

QUEER LEADERSHIP:
AN EXPLORATION OF LGBTQ
LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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May 2017

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AN EXPLORATION OF LGBTQ LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, Barbara Elaine Goodwin Pryor and Owen Thomas Pryor.

In memory of Mom.

College and grad school have been amazing. I can't wait to tell you about all the things I learned in life, I know you'd be fascinated by them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so grateful for the love and support I have found and kept while I managed to complete this graduate education journey.

Dr. Jeni Hart, I will never forget the moment I finished my ELPA interview visit day for the Master's program. On your way out the door you walked up to me and asked me how my day went. I haven't let go since. From day one your support has been unwavering, and I certainly could not be here today without your guidance. Thank you for challenging me, thank you for all the red marks on my papers, articles, and now dissertation, and most of all thank you for being an amazing mentor and friend.

Dr. Casandra Harper Morris, during my Master's program I was in your Research Design course and after one of the class sessions you asked me if I was considering a PhD program. Thank you for making me think that was possible. Your support during my graduate education has been invaluable, and I'm lucky to have had you on my committee.

Dr. Jennifer Fellabaum-Toston, thank you for your encouragement as I applied for the ELPA PhD Program. I remember going to happy hour with you and sharing my interest in continuing my education, but also my own personal doubts and fears. Thank you for being an example and supporting me these last few years.

Dr. Tony Castro, you hooked me with Case Study! This project has morphed since I first took your class, but your support for my research has been invaluable and I am thankful for the meetings, advice, and guidance along the way.

To the participants of this study, thank you for your leadership and advocacy for queer and trans students on your campuses. If all campus leaders adopted your approaches we could transform higher education for LGBTQ folk. To the LGBTQ

participants of this study, that extra burden is heavy and often too much to bear—I know some of it myself. Thank you for sharing your stories and allowing me to share space with you. Your work is inspiring and I am grateful to have been an observer to the amazing things you have accomplished for your students and campus.

Who I am and what I do is attributed to amazing people who have surfaced in my life. Dr. Alaine Arnott, I am so thankful for you, your friendship, and your mentorship. You are the perfect example of how a friend makes us smarter, stronger, and more ready to face the world. From Columbia, MO to New York, NY, I'm lucky to call you a friend. Dr. Garrett D. Hoffman, I couldn't ask for a better collaborator, conference spouse, and friend. Your brilliance intimidates me and empowers me, I look forward to our many adventures in the future. Matthew Livengood, thank you for holding me accountable with your regular check-ins, and for helping me find confidence in my work as a JGG. Dr. Jason Garvey, thank you for support and guidance. I'm grateful for our collaborations and lucky to call you a friend. Melissa Dawn Todhunter, my oldest friend, thank you for always being the person I can come back to. For still loving me after all the awkward teenage years, all the moves across the country, and being a constant friend and sister through the ups and downs of our lives. Amy Masters, I'll never forget how we met and I'm glad we never let go. After all these years I'm glad we can still be connected—SEK represent! Dr. Jimmie Manning, thank you for being the friend and mentor I needed as an aspiring queer activist and undergraduate student. I learned so much from you and am lucky to call you an old friend. David Ta, thank you for all the adventures we shared together, for being my first collaborator in research, and especially for the support and encouragement to find a path through graduate education.

To my Kansas City queer family, thank you for making Kansas City home. Whether it was adventures west, kayaking the Missouri, or enjoying Kansas City's best beer, I'm lucky to be surrounded by so many intelligent and loving humans.

To my UMKC family, thank you for your support of my work and most importantly for supporting queer and trans students in our community. I'm lucky to work (and have worked) with so many amazing colleagues and friends, especially in the Office of Student Involvement and Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.

To my siblings, Jennifer Lynn, Jeremy Michael, Brenda Elaine, David Owen, and Benjamin Joseph, thank you for taking care of your baby brother. I am lucky to have such a loving, supportive, and hilarious group of brothers and sisters.

To my parents, thank you for inspiring my pursuit of knowledge and being a model for maintaining an active curiosity about the world. Most importantly, thank you for instilling in me the importance of compassion and empathy. I'm not sure there's a luckier queer kid than me.

Finally, thank you to my amazing husband, support system, and cheerleader, Rishad. I am lucky to have found someone so understanding of my early morning writing sessions, my weekend coffeehouse getaways, and my constant distracted thoughts as I completed this journey called the dissertation. I couldn't have found a better partner to be on this adventure with and I'm so lucky to have you, Sushi, and Stewie here for the love and support. I love you.

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QUEER LEADERSHIP:
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LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Dr. Jeni Hart, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of staff members at two distinct college campuses who advocated for the advancement of LGBTQ equity through change in campus policy and practice. In this project I conceptualized a queer leadership framework based on grassroots leadership in higher education (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Findings from the multi-site case study identified two unique approaches higher education professionals engaged queer leadership through: a) Queer Activist Leadership and b) LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership. Participants were responsible for creating meaningful change on each campus, relying on campus partnerships with students, faculty, and staff members. These successes establish important considerations for student affairs practitioners, particularly those who work for institutions who do not have designated support programs for LGBTQ equity and inclusion. Findings from this study identified gaps and successes in staff leadership advocacy, demonstrating multiple ways LGBTQ advocates and queer activists may engage in in queer leadership work in higher education student affairs.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the last couple decades, colleges and universities have increasingly improved efforts to become more welcoming to their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, faculty, and staff. Campuses have witnessed an increase in student leadership, the implementation of LGBTQ support programs and services, more inclusive institutional policies and practices, and more than 200 colleges and universities host some form of LGBTQ designated program space (Marine, 2011). Despite these gains, institutions continue to struggle with fostering welcoming climates for these communities (Garvey & Rankin, 2015a; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfield, & Frazer, 2010), leaving important on-going work for campus administrators and LGBTQ leaders.

Historically, institutional changes largely related to improving the campus for LGBTQ communities have been the result of active student initiatives, responses to campus incidents, or through the effort of campus leaders, despite resistance from other institutional actors (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011; Renn, 2010). These forms of LGBTQ activism have been responsible for driving much of the progress for LGBTQ people in higher education, shaping not only individual institutional policies but also the profession of higher education and student affairs (HESA) (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2002).

Student affairs professional associations, ACPA and NASPA, both have active representation from their Committee for LGBT Awareness and LGBT Knowledge Community, respectively. Thus, it is not surprising that members within these associations have witnessed an increase in programming focused on LGBTQ identities and best practices (Pryor, Garvey, & Johnson, 2016). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2009) has also called for institutions to create programs supporting the development of LGBTQ students. Yet, despite some gains,

nearly 95% of colleges and universities in the United States lack institutional programming and support for LGBTQ students (Marine, 2011). This lack of institutional support likely contributes to the hostile campus climates LGBTQ students have reported (Rankin et al., 2010), where LGBTQ communities have frequently found campuses and institutional facilities unwelcoming (Beemyn, 2003; Bilodeau, 2009; Rankin et al., 2010; Vaccaro, 2012). These experiences exemplify institutional dynamics that colleges and universities perpetuate, which exclude gender and sexual diverse communities, reinforcing traditionally heterogendered institutions (Preston & Hoffman, 2015).

Problem

As noted above, progress toward LGBTQ inclusion has been slow and historically fraught with pushback from some institutional leaders and political strife (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2002; Talburt, 2000). Much of the significant progress has been due to student political activism, sometimes in collaboration with faculty or administrative leaders. These faculty and administrators have helped students navigate campus political climates to facilitate incremental changes (Marine, 2011). Among some of the changes, growing numbers of institutions have added sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression to their anti-discrimination policy; created inclusion of name and pronoun policies; and/or developed gender inclusive space policies in campus systems (Campus Pride, 2016).

While students have often played pivotal roles, LGBTQ staff leaders have also been instrumental in these changes. However, our understanding of how LGBTQ activist leaders navigate these institutional climates and change strategies are limited (Bullard, 2013). Understanding the experiences of grassroots and strategic LGBTQ leaders can be

instrumental in continuing progress toward the reduction of heterogenderist practices and establishment of more welcoming communities. Illuminating these experiences can provide practitioners and LGBTQ leaders useful tools for advocating for LGBTQ equity at campuses struggling to support this historically underrepresented population. With only 5% of colleges and universities providing formal LGBTQ program support (Marine, 2011), a vast majority of colleges and universities are lacking resources to appropriately support the academic and social achievement of LGBTQ students.

Purpose and Research Question

Guided by a framework that seeks to explore the use of positional leadership and applications of grassroots activism toward social change, I sought to understand the experiences of grassroots leaders who work toward equity and inclusion for LGBTQ populations on their campus; advancing models for queer leadership in higher education. In so doing, this project has important practical and theoretical implications for higher education scholarship and student affairs practice.

The purpose of this project was to explore the successes and struggles of LGBTQ leaders in HESA, which has valuable implications for practice and for leadership scholarship. Specifically for this study, I explored the experiences of campus leaders who have served as agents of change on their campuses to improve the institutional climate by advocating for LGBTQ inclusive policies or practices. I sought to understand the strategies of these self-identified LGBTQ leaders, through their campus involvement (e.g., LGBTQ Councils, staff organizations, volunteer services) or positional experiences (e.g., campus diversity officers, salaried LGBTQ center staff). I sought to illuminate these practices to provide a guiding framework for other activists in the field. To

accomplish this purpose, the primary research question which guided this study is: How do professional staff campus leaders on two different university campuses engage in grassroots and queer leadership in order to change policies and practices to improve the climate for LGBTQ individuals?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Higher education leadership scholarship often focuses on a positivist/functionalist understanding of leadership; the field lacks critical approaches to understanding leadership complexities (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Grassroots leadership provides an alternative to these hierarchical understanding of leadership, focusing on the change initiatives of leaders at the bottom of institutional hierarchies (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Conceptions of leadership in higher education have shifted considerably over the last 30 years, requiring continued exploration into issues of social justice, and challenging oppressive norms in institutional leadership (Kezar et al. 2006; Kezar & Lester, 2011). Theories of leadership require constant critique and reevaluation, particularly as marginalized groups find more spaces of inclusion, or experience continued resistance, on college campuses. Grassroots leadership provides a valuable frame for exploring how queer leadership is employed, given the often conservative climates LGBTQ leaders must navigate. Although leadership scholars continue to use critical applications (Kezar et al., 2006), queer leadership has not been fully explored among campus administration (Bullard, 2013; Renn, 2010). These leadership efforts not only challenge policy and practice, but can ultimately shift the campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff.

Leadership

To understand queer leadership, it is necessary to discuss leadership more broadly. Rost (1991) identified hundreds of definitions and theories related to leadership throughout the greater part of the 20th century, many encompassing themes related to individualist theories of leadership (e.g., behavior, “great man” (sic.)); a large number also focused on leadership as it related to management, often conflating or confusing the two. Leadership was predominantly viewed as a top-down approach to managing followers through a hierarchical chain of command, rather than a shared experience between leaders and followers. These views of leadership – often characterized as from the industrial paradigm (Rost, 1991) – typically focused on leaders’ rules, goals, and influence.

