describe your experience in the center?

General Perceptions of the LGBT Resource Center

1. Talk a little about your understanding of the center.
2. When was the first time you visited the center?
3. How do you feel when you walk into the center?
4. How would you describe the atmosphere of the center?
5. What role do you believe the center plays on campus?
6. Is it necessary to have the LGBT resource center on campus?

7. Is the center important to you? Why or why not?
8. Did the presence of the center influence your decision to attend this institution?
9. Describe the impact the center has had on you as a student at this institution?
10. What impact has the center had on the organizations in which you belong?
11. How useful are the centers facilities to LGBT students?
12. How involved are you in the events sponsored by the center?
13. How often do you visit the center?
14. Describe what your experiences would be like if there was no center on campus?
15. To what degree do you believe you would utilize the services and programming if the center was part of a larger multicultural center?