Another dominant assumption about leadership was that it could be located in specific traits that leaders possess (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007; Rost, 1991). These characteristics included self-confidence, intelligence, or charisma, and by observing them, people could distinguish leaders from non-leaders (Komives et al., 2007). To counter these restrictive and somewhat autocratic views of leadership, Rost (1991) offered his own approach to leadership, a post-industrial view of how leadership should function in the 21st century. Challenging previous unilateral assumptions of leadership, Rost argued for a definition of leadership as a characteristic shared among leaders and followers who are striving toward achieving mutual purposes. This shift in understanding leadership recognizes the complexity of leadership in general.

Within the context of higher education, many have embraced post-industrial views of leadership and more recently some have focused on bottom-up collective

leadership efforts (Kezar et al., 2006). These views challenge notions of higher education leadership as top-down and authoritative through traditional hierarchical positions of power (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Considering leadership as a collective process is at the heart of my study.

Grassroots Leadership

Kezar and Lester (2011) identified grassroots leadership efforts on college campuses as responses to the changing higher education landscape. They defined leadership “as an effort by groups or individuals to create change, drawing on these new definitions of leadership that distinguished management from leadership and did not assume that authority was synonymous with leadership” (p. 4). Pushing this definition further, they identified grassroots leaders as individuals with no formal position of authority, who operate from the bottom-up, and who aim to challenge the status quo of an institution. Grassroots leadership is nonhierarchical, often collective, and not an institutionalized process, where structure, networks, and support systems are individually created efforts (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Because working up and through a gendered/heteronormative system may create barriers for leaders pursuing institutional change, grassroots leadership provides an important frame for considering how LGBTQ leaders *collectively* navigate historically oppressive bureaucratic structures.

This particular framing is rooted in the tempered radical framework (Meyerson, 2003), which examines bottom-up, tempered efforts of change within organizational settings. Grassroots leaders, thus, have to play within the bounds of their contextual setting (e.g., universities), challenging what is traditionally a top-down leadership environment. Meyerson found tempered radicals navigate institutional change through

five approaches: a) quiet resistance, b) taking personal threats and turning into opportunities, c) participating in negotiation to locate alternative solutions, d) supplementing small wins to gain larger results, and e) organizing action around an issue. These approaches deviate from the more radical forms of activism found in other grassroots approaches by seeking to play within the hierarchy of the institution, often an unavoidable but expected hurdle when seeking to change historically oppressive systems of power. Faculty and staff have found these approaches successful (Hart, 2007; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Kezar, Gallant, & Lester, 2011).

Much of Kezar and Lester's (2011) efforts have focused on grassroots leadership from the perspective of faculty and staff, who work to challenge the status quo within an institutional bureaucratic structure. Faculty and staff experience unique challenges when taking on grassroots leadership initiatives, still having to play into the bureaucratic structure and facing fears of retribution, particularly when they have not secured tenure or have a long-term contract (Kezar et al., 2011; Lester & Kezar, 2012). Following the conceptions of grassroots leaders as bottom-up and challenging the status quo, grassroots leadership may provide an opportunity to enhance our understanding of queer leadership in higher education.

Queer Leadership

As the progress of LGBTQ equity at colleges and universities is rooted in grassroots organizing (Marine, 2011), grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011) guides the advancement of queer leadership in higher education. This project was driven by my interest in exploring how campus leaders utilize these forms of leadership to establish welcoming campus climates for LGBTQ communities. The term *queer* may be

applied to social practices that challenge the normative expectations of gender and sexuality. Most notably, queer theory disrupts heteronormative conceptions of sexuality and gender, challenging social practices through the lenses of marginalized or non-normative identities (Abes, 2008; Dilley, 1999; Pinar, 2003). Dilley argued that the application of queer theory seeks to place queer viewpoints at the center of inquiry, questioning perspectives frequently left uninvestigated. Within this project, I define queer leadership as the intentional process to advance equity for sexual and gender minoritized communities through grassroots leadership strategies; specifically championing social change through institutional policy and practice. Queer is used as an inclusive term respecting the multiple dimensions of sexual and gender diversity, challenging hetero/cisnormative practices in higher education.

Queer leadership scholarship in higher education is scant, but it serves as guidance for connecting queer leadership strategies to grassroots leadership. Previous explorations of queer leadership have provided minimal guidance in defining queer leadership. Lugg and Tooms (2010) demonstrated strategies for exercising queer leadership through the implementation of inclusive practices by challenging heterogenderism in education systems. Their exploration of queer leadership focused on challenging institutional norms of professionalism, most notably through expectations of dress based on gender (the St. John suit), and the resultant panoptic gaze queer school leaders often encountered (Lugg & Tooms, 2010). In her exploration of queer student activists, Renn (2007) noted these activists “embraced a public gender and/or sexual identity in opposition to normative, straight culture and moved away from a positional view of leadership to an approach that incorporated commitment to change social systems

for the purpose of decentering power” (p. 323). These queer student activists challenged traditional notions of leadership with the pursuit of transformational change (Renn, 2007). These examples begin to demonstrate how queer leadership in higher education may surface among campus staff. Ultimately, queer leadership rejects normative gender or sexual identity expectations, challenges normative leadership strategies, and disrupts a system that historically rejected queer people.

Design

Qualitative research allows researchers to illuminate the understanding of a particular experience or setting, providing rich and deep context to the experiences of individuals (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Merriam characterized the deep nature of qualitative inquiry, and its use to provide meaning and understanding. To explore my research question, I will utilize qualitative case study methods to understand and make meaning of the leadership experiences of LGBTQ leaders and how they navigate campus political climates to pursue, create, or implement change.

More specifically, case study research is a way of getting at detail within a particular context, revealing the complexities within a particular case setting. A case study serves as both a unit of analysis and a methodology, honing in on a particular bounded system (Jones et al., 2014). Because I sought to understand how staff members on particular campuses engage in LGBTQ leadership practices, this project embraces a constructivist case study paradigm (Jones et al., 2014). In addition, I was interested in the similarities and differences of practices and strategies within two different higher education contexts, calling for comparative cases. A multiple comparative case study

allows for a rich understanding of leadership phenomena within each case, and seeks to identify common or distinct characteristics across case sites (Yin, 2014). As such, I employed a multiple comparative case study (Yin, 2014). Case sites included two unique higher education institutions that have recently made progress toward inclusion for LGBTQ equity on their campus.

The groups of LGBTQ leaders on each campus served as a case, a system bound by the institution and the leadership experiences of the participants. As this study was interested in staff leadership, I sought participants who: a) are not currently in a position specifically dedicated to LGBTQ equity, b) are not in formal administrative roles (e.g., vice-president, vice-provost, provost, president); c) serve as a staff member; and d) self-identify as involved with supporting queer initiatives (e.g., advocating for policy change, providing service to a campus organization). Despite these restrictions, as data collection commenced, some faculty members and graduate students were recruited as co-leaders of LGBTQ change, and provided important contributions to the case context.

Data primarily relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews, as interviews provide the strongest source of data for case study research (Yin, 2014). Additionally, documentation analysis (e.g., memos, policies, newspapers, websites) supported the case context. I also conducted some participant-observations and journaled (Yin, 2014), although I was limited in in participant-observation opportunities at one site. I analyzed these data utilizing multiple case study techniques and compared data across the experiences of the case sites and LGBTQ leaders (Yin, 2014).

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, I use a number of terms that are frequently misunderstood. To provide clarity, I will define those terms next. *Heterosexism* privileges heterosexual identities and relationships, regulating them as standard, and excludes other non-normative sexualities (Dilley, 2002). Bilodeau (2009) identified *genderism* as a system that privileges cisgender binary people; it oppresses trans identities through systemic policies and practices that exclude and remove space for transgender and gender non-conforming communities. I use *heterogenderism* as a composite of heterosexism (Dilley, 2002) and genderism (Bilodeau, 2009); heterogenderism reinforces the oppressive systems that marginalize queer identities through HESA policy and practice.

Combined, heterogenderism reinforces non-queer power and privilege in institutional systems. Preston and Hoffman (2015) explored the exclusion of queer identities at traditionally heterogendered institutions (THI), where these institutions “operate in a way that continues to sustain and reaffirm tradition hierarchies of gendered and sexual oppression, regardless of the various policies, regulations, and diversity programs in place to support LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff” (p. 65).

Heterogenderism is systemic, requiring queer leaders to navigate change in policy and practice, to combat the effects of marginalization often felt by students, faculty, and staff.

Cisgender, sometimes shortened to *cis*, is a term used to define individuals whose sex assigned at birth corresponds with their gender identity (Serano, 2007), often considered to be the binary option to transgender (Spade, 2011). *Trans**, is used as an inclusive symbol, acknowledging the multiple gender diverse identities represented in the

trans* community (Tompkins, 2014). In addition to the binary transgender identities, i.e., trans man or trans woman, trans* has been used to represent other trans identities, including genderqueer or gender-non-conforming people. *Genderqueer* or *gender-non-conforming* people may not identify with societal expectations associated with binary genders of man and woman, or they may identify with both, or with a number of other gender identities (Wentling, 2015). Genderqueer and gender-non-conforming individuals who use non-binary pronouns (e.g., *they/them/their, ze, hir*), have reported more hostile classroom climates compared to their binary transgender peers (Wentling, 2015).

For the purposes of this project, *allies* or *allyship* are frequently used to signify people who demonstrate a commitment to social justice and in the context of this project, toward queer identity groups (Washington & Evans, 1991). Allies may exhibit this commitment through challenging heterogenderist attitudes, and/or actively challenging oppressive policy or practice in higher education. While allies may disrupt moments of heterogendersism, an *activist* actively pursues opportunities to support marginalized communities, advocating for change toward the inclusion of marginalized groups in HESA policy and practice. Kezar and Lester (2011) define *activists* as individuals who use noninstitutionalized practices or “outside channels” to create change. However, Hart (2007) found that activists may use both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized practices to create change. Hart further explained activist strategies as “the purposeful methods in which members of an organization engaged in order to raise consciousness and foster change” (p. 34). Allies may call out injustice when witnessed, but activists engage in dismantling the system that allows the injustice.

Significance

Colleges and universities continue to be sites of exclusion for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. Unwelcoming campus climates (Rankin et al., 2010; Vaccaro, 2012) and a lack of queer and trans* inclusive spaces (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b; Marine, 2011; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014) continue to permeate most institutions in the United States. Yet, HESA has witnessed some shifts in institutional policy changes and practices on some campuses (Campus Pride, 2016), which indicate greater thoughtfulness toward LGBTQ student support services. The shift is still slow (Marine, 2011), and warrants greater exploration in order to inform future change initiatives.

Practitioners in student affairs, and more specifically LGBTQ affairs, may find the exploration of queer leadership useful, particularly the tools of grassroots leadership in navigating institutional change. For example, practitioners at institutions that are not financially or politically able to pursue establishing LGBTQ centers may find value from the strategies employed by these queer leaders. Additionally, this study's findings provides invaluable guidance for activists seeking to disrupt heterogendered norms at their institutions, by identifying strategies or tactics for navigating power dynamics at their campuses. Further, these findings may be especially meaningful to LGBTQ leaders, students, faculty, staff, and administrators who thoughtfully navigate hostile climates to improve campus for themselves and other queer individuals.

Finally, this project puts forward a model for queer leadership in higher education. Queer leadership advances our understanding of grassroots leadership in higher education (Kezar & Lester, 2011) by shifting focus toward the experiences of LGBTQ staff leaders navigating change for LGBTQ equity and inclusion on college

campuses. This study advanced what we know about queer leaders and how they navigate institutional change in historically oppressive systems. It also focused on staff, who are often excluded from studies of campus activism (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Conclusion

In this study, I argue for the importance of exploring queer leadership in higher education through a lens of grassroots leadership. In this chapter, I provided an outline for how I explored the phenomenon of leadership, rooting my work in relevant higher education and grassroots leadership scholarship, and I provided an overview of the study's design. Historically LGBTQ leadership initiatives have been student-driven (Dilley, 2002), resulting in the rise of LGBTQ inclusive policies, and programs and services at a number of colleges and universities in the United States (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2000). This project sought to recognize the role that staff also play in advancing LGBTQ equity on their campus, providing valuable implications for leadership scholars and HESA practitioners. In the next chapter, I will review relevant research related to the purpose of the study and this study's theoretical and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature to begin to explore queer leadership in higher education. I begin by examining LGBTQ scholarship in higher education, providing focus to the increased visibility of LGBTQ identities, LGBTQ campus climate scholarship, and the evolving constructions of queer and trans* identities. I then review the history of queer campus resources and discuss the history of colleges and universities as sites for LGBTQ inequity and unwelcoming climates for LGBTQ people. It would be remiss to explore queer leadership in higher education and student affairs without acknowledging the significant impact student activists have had on LGBTQ equity in HESA. Thus, I will then explore the advancement of LGBTQ equity through the work of student activists (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011) before reviewing the limited research exploring staff activism and LGBTQ equity. Next, I focus on educational leadership literature, and the current calls for advances in conceptualizing leadership, with a particular emphasis on higher education leadership.

Finally, I explore Meyerson's (2003) tempered radicals framework and Kezar and Lester's (2011) theory of grassroots leadership in higher education. I argue that grassroots leadership in higher education provides a framework for understanding how queer leaders navigate change toward equity of LGBTQ communities in higher education. In Chapter 1, I defined queer leadership as the intentional process to advance equity for sexual and gender minoritized communities through grassroots leadership strategies, specifically advocating for social change through institutional policy and practice. Queer leadership is thus an extension of grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), addressing advocacy for LGBTQ equity at institutions that have historically

marginalized queer and trans* communities (Marine, 2011; Preston & Hoffman, 2015). This review not only identifies a gap in queer leadership scholarship, it guides this study's exploration of queer leadership in higher education.

LGBTQ in Higher Education

Higher education scholarship about the LGBTQ community is focused on three primary areas: a) visibility of LGBTQ people; b) campus climate for LGBTQ people; and c) changing constructions of LGBTQ identities and experiences (Renn, 2010). Below, I explore these foci in turn.

Visibility of LGBTQ People

The visibility of literature about LGBTQ individuals on campuses gained momentum in the 1990s with a small number of edited narratives and qualitative studies focusing on the lived experiences of LGB and eventually trans* students (Renn, 2010). Much of the visibility in LGBTQ literature historically centered on White gay cisgender men (Marine, 2011; Renn, 2010), leaving a notable gap in scholarship about communities of color and other sexual and gender diverse populations. However, this scholarship provided a basis for some policy and practice decisions, which led to growth in institutional programming and support for LGBTQ students (Marine, 2011; Renn, 2010).

Further, much of the scholarship focused on LGBTQ people in HESA is focused on students, leading Renn (2010) to argue for more research about LGBTQ staff and faculty. Most of the literature about LGBQ staff centers on individuals working in student affairs (Croteau, 1995; Croteau & Lark, 2009; Lark, 1998) and, more specifically, in LGBTQ student services (Sanlo, 2000). However, Jourian, Simmons, and Devaney

(2015) exposed a severe lack of literature examining the lived experiences of trans* staff and faculty in the field of HESA.

The scant scholarship has focused on trans* experiences; inquiry about policy and practice for LGBTQ individuals is still lacking. Marine and Nicolazzo's (2014) work is an exception. They found trans* LGBTQ programs and services roles were excluded in research. Instead, campus programs were *about* trans* populations, but not specifically *for* trans* students. Moreover, despite a number of institutions hiring transgender staff members in their LGBTQ campus programs, a majority were trans masculine; there were few trans feminine staff members, highlighting a lack of diversity among those leading efforts to educate about and support LGBTQ people (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014).

Although scholarship has demonstrated an increased visibility of LGBTQ people in higher education, research continues to lack diverse representation about the LGBTQ community.

Campus Climate

As with the aforementioned research focused on visibility, climate studies largely focus on student experiences, with limited consideration of staff and faculty. Attention to students is also consistent with campus climate research in general (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). For years, campus climate studies reported that LGBTQ students experienced considerable harassment and discrimination, especially when compared to other student groups (Rankin, 2003; 2005; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo et al., 2002). Climate studies in the 1980s and 1990s were largely structured to increase visibility for and awareness of LGB individuals in higher education (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Since then, climate research including trans* identities has increased, and scholars have found that campuses

are more hostile for trans* and gender non-conforming students compared to their LGB peers (Rankin et al., 2010).

Rankin (2003) assessed LGBTQ campus climate, bringing a focus on LGBTQ experiences and the systemic and overt forms of harassment and discrimination reported on college campuses. More specifically, researchers have found that campus spaces like residence halls (Evans & Broido, 1999; Herbst & Malaney, 1999; Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013; Pryor, Ta, & Hart, 2016); Greek life (Yeung & Stomblor, 2000); and the college classroom (Garvey & Rankin, 2015a; Pryor, 2015; Spade, 2011) were frequent sites for discrimination, harassment, and exclusionary practices.

Researchers continue to find that colleges and universities are largely hostile environments for LGBTQ students (Vaccaro, 2012) who generally perceive the campus climate as less inviting, or chillier, than their peers (Brown et al., 2004; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). For example, Rankin et al. (2010) found that approximately one quarter of LGBQ students and one-third of transgender students had experienced harassment or violence on campus because of their sexual and/or gender identity. Similarly, Woodford, Howell, Silverschanz, and Yu (2012) found LGBTQ students experienced considerable discrimination. They reviewed heterosexist language (e.g., “that’s so gay”) and its impact on LGBTQ students in campus environments and found microaggressive language negatively impacted students social and physical well being. Students had a greater likelihood of feeling disconnected or excluded from the university and experienced stress due to heterosexist comments (Woodford et al., 2012).

LGBTQ Identities. The fluid and evolving sexual and gender identities of individuals has added to the complexity of LGBTQ identity scholarship (Garvey &

Rankin, 2015b). Experiencing campus climate is intricately linked to identity for many LGBTQ individuals, and understanding the role of LGBTQ identities for those at colleges and universities is difficult due to a lack of disclosure of identities, perhaps due to fear of retribution or harassment (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010). For example, some studies report that LGBTQ students who are more *out* with their identities experienced harassment and victimization at higher rates than students who are not (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003). However, LGBTQ students who withheld their identities from other students reported less positive perceptions of campus climate (Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger, & Hope, 2013). A warm campus climate with supportive resources may facilitate welcoming spaces for students as they explore their identities; however many campus climates were found to be chilly for LGBTQ students (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b; Rankin et al., 2010). Garvey and Rankin highlighted the influence of identity disclosure on the use of campus resources for LGBTQ students, finding that students who were more out were less likely to use them. Their findings have implications for campus programming; out students may not utilize campus resources, but students struggling with their identities or those who do not come from supportive home environments may still benefit (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b). Moreover, additional resources may be needed for those who are more out.

Queer Resources and Policies

As the number of institutions with LGBTQ programs has grown, there are only approximately 200 campuses that host some LGBTQ resource center or program (Marine, 2011). This is a small percentage compared with the more than 4,500 colleges and universities in the United States. Considering the consistent report of unwelcoming

campus climates, this lack of programming support contributes to these experiences (Rankin et al., 2010). Much like the LGB community, but often more severe, members of the transgender community on campuses have frequently reported a lack of inclusive campus facilities, struggles in residential life, unwelcoming Greek life communities, gendered classroom environments, and lack of institutional policies or practices (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Garvey & Rankin, 2015a; Pryor, 2015; Pryor et al., 2016).

Bilodeau (2009) examined the influence of exclusionary and genderist practices in higher education, finding that trans* students face significant pressure to fit in and participate in institutional programs or campus facilities that perpetuate the gender binary and normative expectations of students on a college campus. These expectations negatively impact transgender student experiences on campus, serving as examples of how higher education institutions continue to oppress queer communities (Bilodeau, 2009). For example, campus facilities; student organizations (e.g., Greek life, recreation sports); policies; and programs frequently support binary identities (Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2016). Campuses and other university spaces are often unwelcoming for transgender students; they experienced being tokenized, othered, and marginalized by campus administrators, staff, and student peers (Bilodeau, 2009; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Hart & Lester, 2011; Pryor, Ta, & Hart, 2016). To summarize, most studies in the last decade have provided broad overviews of trans* student experiences, focused on student narratives and recommendations for HESA practitioners (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, 2012; Beemyn, et al., 2005; Goodrich, 2012). Although this scholarship has added to researchers and practitioners understanding of the complexities associated with

sexual and gender diverse identities, much more research is needed and my current study will address part of this need.

Today, colleges and universities continue to add sexual orientation and gender identity in their non-discrimination policies (Marine, 2011); nearly 1,000 colleges and universities include gender identity/expression (Campus Pride, 2016). Yet, transgender and gender non-conforming students report less welcoming campus climates compared to their cisgender gay and lesbian peers (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b; Rankin et al., 2010), suggesting other policies and practices are needed to improve the experiences of trans* students.

Despite some advances for LGBTQ communities on campuses, as evidenced by policy and programming efforts (Marine, 2011), institutions continue to reinforce a narrative of otherness toward queer communities by primarily focusing on students' sense of belonging and matriculation, framing queer students as needing help (Talbert, 2010). For example, Safe Space or other similar programs intended to support queer students position them as individuals who need to be saved. Thus, these resources become tools to support "at-risk" students, and "rely on narrow ideas of who LGBT youth are and what they need" (Talbert, 2010, p. 113). In these ways, institutions perpetuate a narrow focus on belonging. While well-intentioned, campuses often fail to recognize the complexity of queer student identities (Talbert, 2010).

Further, Preston and Hoffman (2015) demonstrated that these well-meaning queer oriented programs have the potential to perpetuate this narrative of needing to save, by supporting institutional structures of power. Instead of creating space for activism and disrupting policies or practices that perpetuate normative identity construction, the "THI

[traditionally heterogendered institution] limits the ability of students, faculty, or staff, to imagine new ways of being [queer]...in ways that allow for more freedom, that creates spaces to confront violence, and that empower individuals to enact agency” (Preston & Hoffman, 2015, p. 82). As a result, some institutions are providing well-intentioned support; however, they are not engaging students in activism or challenging normative expectations placed on queer identities.

Student Activism

Young college student activists who challenged previous heterogenderist norms deserve considerable credit for much of the progress to develop and implement LGBTQ policies and resources at some colleges and universities (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). To explore staff member efforts, it is critical to first recognize the role student activists have played in queer leadership on campuses. Colleges and universities have been historic sites for student activism and change. Notably, the 1960s witnessed continued growth of the Civil Rights Movement, where students participated in demonstrations for racial equality and became models for student activism during that decade (Rhoads, 1998). The Peace Movement, the Women’s Movement, and the start of Gay Liberation efforts also emerged in this era, increasing student involvement in campus activism across the United States (Rhoads, 1998). The 1970s and 1980s saw considerable growth for the Women’s Movement and the advancement of queer student organizing and activism. Rhoads argued that movements from the 1960s and 1970s are responsible for the advancement of what he calls the “Multicultural Student Movement of the 1990s.” Out of these movements, Women’s Center, Multicultural Student Affairs, and LGBTQ Resource Centers, began to proliferate on campuses (Rhoads, 1998).

Sparked largely by the Stonewall Riots in June of 1969, queer resistance groups in large urban cities across the United States (e.g., Mattachine Society, Daughters of Bilitis) inspired broader organizing efforts on college campuses (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). The latter part of the 1960s saw early formation of queer organizations on campuses such as Columbia University, the University of Minnesota, and the City College of New York (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). Queer movements increased visibility in the 1970s; however, most university faculty and administrators refused to recognize or provide any support related to these movements and their goals (Marine, 2011). As a result, many student organizers sued their institutions, demanding access to organizing space and inclusion in their campuses student government practices. This lack of institutional support was commonplace throughout the 1970s, particularly in the Midwest where student groups at the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri campuses fought successful court cases that led to student recognition (Dilley, 2002). Although coastal cities (e.g., New York City, San Francisco) were larger sites for the gay rights movement, communities in the Midwest, particularly on college campuses, were also thriving (Dilley, 2002).

Student activism of the 1970s and 1980s played a significant role in the expansion of queer resource centers on college campuses (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002; Marine, 2011). The University of Michigan established the first dedicated office to Lesbian-Gay Male Programs in 1971 (Dilley, 2002; Zemsky, 1996). These offices typically focused on providing education on campuses about and for LGBTQ identities; advocacy of LGBTQ students on their campus; and counseling and personal support for LGBTQ students' health, wellbeing, and academic success (Marine, 2011). The financial

establishment for these centers frequently relies on student fees for administrative and operating costs (Marine, 2011), making some spaces open targets for cuts or political opposition. Today, queer resource directors may be charged with pursuing external funding and donors to ensure support for continued services (Sanlo, 2002), again leaving some centers vulnerable if they are unable to find significant donors.

As previously discussed, in the 1990s, student activism witnessed a shift toward holistic social justice efforts with the rise of the Multicultural Student Movement, fostering a newly emerging ideology of inclusion and support across marginalized identities (Rhoads, 1998). Over these last few decades, this increased visibility of marginalized students led to a stronger awareness of campus climate, particularly in how it is experienced by women, racial minorities, and the queer community (Renn, 2010).

Within queer scholarship, an awareness of intersectional identities challenged the focus on the White cisgender gay and lesbian community to include other interlocking identities that have historically been (albeit, inaccurately) placed at the center of the queer movement. Related to this, necessary scholarship on the lives of transgender students and queer communities of color has started to emerge (Renn, 2010). Despite some growth toward intersectional awareness, and the rise of what Rhoads (1998) considers the Multicultural Student Movement, the queer community continues to experience divisions by issues of race, gender, and socio-economic status, where transgender and queer communities of color are considerably pushed to the margins within the broader queer community (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Marine and Nicolazzo reinforced this through their analysis of LGBTQ centers, finding a notable lack of intersectional and trans* activist oriented programs.

As students engage in 21st century activism, their goals are similar to those of past activists—to enact change (Broadhurst, 2014). However, Broadhurst found some differences in strategy. For example, activists may be utilizing social media, organizing in less visibly confrontational means, or be driven by a multiplicity of causes. While many are organizing student-only movements, other student activists have found great success pairing their energies with faculty and staff members (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Kezar and Maxey contended that faculty and staff are able to help students navigate the intricacies of campus politics. For example, when students sought to establish LGBTQ centers on campus and experienced institutional rejection, faculty and staff members were often able to assist them in identifying partners on campus. Engaging with faculty and staff raised activists' consciousness about university politics and operations, which helped them learn how to operate within "the system" (Kezar & Maxey, 2014).

Staff Activism

Yet, there is a dearth of scholarship focused on LGBTQ leadership or staff in higher education related to improving the climate for LGBTQ communities (Kezar, 2010; Renn, 2010). Scholarship considering the role of LGBTQ staff has primarily focused on resource center staffing (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002), with only recent considerations of gay and lesbian executive leadership (Bullard, 2015). These resource center staff members have been charged with the intricacies of running their campus LGBTQ programs, often as the sole campus leader. Their required roles often include providing student support, education, direction, fundraising, and public relations (Sanlo, 2000; Sanlo et al., 2002).

Sanlo et al. (2002) assembled a guiding framework for campus leaders as they work to implement LGBTQ programs. In some cases, establishing these new programs was possible due to support and pressure from faculty and staff to develop these programs (Sanlo et al., 2002). Thus, strong faculty and staff networks on campus can provide peer support and a collective to take on campus initiatives. For example, faculty and staff have advocated for inclusive partner benefits, supported LGBTQ colleagues through tenure and promotion, and lobbied for institutional anti-discrimination policies (Sanlo et al., 2002). Despite these documented collective efforts, little is known about the processes staff use for navigating leadership dynamics.

Historically, student affairs (SA) administrators' participation in campus activism has been tempered (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). One reason may be that best practices in student affairs contend practitioners should be mindful that their free speech is much more limited than students, faculty, and non-employees (Gehring, 2001). Some models for SA practitioners focus on the roles of management, where the SA practitioner is the leader, educator, and manager for administrative offices. "The student affairs administrator leader becomes the front-line role model for defining and demonstrating fair, honest, rule-abiding values" (Dixon, 2001, p. 70). Thus, SA practitioners are expected to uphold institutional policies and practices, and are not encouraged to engage in possible change initiatives (Gehring, 2001). These expectations on SA staff facilitate institutional complacency, and have largely deviated from the activism and advocacy which led to the creation of most campus LGBTQ resource centers (Self, 2015). The hidden expectation for SA practitioners is that they need to

“fall-in-line” and not rock the boat. Yet, there are examples of SA practitioners taking active roles toward change on their campuses.

Wolf-Wendel et al.'s (2004) review the campus experiences of senior SA administrators during the Civil Rights movement. The narratives they captured illustrated the purpose and impact of administrators during times of campus unrest, and how they navigated support for students and institutional expectations. A primary role played by the SA professionals is that of mediators, who identify student support needs, concerns, or demands, and gain institutional buy-in to respond constructively (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). While navigating their roles, many administrators saw their role as “change-agents,” agreeing with most student concerns. Some even actively participated with student demonstrations, while others supported from a distance. Regardless, Wolf-Wendel et al. were able to provide an important and rare look at how campus leaders navigated their role during change movements, in general, and certainly within activist movements.

Educational Leadership

Staff participation in campus activism demonstrated the role some campus leaders may play in advocating for change. Thus, understanding historical and contemporary theories of leadership may help to interpret how their activist efforts can be viewed. The study of leadership in higher education has experienced significant growth in the last few decades (Kezar & Carducci, 2009; Roberts, 2007). As with leadership scholarship in general, Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin (2006) argued that higher education leadership scholarship needs to be open to adopting new approaches to more closely, and critically, examine the phenomenon of leadership on the campuses of our colleges and

universities. However, before I can explore a more critical approach, queer leadership, it is necessary to better understand leadership in general and then, within a higher education context.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Rost (1991) identified hundreds of definitions and theories related to leadership, many of which placed leadership as a trait or behavior attributed to a specific type of individual. These traits often relied on actions of the leader, their charisma, character, or were management-oriented. These earlier conceptions of leadership often conflated roles of a manager with that of a leader (Rost, 1991). The “great man” (sic.) theories viewed leadership as hereditary properties only possessed by certain individuals. Further, leadership was understood as a top-down strategy for managing followers through a hierarchical chain of command, rather than the shared experience between leaders and followers (Komives et al., 2007).

Many studies have attempted to pin down a definition of leadership using quantitative survey instruments; others have built leadership development programs around complex self-assessments and competency worksheets (Bryman, 2011). In the last few decades, critical scholarship has shifted away from a leader-centric or top-down approach toward a more relational and multifaceted view of leadership (Kezar et al., 2006). Yet, despite this move toward more critical approaches to the study of leadership, the vast majority of research – and many corresponding leadership development programs – tend to confine leadership as simple, quantitatively measurable, and causal.

Leadership in Higher Education

Kezar et al. (2006) reviewed and analyzed how leadership in higher education historically evolved and explored applications of leadership across disciplines over the

last couple decades. They captured leadership concepts across epistemological paradigms, reviewing leadership through lenses of functionalism, social constructivism, critical views, and postmodernism. They contended that the proliferation of leadership scholarship was due to critical and postmodern views and practices of leadership. These paradigms provided clarity to leadership happening at multiple levels of colleges and universities, and among staff, faculty, and students. In these ways, leadership is not an isolated phenomenon only found within positional authority (e.g., presidents, deans). Despite this, upper level leadership continued to received some attention; scholarship is scant regarding the application and successes of staff leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

As an example of inquiry about upper-level positional leaders, Kezar and Eckel (2008) examined how university presidents enacted diversity agendas on their campuses through transactional and/or transformational forms of leadership. Transactional leadership was found to be more important in situations when presidents faced the greatest resistance, particularly in bureaucratic structures where leaders have to negotiate power and exchange with constituents. They further found that despite a desire for transformational forms of leadership, which move beyond self-interest and toward inspired and collective initiatives, some political climates did not lend themselves to transformative leadership strategies. This study is important to my research because Kezar and Eckel (2008) also illustrated the challenges associated with confronting diversity initiatives using transformative approaches. While they focused on presidential leadership, their findings may shed light on diversity leadership, such as improving the climate for the LGBTQ community.

Higher education leadership studies provide insight into the intricacies of institutional leadership across institution types, as well as insight into leadership strategies (Kezar et al., 2006; Komives et al., 2007). One such study provided a rare look at the experiences of gay and lesbian presidents, exploring how they negotiate identity, leadership, and campus climate (Bullard, 2015). Queer leaders, in this context, used their identity as a source of visibility for others on their campuses, creating an assumed welcoming campus climate for other LGBTQ members in their community. Despite their success stories, the picture of how or if these queer leaders advocated for specific change to heterogenderist practices remains unclear. Thus, more research is needed.

Tempered Radicals

Successful challenges to dominant power structures in higher education, particularly for queer voices, has historically been the result of bottom-up strategies (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2002). Such strategies were typically negotiated and often tempered. Meyerson (2003) explored how individuals created change in their workplace, through incremental, day-to-day interactions. These “tempered radicals” were strategic in their pursuit of change, learning how to navigate social change in the corporate environment. Yet, this pursuit of change required these radicals to carefully consider their strategies and tactics to a fruitful end. Tempered radicals show up in different forms, but ultimately work to challenge the dominant institutional norms into which many do not fit. Meyerson explained, “Sometimes these individuals pave alternative roads just by quietly speaking up for their personal truths or by refusing to silence aspects of themselves that make them different from the majority” (p. 5). Challenging conformity (i.e., the normative institution) to establish spaces of equity and inclusion speaks to the primary

purpose of tempered radicals, or grassroots leaders. However, this role as a tempered radical creates a tension between conformity and rebellion, which could lead to ambivalence toward their organization.

As noted in chapter one, tempered radicals act through five varied approaches in their pursuit of change (Meyerson, 2003). These five approaches are: a) quiet resistance, b) taking personal threats and turning into opportunities, c) participating in negotiation to locate alternative solutions, d) supplement small wins to gain larger results, and e) organizing action around an issue. Tempered radicals who resist quietly often rely on three subtle approaches to challenge social issues. First, tempered radicals engage in psychological resistance. This occurs when they challenge expectations of conformity and embrace their difference compared to the dominant culture. This action challenges the power of the majority, who often exerts its beliefs, stereotypes, and stigmas onto targeted others. However, this approach also challenges radicals to armor up, and temper their responses to microaggressive comments. Second, self-expression is another form of quiet resistance. This is manifested in how one dresses, places office décor, uses language, or enacts their leadership. Third, quiet resistance emerges in subtle, behind the scenes forms, sometimes through participating in causes outside of the workplace, or through establishing small networks that foster a shared group identity for the marginalized. In subtle ways, these forms of quiet resistance create opportunities to foster support among like-minded others and challenge the larger institution.

Turning personal threats into opportunities places the tempered radical in a position to silently submit or aggressively confront (Meyerson, 2003). Meyerson demonstrated how tempered radicals use marginalization (e.g., experiencing

microaggressions) and turn it into learning moments that engage the aggressor. These opportunities place choice in the hands of the tempered radical to identify how they respond, recognizing the complexity of the context (e.g., who is the offender, their position in organization, the organizational environment, potential payoff for challenging the individual). Tempered radicals can turn threats into opportunities in six ways: interrupting momentum, naming the issue, correcting assumptions or actions, diverting the direction, using humor, and delaying a response. Despite the efforts of those who turn personal threats into opportunities, Meyerson found these responses had little impact beyond interpersonal interaction.

Negotiation is another strategy used to broaden the impact of change. There are four primary negotiating strategies tempered radicals might employ: a) stepping back, temporarily removing oneself from the current situation to allow emotion and personal experience to subside, which creates room for a broader perspective; b) looking inward, creating a space for individuals to reflect on what they want to achieve, what they are willing to give up for that goal, and to name their fears associated with the impact of their loss/gain; c) taking stock of others' interest to uncover what is driving their adversaries (e.g., what do they want, what do they fear, what do they value, and what might they be able to give up during negotiations); and d) using third parties to provide clout, emotional or social support, mediate difficult conversations, and help frame issues that may remove some of the emotional or personal influence within group. "To approach a difficult situation or conflict as a negotiation is to take the stance of agent rather than victim" (Meyerson, 2003, p. 99). Further, leveraging these agentic gains through negotiation is an important strategy for working across difference.

Meyerson (2003) identified small wins as the achievable initiatives that may not be a logical first step in a linear change order. Part of developing the path to a small win rests in the flexibility of the movement to adapt, or take alternative routes, to the intended outcome. Being ready to act on opportunity is a key component, as is gauging time and energy for wisely selecting challenges (Meyerson, 2003). Small wins can also be used to properly frame the movement, ensuring that problems do not go unrecognized. Tempered radicals strategically use small win narratives by identifying flaws in the dominant discourse and offer alternative views. Small wins are actually considerable gains that carry momentum forward. While big wins are important, they are much more risky and difficult to achieve without a larger body of support.

Although individuals may be able to achieve small wins or some change on their own, organizing collective action is one of the more successful forms of activism among tempered radicals (Meyerson, 2003). “When the target of change is something as large, or immediate as new organizational practice or policy...it may require the force of a collective body to generate movement” (Meyerson, 2003, p. 123). Working in concert provides legitimacy, power, and resources that individuals may not experience alone. Routes to organizing collectives rely on three conditions: a) the occurrence of political opportunities or threats; b) available structures for individuals to organize themselves into a group; and c) framing group identity, its opportunities, and its threats (Meyerson, 2003). This type of organizing requires some thought about differences within the collective, particularly ensuring that issues are clarified, and that there is clear definition to the group culture, structure, and leadership.

The concept of tempered radicals serves as an important frame for the development of grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), as it provides a structure that illustrates the impact bottom-up leaders can have on an organization. Across the various levels of action employed by tempered radicals, Meyerson (2003) pointed out that they may utilize any of the five aforementioned strategies for navigating change. Two of those strategies, collective action and quiet resistance, are particularly important. They are not dependent on each other, and each purpose, cause for action, or individual context and culture may require different engagement. However, while Meyerson provided an important frame for grassroots leadership, her concept is shaped by corporate organizational cultures. As such, tempered radicals fail to fully capture the complexities of higher education institutional leadership structures. To adapt this framework for higher education, Kezar and Lester (2011) expanded upon this framework and through their research developed the theory of grassroots leadership in higher education, which I explore next.

Grassroots Leadership

Grassroots leadership is an alternative view from earlier theories about leadership about how change can happen in bureaucratic higher educational structures. As a model, it requires bottom-up efforts from those who lack authority, or delegated power. Kezar and Lester (2011) sought to spotlight the changes taking place on college campuses that frequently go undocumented. They said, “we do not have an appreciation of the various change initiatives and agendas of bottom-up leaders, strategies or grassroots leaders, obstacles that they face, or ways they maintain resiliency” (p. 9). Their model advanced Meyerson’s (2003) work, placing grassroots activism in the context of higher education

leadership, specifically gauging how faculty and staff participate in campus activism, resistance, and change.

Kezar and Lester (2011) developed their framework grounded in data from five different campuses, focusing on faculty and staff initiatives at public and private institutions. These campuses included a) community college, b) research university, c) public regional university, d) technical college, and e) liberal arts college. To analyze collective action in these institutions, Kezar and Lester provided a guiding framework that organized the phenomenon of grassroots leadership in higher education into three levels: individual, group, and organizational (see figure 1).

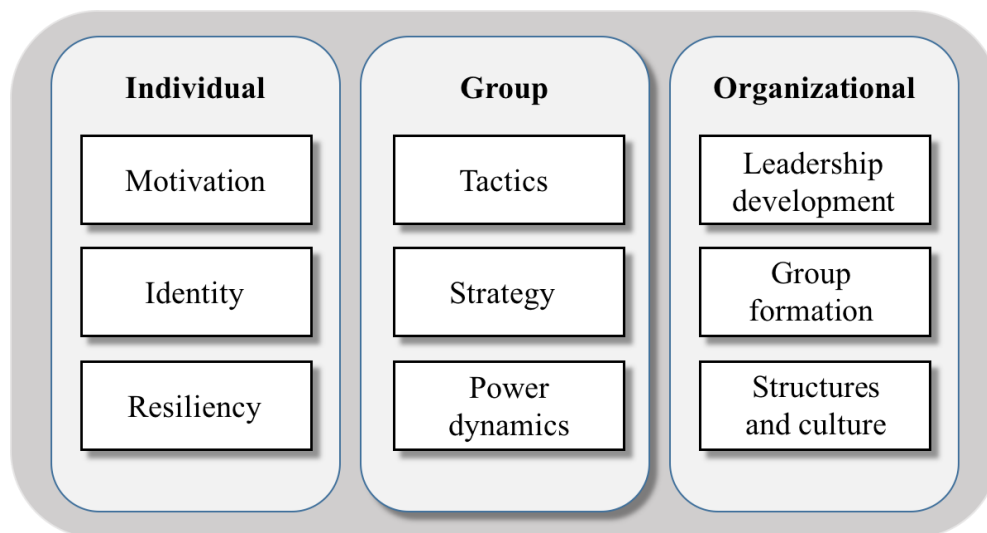


Figure 1. Grassroots leadership model; challenges and obstacles. (Kezar & Lester, 2011)

Individual Level

The individual level phenomenon considered three primary factors: motivation, identity, and resiliency. Kezar and Lester (2011) explain *motivation* as the reason, or causes, for involvement in grassroots leadership, varying from self-interest or passion to commitment or responsibility. Such motivation may surface due to personal relationships to members in marginalized communities, or holding some personal beliefs toward the

primary goal. *Identity* included characteristics that make an individual distinctive.

Grassroots leadership is particularly focused on identity as it relates to how identity informs approaches to leadership (e.g., sexuality, gender, race). For example, holding an identity in the LGBTQ community may influence leaders' attitudes or approaches, or make them more (or less) aware of other social justice issues. *Resiliency* refers to the ability to bounce back from challenging circumstances and it is frequently shaped by possessing strong values, having balance, feeling optimism, and networking (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Kezar and Lester (2011) found resiliency played a significant role in grassroots leaders' ability to forge through institutional obstacles and work through power dynamics that created resistance. Their findings break down participant resiliency through intrinsic and extrinsic forms of coping. Intrinsic resiliency manifests through a number of coping strategies. These may include the leaders': a) personal visions, b) beliefs and optimism, c) feeling as if they make a difference, d) maintaining a realistic perspective, e) humor, f) finding balance, and g) inner reflection. Despite these forms of resilience, obstacles still provide considerable challenges to grassroots leaders. Thus, being able to tap into resiliency is an important strategy for leaders to understand. Some of these forms of resiliency show up in extrinsic groups, especially from like-minded activists, having a personal support network, maintaining a working community, or connections with family members. Resiliency is strongest when grassroots leaders draw from both their intrinsic and extrinsic sources, supporting their change efforts while working through the flow of power and resistance in their institutional climates.

Group Level

The group level phenomenon is rooted in three primary factors: tactics, strategy, and power dynamics. *Tactics* are specific methods or strategies for achieving goals; these may include consciousness raising, empowerment, relationship building, organizing, and participating in marches. *Strategy* is an overarching principle that is applied to various tactics to achieve a goal, including compromise, flexibility, confrontation, or a pragmatism. Combined, strategy and tactics serve as the primary methods for achieving goals of social change. *Power dynamics* are primarily related to the social interactions and incompatibility of individuals attempting to shape or change environments in different ways (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Power dynamics are one of the greatest obstacles grassroots leaders' encounter, particularly for staff who seek to impact bottom-up change (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Power dynamics manifest in myriad ways, including discrimination and harassment. Within the grassroots framework, Kezar and Lester identified areas where power dynamics manifest: a) institutional dominations or oppression and b) bullying or incivility. "The severe forms of oppression and silencing that staff face lead to turnover, lack of leadership for the initiative, and weakened resiliency of individuals involved in the change" (p. 150). Kezar and Lester's (2011) findings revealed several staff projects that were suppressed before they even got off the ground. Staff were frequently more vulnerable to power dynamics on campus due to their status in the institutional hierarchy, whereas their faculty counterparts may have had some protections from the worst power conditions. This may be why so little research has explored staff activism.

Administrators maintain positional power and privilege within higher education institutions, with staff often situated in a separate sphere from university officials and faculty. Power also is leveraged between groups, and sometimes include those without formal authority. Kezar and Lester (2011) identified five distinctive types of power dynamics: a) oppression, which was the most abusive form of power mostly used on staff members, was found through intimidation tactics or threats of employment; b) silencing, which included actions that made individuals feel as if they do not have a voice because they fail to acknowledge a problem exists; c) controlling behaviors by institutional agents who exerted their power by not allowing grassroots leaders to organize or meet without administrators present; d) stalling tactics, most often experienced by faculty, which may appear to be aspects of the bureaucratic process but turn out to be strategies of administrators to slow down or prevent change; and e) microaggressions, which are small continuous abusive behaviors that belittle or exclude individuals. However, despite these power dynamics, many grassroots leaders demonstrated strategies and tactics for working through these oppressive environments (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Organizational Level

The organizational level phenomenon is observed in three contexts: leadership development, group formation, and structures and culture. *Leadership development* focuses on formal and informal efforts to prepare or educate others about the tactics, strategy, resiliency, and power dynamics involved in grassroots leadership. Typically, these are informal efforts due to the organic nature of grassroots leadership. However, formal tactics might include organizing brown-bag lunches or forming networks. Informal efforts typically focus on mentoring and coaching. *Group formation* references

people who voluntarily come together for a shared purpose. This might include networks, teams, or ad hoc committees. *Structures and culture* address aspects that shape the organizational policies or practices of an institution, such as hiring, reward structures, or mechanisms for shared governance. *Organizational culture* refers to the institutions values, norms, and assumptions that guide the organizational structure.

Grassroots leadership distinguishes itself from other forms of leadership, most notably through bottom-up strategies. Top-down efforts typically refer to challenges and action from upper administrators, whereas bottom-up efforts focus on the interests and actions of grassroots organizers (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Recognizing these distinctions, Kezar and Lester identified tactics that grassroots leaders utilized to navigate between the bottom-up and top-down hierarchies. These tactics included: assessing timing of action; capitalizing on and being open to opportunities; relying on translators (e.g., liaisons or gatekeepers); and sensitizing those in power to the change initiative. Engaging and coaching administrative authority through the importance of the change initiatives, using data, and leveraging student interest create opportunities for top-down leaders to understand the grassroots leaders' rationale for change (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

As a framework, Kezar and Lester (2011) were able to identify tactics and strategies faculty and staff used to forge successful gains, such as applying tempered bottom-up strategies of grassroots leadership. Despite developing a strong framework for future analysis, Kezar and Lester identified the experiences of university staff as change agents as a continued gap in higher education scholarship. This gap is likely due to the fact that “staff are often the lowest paid, are the first to be laid off, and have little voice in institutional decision making; they have limited agency” (Kezar & Lester, 2011, p. 298).

This project addresses this gap by illuminating the voices of staff members who engage in leadership that demands equity for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff.

Queer Leadership

Building on Kezar and Lester's (2011) advancement of grassroots leadership in higher education, I argue that queer leadership requires three additional considerations within the *individual, group, and organizational* phenomenon. These include: a) queer advocacy; b) queering leadership; and c) queer policy and practice (see figure 2). Placing queer viewpoints at the center of leadership (Dilley, 1999) creates room for the exploration of LGBTQ equity and disrupts normative leadership strategies, even within the grassroots movement. As colleges and universities are frequent sites for heterogendered policies and practice (Preston & Hoffman, 2015), the complexity of navigating these spaces, particularly in conservative regional climates, is in need of exploration. As previously discussed, scholarship has demonstrated the impact activists have had on LGBTQ advancement (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2000; Self & Hudson, 2015); leadership at colleges and universities continues to support heterogenderist practices (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Preston & Hoffman, 2015; Self, 2015); and higher education institutions continue to lack supportive policies and practices for LGBTQ students (Campus Pride, 2016; Marine, 2011). These three additional phenomena contribute another layer of complexity to grassroots leadership, putting forward a queer leadership model for higher education.

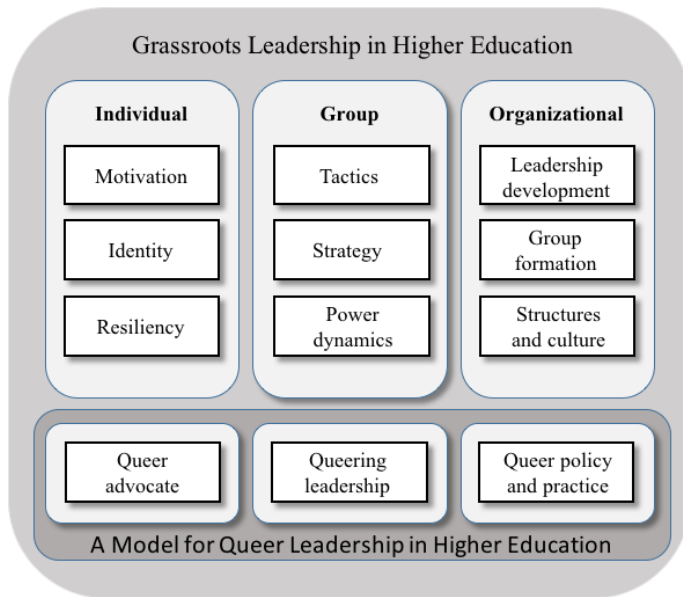


Figure 2. A proposed conceptual model for queer leadership in higher education.

Queer advocacy adds to the complexity of the individual phenomena (Kezar & Lester, 2011) by extending the conception of individual *identity* and *motivation*. In many circumstances, *queer activists* or *advocates* maintain a position of privilege in how and when they choose to advocate. Advocates may or may not identify as LGBTQ, although their *identity* may certainly complicate and inform their strategy toward *advocacy*. Identity is a central component to grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), yet the naming of oneself as a queer advocate in a historically oppressive climate deepens the stigma attached to that leader. While an LGBTQ identity may not always be visible, thus unable to remove the fear or anxiety associated with their identity, *advocates* can, and most likely do, pick and choose their moments of advocacy. As staff are vulnerable to retaliation and threats of job-loss (Kezar & Lester, 2011), advocates may choose to exercise their privilege to address issues of inequity, leveraging grassroots leadership strategies to advance their agenda. To be an advocate requires action and it is important to note the term does not represent a social identity. The role of queer identities is already

factored into Kezar and Lester's (2011) framework, but it is also notable that not all LGBTQ grassroots leaders are advocating for LGBTQ equity nor do all queer people wish to be their own advocates. *Queer advocate* is a commitment chosen and acted upon by the grassroots leader.

Queering leadership centers queer identities in leadership practice and extends grassroots leadership efforts in disrupting power dynamics in higher education institutions. Thus, centering queer identities in leadership practices necessitates a disruption of heterosexist and cissexist culture embedded in institutional leadership and practice. Queer leaders may exercise this by advocating for LGBTQ students or colleagues, engaging conversations about LGBTQ equity in practice, advancing dialogue on LGBTQ inclusive practices, and challenging heterogendered norms. Further, an additional struggle of queering leadership may require obtaining buy-in among constituents who may or may not be compassionate or aware of queer needs or issues. Heterogendered practices are the result of heteronormative (Abes, 2008; Dilley, 1999) and genderist (Bilodeau, 2009) ways of seeing the world, often perpetuated by non-queer individuals who are unaware of their power and privilege or how heterogenderism impacts the LGBTQ community. Centering queer issues, often overlooked and misunderstood in HESA, creates an added layer of complexity to the group phenomena of grassroots leadership.

A final important contribution of queer leadership connects outcomes to campus organizational structures. Renn's (2007) queer activists demonstrated the need for transformational leadership that advanced social change. Thus, *queer policy and practice* extend the organizational phenomena of *structures and culture* within grassroots

leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), specifically advancing LGBTQ policies or initiatives. Challenging institutional norms and advancing queer inclusive practice or policy is a cornerstone to queer leadership (Lugg & Tooms, 2010). Lugg and Tooms (2010) explored the role of queer identities in the context of educational leadership and environments, applying queer theoretical concepts to uncover areas of heterosexism and homophobia in the profession. They argued creating queer inclusive leadership environments extends beyond just eliminating discrimination, but also includes implementing inclusive policies, disrupting bullying behaviors, embracing all forms of queer identities, and espousing a welcoming environment through empathy. Thus, queer educational leadership not only relies on queer-minded actors, but on transforming historically heterogenderist institutions. Transforming institutions may require strategies beyond traditional notions of authoritative leadership. As such, bottom-up leadership strategies may be an effective approach for challenging these institutions. These additional strategies serve as an important outgrowth to grassroots leadership, centering queer advocacy, disrupting heterogendered practices through queering leadership, and advancing policy and practice to benefit LGBTQ people in HESA.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed scholarship relevant to this study's exploration of queer leadership in higher education and student affairs. In doing so, I provided a framework for the study that included the role of students and HESA staff in LGBTQ activism, progress for the inclusion of LGBTQ communities at colleges and universities, relevant LGBTQ research in HESA, and a review of tempered radicals and grassroots leadership. Finally, I provide a conceptualization of how queer leadership in higher education may

operate, demonstrating how it serves as an outgrowth of grassroots leadership in higher education (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Most importantly, the literature demonstrated a gap in understanding queer leadership in higher education. Despite a growth in LGBTQ research in higher education, little emphasis is placed on understanding how HESA staff have navigated change for LGBTQ equity at colleges and universities. Further, traditionally heterogendered institutions continue to exclude queer identities and discourage student activism (Preston & Hoffman, 2015), upholding unwelcoming campus climates for queer students, faculty, and staff (Rankin et al., 2010).

This demonstrated growth in LGBTQ programs in HESA is promising (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2002); yet, a lack of visibility of queer leadership in higher education scholarship raises questions about how LGBTQ leaders have navigated, or continue to navigate, change at historically oppressive institutions. LGBTQ progress in higher education is due, in part, to the efforts of grassroots organizing (Marine, 2011), particularly queer student activists (Dilley, 2002; Renn, 2010). However, more recent advancements, particularly with an increase in institutional policies and campus resource centers, may suggest that campus staff are engaging in change efforts. The present study advances an understanding of queer leadership among staff in higher education and student affairs. The implications of this investigation may serve as a model for staff leaders seeking to advance equity for LGBTQ communities, currently underrepresented at US colleges and universities. In the following chapter, I discuss my study design in detail.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

LGBTQ scholarship in higher education is lacking critical methodological and theoretical depth (Renn, 2010). As scholarship urges HESA practitioners to confront the often chilly climates for LGBTQ students, Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, and Gildersleeve (2012) argued for qualitative inquiry that challenges normative scholarship practices to more deeply interrogate the structures that continue to privilege certain groups. Qualitative inquiry is positioned to critique these power structures, creating room to advance equity and social justice change.

Social justice serves as our compulsion to document not only how these power relations produce oppressive and/or emancipatory conditions but also how to imagine rearranging these relations to map new conditions that achieve an ever expansive notion of equity and opportunity. (Pasque et al., 2012, p. 7)

To examine the experiences of queer leaders in higher education, I advance a queer leadership framework guided by grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), which interrogated leaders' strategies for navigating change and power dynamics in higher education. Consistent with critical qualitative inquiry, it is imperative to name the paradigm from which I approach this project (Jones et al., 2014; Pasque et al., 2012). I approach this study with a critical constructivist paradigm, where critical ideologies serve to critique institutional practices, assumptions, and political ideologies (Jones et al., 2014; Leonardo, 2004). Ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology are placed at the center of critical inquiry as philosophies that undergird meaning-making and the establishment of our worldview (Pasque et al., 2012). *Ontology* refers to what we believe about the nature of reality; *epistemology* asks how do we know what we know; *axiology*

asks what is the role of values that undergird ontology and epistemology; and *methodology* becomes engaged with these three ways of knowing, as Pasque et al. (2012) purported, the “interactive triad of being, knowing, and valuing” (p. 23). Thus, methodology is more than the steps of data collection (or methods), but is guided by the researcher’s worldview, quests for knowledge, and values (Pasque et al., 2012).

Constructivists view the world more subjectively, through the lens of multiple realities that are shaped by people, their lives, and their interactions with others (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Merriam identified constructivism as interpretive research, where knowledge is created and not found in an observable reality. “Critical constructivism works to expose elitist assumptions embedded in existing knowledge. Understanding that dominant power wielders have attempted to hegemonize individuals via...political, economic, social, cultural, epistemological and pedagogical structures” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 143). Critical methodological consideration requires scholars to seek social transformation, foregrounding issues of equity through the research process (Pasque et al., 2012). Thus, this project sought to illuminate the experiences of change agents who advance equity in higher education systems that historically have oppressed minoritized groups, in particular the LGBTQ community. I move beyond objective ways of knowing, and toward interpretative work that is co-created with participants or activists, to illuminate the transformation efforts of queer leaders in higher education.

Research Purpose and Question

As introduced in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of campus leaders who have served as agents of change in their institutional climate through LGBTQ inclusive policy or practice. I sought to illuminate the strategies

of these self-identified LGBTQ leaders, through their campus involvement or positional experiences, particularly identifying their strategies for navigating institutional power structures. The research question which guided this study is:

How do professional staff campus leaders on two different university campuses engage in grassroots and queer leadership in order to change policies and practices to improve the climate for LGBTQ individuals?

Design

To answer my research question, I conducted a multi-site case study (Yin, 2014). Case study is a valuable form of inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in a real-world context, where distinguishing factors between phenomenon and context may not be clear (Yin, 2014). This form of inquiry relies on multiple sources of data, contributing to data triangulation and researcher trustworthiness. Although qualitative research is not intended to be generalizable, using a multiple-case design allowed for more compelling data that I compared and contrasted based on the phenomenon of LGBTQ advocacy (Yin, 2014). For the purposes of this study, I explored queer leadership at two distinct institution types, similar to Kezar and Lester's (2011) exploration of grassroots leadership. Each campus and their LGBTQ leaders served as a case, systems bounded by the institutions and the leadership experiences of my participants. The primary data collected was individual interviews, with additional data including documents and some observation.

Methods

Site and Participant Selection

In selecting the cases, Jones et al. (2014) suggested, "the selection of the case emerges from the theoretical framework because this provides the foundation for the

particular investigation and leads to the purpose of the study” (p. 96). Cases may be selected due to the rich nature of their context or due to unique or typical factors of interest in the phenomenon (Jones et al., 2014). For this study, staff leaders who advanced LGBTQ equity embedded in a typical campus setting served as the case. I purposefully identified the two campuses for my study due to recent changes at each campus that demonstrate support for LGBTQ communities. The first institution, the Metropolitan School of Art (MSA, a pseudonym), is a small private art school in the Midwest. MSA has a student population of 1,000 full-time students; 64% are women. The racial composition of the students is: 63% White, 7% Hispanic, 7% two or more races, 5% Black or African American, 2% Asian, and 15% unknown. The second institution is Midwest Rural University (MRU, a pseudonym), a mid-sized public rural serving institution in the Midwest, located about 50 miles from a prominent Midwest city. MRU has a student population of 14,000 students; 54% are women. The racial composition of the students at MRU is: 84% White, 9% Black, 3.3% Hispanic, 2.75% two or more races, and 1.3% Asian.

I selected MSA and MRU because they are typical institutions that do not house institutionally funded LGBTQ programs. In addition, they represent two distinct institutional classifications, which may enhance the transferability of the findings. Kezar and Lester (2011) explored grassroots leadership at five different institution types. Although five campuses is beyond the scope of this study, exploring two cases provided a rich comparison and contrast as to how queer leadership functioned differently based on each campus and staff leadership context.

Despite not housing formal LGBTQ student affairs programs, both campuses have demonstrated some progress toward the inclusion of LGBTQ identities in policy and program changes. MSA recently implemented a name and personal gender pronoun policy, which allows students to change their names and have their gender pronouns reflected on class rosters. MRU implemented a graduate assistant position dedicated to LGBTQ programs and facilitates a campus Safe Space program—an LGBTQ diversity training program hosted on many campuses—that has provided greater support for its LGBTQ community. Both campuses also provide a unique glimpse at support and resources for LGBTQ communities through programs that are not officially facilitated by an LGBTQ office—perhaps more common considering that fewer than 5% of colleges and universities host LGBTQ programs (Marine, 2011).

Due to my professional role as Assistant Director for my campus's LGBTQ programs, I held access to professional contacts, or gatekeepers (Jones et al., 2014), to assist with identifying campus LGBTQ leaders. Although I had frequent professional interactions with these gatekeepers, they have maintained contact with me as an LGBTQ professional resource of support and guidance. These gatekeepers provided a list of potential participants for me to contact. Leaders were invited to participate via email (Appendix A). Those who agreed and enrolled in the study were provided informed consent, which addressed the purpose of the study, risks and rewards associated with their participation, and information about their right to withdrawal from the study during or after their involvement (Appendix B). No participants withdrew from the study.

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy based on the theoretical construct to identify staff members engaged with LGBTQ leadership (Patton,

2002). Other LGBTQ leaders were identified through snowball sampling (Patton, 2002); I asked those who participated for other potential participants they know as LGBTQ leaders on their campus. As this study is focused on staff leadership, I sought participants who: a) were not currently in a position specifically dedicated to LGBTQ equity; b) were not in upper-administrative roles (e.g., Vice-President, President); c) serve as a staff member; and d) had some involvement in LGBTQ leadership (e.g., advocating for policy change, providing service to a campus organization). Despite these restrictions, as data collection commenced, faculty and graduate students were recruited as co-leaders of LGBTQ change, which provided important details related to each campus case context.

A total of eight participants were enrolled in the study at MRU, including five full-time staff members, two post-tenure faculty members, and one graduate assistant. All participants at MRU identified as White. Jennifer, who identified as queer and agender, served as a staff member in the counseling center for over 4 years. In addition to her role as a psychologist, Jennifer managed and facilitated the campus Safe Space training on campus. Benjamin, a queer trans man, is the LGBTQ graduate assistant and had served in his position for 1 year. He and Jennifer are married and have worked on LGBTQ issues collaboratively between their respective offices. Sheila, a lesbian cisgender woman, is a staff member who has been at the university as a student and staff member for a collective 16 years. The last 6 years she has worked within student affairs as part of the Student Life Engagement Program (SLEP). Barbara, a faculty member on campus, has been at MRU since the early 1990s as a student, and then returned after a brief gap for her Master's degree. Barbara and Sheila are married and have been strong advocates on campus for many years. Sue and Debbie, both straight cisgender women, are staff

members on campus and both have demonstrated support for LGBTQ equity on campus, although neither have been strongly involved with advancement at MRU. Despite this, Sue and Debbie provided valuable feedback for the campus context and climate. Tom, a straight cisgender man, has been at MRU since the early 1980s and views himself as a bit of an outsider at MRU due to his vocal atheistic views. He also spoke about being assumed to be queer, due to his “non-traditional” views and attitudes. Dr. Jeremy Nessie, a straight cisgender man, is a tenured faculty member who helped advocate for domestic partner benefits for campus faculty and staff. Some participant demographics will be explained further in Chapter 4.

A total of six participants were enrolled in the study at MSA, including five staff members and one graduate intern. Kerry served as the Dean of Students for MSA, where she has worked for over 10 years. She identified as a White, straight, cisgender woman, who has advocated for LGBTQ policy expansion at MSA. David Owen served as the Assistant Dean of Students for MSA, having worked at MSA for nearly 4 years, he too identified as White, straight and cisgender, advocating for LGBTQ policy expansion. Despite their titles, Kerry and David Owen navigated change leveraging strategies employed in grassroots activism. Although grassroots leadership maintains advocacy happens from the bottom-up (Kezar & Lester, 2011), Kerry and David Owen’s context of a small fine arts college created a structural difference where their role at MSA allowed them certain leadership privileges, but the smallness of the campus still required them to maneuver within a system and institutional power dynamics that prevented them from making top-down changes. Their strategies required bottom-up movement to obtain buy-

in and to be effective. Thus, I viewed their involvement in this study as staff members who were still limited by power structures beyond their control.

Other participants included Bobby, an Asian gay cisgender man who had previously worked at MSA for 7 years. During Bobby's time at MSA he supported the LGBTQ student organization and helped launch a Safe Space program for campus. Brenda, a White straight cisgender woman, worked in student affairs at MSA for nearly 20 years. Elaine, a White straight cisgender woman, worked in student affairs at MSA 25 years. Brenda and Elaine were committed to LGBTQ student support and provided valuable context to MSA. Casey, a White, queer, gender non-binary person, provided support to LGBTQ students as part of their (Casey's pronoun) counseling practicum at MSA. Some participant demographics will be explained further in Chapter 5.

At each campus, I had hoped to interview at minimum a total of 10 campus constituents and self-identified LGBTQ leaders, primarily comprising of LGBTQ staff leaders. Due to the differences in each campus context, I was not able to reach this goal. The recruited participants struggled to identify other advocates on campus to recruit. However, at each campus I identified a small number of leaders who were most instrumental toward progress on their campus. Participants not as directly involved in policy change or practice still provided valuable assessments of each campus, contributing rich data for understanding each case.

Data Collection

Case study requires the use of multiple sources of data for establishing a strong case and to ensure data triangulation and trustworthiness (Jones et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). As mentioned, data collection primarily relied on interviews with campus leaders who

advocate for LGBTQ equity on campus. Interviews are considered one of the most significant sources of data in case study research, because they are able to provide thick and rich accounts of the case phenomenon from participants engaged in the practice of LGBTQ leadership (Yin, 2014). I used documentation as a secondary source of evidence. These data included optional participant demographic surveys, campus websites promoting LGBTQ equity, and student newspaper articles. Yin argued that documents provide an unobtrusive source without interfering with the case, and can provide a broader context to the site. Additionally, at MSA I conducted participant-observation of the diversity workgroup meetings to obtain a stronger sense of the leadership context. Despite attempts to collect participant-observation data at MRU, I was not successful in making inroads on campus for this data source. However, at both campuses I conducted informal-interviews with other staff members or graduate students. These informal interviews were primarily a strategy for learning more about the campus context and climate. These individual accounts were not audio recorded, but their data were added to my field notes and included in analysis.

Interviews. Because my interest was in the experiences of LGBTQ leaders, my primary source of data relied on open ended, semi-structured interviews with self-identified LGBTQ leaders. This form of interview allowed for a deeper exploration of participant experiences (Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted face-to-face and guided by the interview protocol (Appendix C). The interviews discussed the participants 1) perceptions of campus climate related to LGBTQ identities and issues, 2) how they have engaged in leadership efforts to advocate for LGBTQ equity, and 3) how institutional agents have responded to LGBTQ concerns on campus. Further, I explored

how participants navigated power structures, if and how they engaged constituent groups, and what successes or set-backs they experienced. I conducted at least one interview with each participant, with interviews lasting 93 minutes on average. After the first round of interviews, it became apparent which staff members were most engaged with advocating for LGBTQ equity. This led me to identify select participants for a second interview (Appendix D), to further understand their leadership philosophy and how they centered LGBTQ students in their work. This second interview averaged 31 minutes, with a total of three participants from MRU and two participants from MSA. With permission, both sets of interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim; I removed any personal identifying information in the transcripts to enhance confidentiality, asking participants to create pseudonyms for themselves. Finally, participants were asked to fill out an optional demographic form (Appendix E), completed by all but one participant.

Documentation. Jones et al. (2014) highlighted the use of documents as a tool for telling part of the case's story; confirming components of the interview participant experiences; and uncovering institutional values, beliefs, or stories. I specifically focused on the aforementioned demographic forms, university websites, and campus newspapers detailing issues related to the LGBTQ community at each campus. In addition, I conducted a search engine review of each campus's website, focusing on the following keywords: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, LGBT, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Observation. A third source of data was direct participant-observation to examine the process of queer leadership and to gain a sense of the LGBTQ climate at each institution. Participant-observation allows the researcher to observe phenomena not

easily captured through interviews or document analysis, capturing participant engagement in a real-world setting (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014). Jones et al. (2014) suggested observations are most meaningful when they address the research question or are guided by the study's framework. For this project, I intended to observe leaders engagement with advocacy. I was only successful in completing observations at MSA. I conducted observations at MSA by attending five of their campus diversity workgroup meetings, which allowed me the opportunity to connect with some faculty, staff, and students. These meetings addressed diversity and inclusion issues impacting campus and allowed me to develop a sense of the LGBTQ campus climate. Specifically, I looked for a) how meetings are led, b) who is leading the meeting and who is at the meeting, c) goals or action items obtained from the meeting, and d) if and how the meeting contributes to advocating for LGBTQ equity as proposed in the queer leadership model. As part of these observations, I maintained a researcher's log and kept field notes for analysis. I made efforts to attend meetings and student events at MRU, but due to the request of the advisor, I was not successful in collecting data from this method.

Data Analysis

For this project, due to the nature of multiple sources of data, constant comparative data analysis was employed to effectively compare all data sources (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). Constant comparison of data happens at every stage of the data collection process (Jones et al., 2014). Analysis was ongoing and tracked through a researcher log and memos. Memos served as a tool during the analysis process, assisting with making sense of the data and identifying early interpretations of the data (Jones et al., 2014). Once interview data were transcribed, some of the observations completed,

and documents reviewed, data were organized in a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program to assist with data management. As this is a multi-site case study, I relied on cross-case syntheses (Yin, 2014), where I examined findings within each individual case before comparing leadership experiences across cases. I use Chapter 4 to discuss the findings from MRU, Chapter 5 to discuss findings at MSA, and then Chapter 6 to compare across cases and provide discussion and implications.

Coding. Using *analytic induction*, both deductive and inductive coding methods were employed during data analysis (Patton, 2002). “Sometimes... qualitative analysis is first deductive or quasi-deductive and then inductive as when, for example, the analyst begins by examining the data in terms of theory-derived...framework (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Because this project explored queer leadership as an extension of grassroots leadership, I identified a set of *a priori* deductive codes following the queer leadership framework that was informed by grassroots leadership levels: *Individual*, *Group*, and *Organizational*.

Relying on this deductive process may have limited analysis of the case, thus I also employed open and axial coding (inductive), to capture nuances of the cases not identified through the deductive methods. I reviewed interview transcripts and other data through line-by-line open coding (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Line-by-line coding relies on staying close to the participants’ words, asking questions of the data that get to what the data actually reveal (Jones et al., 2014). Jones et al. (2014) discuss focused (axial) coding as the process of making analytic sense of the larger data from open coding. “Focused coding enables the researchers to make an analytic turn as focused codes become more integrative and theoretically rich categories (Jones et al., 2014, p.

80). These inductive codes were especially valuable for further explanation of queer leadership. Particularly the nuances leaders at each campus espoused, which led to at least two ways to understand how staff engaged queer leadership strategies.

Open and axial coding comes from the grounded theory tradition (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I borrowed from this process within this multiple case study, but I did not intend to generate a grounded theory framework. Presentation of the case findings are guided by the proposed framework, conceptualizing queer leadership through extant literature and the grassroots leadership framework. Themes identified through the data analysis reveal the nuances of each case and highlight any similarities or differences between the sites and framework, as outlined in chapter 6. The case presentation shows how the data contributes to understanding the phenomenon of queer leadership in higher education at MRU and MSA.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and promote confidence and rigor in the research process, I am guided by Jones et al. (2014), who argue for the use of inquiry and relational competence. It is important to demonstrate not only rigorous methods and research practices, but also acknowledge how my social identities and role as an LGBTQ educator may influence how I approach this project.

Inquiry competence. I ensured credibility through data saturation and the use of multiple data sources. Jones et al. (2014) argued that dependability is confirmed through the explicit detail of data collection and the study's research process. As such, I established an audit trail and detailed outline of the data collection process. Further, they argued transferability may be met through demonstrating the relevance of the research

findings. In this case, LGBTQ advocates at other institutions in HESA may find that the study has valuable implications for their own work. Finally, Jones et al. (2014) argued that confirmability enhances researcher trustworthiness of data analysis. This process ensured findings were attached to the data collection and analysis process and are not unethically shaped to correspond with the framework. I also triangulated data through the collection and analysis of multiple sources (e.g., interviews, observation, document analysis; Jones et al., 2014).

Relational competence. Researchers must interrogate their role in the data collection and analysis process (Jones et al., 2014). I am a White, gay, cisgender man, who currently works as an LGBTQ practitioner in HESA. Researcher positionality is an important component that “[takes] into account the experiences and social identities of those being studied and of the researcher,” to mitigate some biases in the interpretation of data (Jones et al., 2014, p. 41). It is important for me to acknowledge that my work as an LGBTQ advocate and educator is central to my purpose as a scholar practitioner. These identities and experiences contribute to my worldview and positionality that tries to center minoritized voices. Part of this process is recognizing the power I possess as the researcher and as an active queer practitioner in the field of HESA. As this project sought to illuminate the experiences of queer leaders, my identities certainly impacted the dynamic between myself and the study’s participants, establishing credibility and trust between myself and participants. Thus, naming these areas of privilege and power are important for understanding how I maintained trustworthiness during data collection.

Jones et al. (2014) also encouraged researchers to recognize any pre-understandings. Because of my positionality as an LGBTQ practitioner, I acknowledge

my own curiosity centered on change and progress for LGBTQ inclusion on college campuses. I have played active roles in pursuing change for LGBTQ equity as an undergraduate student, graduate student, and higher education professional. These identities and experiences contribute to my interest in illuminating others' experiences as queer leaders, who are doing critical work in climates historically not welcoming of LGBTQ individuals. By defining my positionality and remaining reflexive throughout the research process, I am ensuring goodness in qualitative research (Jones et al., 2014).

Limitations

As with any research endeavor, this case study is not able to fully capture all that can be known about queer leadership, and thus there are some important limitations to acknowledge. Qualitative inquiry, and more specifically case study research, is not intended to be generalizable (Yin, 2014). Thus, any findings related to queer leadership or the phenomenon of grassroots leadership are meant to provide implications that may be transferable to HESA leadership practice, policy, and understanding queer leadership. Another limitation this project may encounter is related to sample limitations. Due to the scope of the project, it is not possible to explore leadership across additional institution types or geographic locations. However, this does not detract from what can be learned from these particular findings and contexts. In addition, the study may serve as a model for further exploration of queer leadership in other settings.

Further limitations relate to the participants recruited for this study. My access was limited to the two institutions I sought to explore. Both campuses lacked racial and gender diversity among their staff, particularly those involved with LGBTQ equity work. All participants, except for Bobby at MSA, identified as White. Further, most participants

at both campuses were cisgender. Although the experiences of the participants were valuable, a homogenous sample limits understanding about the intersections of race and gender. This limitation may impact how queer leadership is understood through various identity lenses, and serves as a call for continued exploration of queer leadership among racial and gender diverse staff.

Although I already named my identities, it is important to acknowledge how my identity as a White, gay, cisgender man may influence data collection and analysis. Despite any attempts to bracket these identities, they may still influence the rapport I developed with participants, as well as the lens in which I approached data analysis. Although my gay identity may have created trust with queer participants, it may have limited possible opportunities of trust with non-queer participants. Additionally, my role as an LGBTQ student affairs professional impacted the lens in which I approached this study and it also allowed me access to participants at both campuses. My role also affords me an understanding of the nuances associated with LGBTQ advocacy, something someone not in my role may not understand. Although I have no affiliation with either institution, my professional role allowed me access to participants and these experiences. I believe this relationship also bolstered my credibility with each campus, which created a trust between myself and the participants at each site. However, it is important to acknowledge how my lenses as a practitioner and critical constructivist inform my approach to data collection and analysis. Finally, collecting case data as an outsider limited my time and exposure to each case and served as a limitation toward fully understanding each institutional context; I sought to counter this limitation through thorough and rigorous data collection.

Conclusion

This project explored the role of LGBTQ leaders and queer leadership in higher education and student affairs. In this chapter, I outlined my methodological perspective and methods strategy for addressing this study's research question. I sought to illuminate the strategies LGBTQ leaders on two campuses use to advance LGBTQ equity and challenge traditionally heterogendered institutional practices. In my inquiry, I focused on the strategies and experiences of HESA staff members through a framework of grassroots and queer leadership. Participants were recruited through my professional networks and snowball sampling, to identify individuals engaged in change initiatives on their campus.

Higher education leadership in the 21st century requires new approaches for understanding and practicing leadership (Kezar et al., 2006). Scholarship and practice has witnessed a shift toward more socially responsible forms of leadership (Kezar et al., 2006); yet we must learn to navigate often times unwelcoming bureaucratic structures to advance social justice and equity (Pasque et al., 2012). The primary purpose of this project is to understand the experiences of campus staff who advocate for the advancement of LGBTQ equity at colleges and universities. Focusing on the experience of queer leaders in higher education may serve as a framework toward the reduction of heterogenderist practices at other colleges and universities, providing valuable implications for HESA research and practice. In the subsequent chapters, I detail my findings at MRU (Chapter 4) and MSA (Chapter 5), and then details a cross-syntheses analysis and discussion (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER FOUR: MIDWEST RURAL UNIVERSITY

When I was in high school and in undergrad, what would now be called the queer student group, it certainly wasn't called that at the time, the only way you could find out where they were meeting was being told by somebody else. There were no flyers, there were no posters, they met in a non-posted room, typically with the lights off and black paper over the windows. – Barbara

Midwest Rural University is located in Rural City (RC), a town of approximately 20,000 people. As a rural community in middle America, RC is primarily known for the presence of MRU and the neighboring military base less than 20 minutes away. A small city where the university sits right at its heart, MRU hosts a student population more than half the size of the city itself. Not surprising, the regional political climate is quite conservative, a point acknowledged by many of the participants in this study. The setting provides an important backdrop for considering how university members engaged their campus in advocacy for LGBTQ equity.

I made several trips to MRU over the summer and into the fall semester. Each time I drove, the path became more familiar. As I exited Metropolitan City (MC) and headed to RC to meet with the study's participants, I found myself on a small familiar highway with MC slowly fading away in my rearview mirror. As the distance between MC and RC increased, an aura of small town Midwest becomes salient. Fields of soybeans and corn, billboards proclaiming religious redemption, and the frequent intersections with local mom and pop filling stations and bait shops. MC was behind me now and I could sense the shift, fewer small sized cars, larger pick-up trucks and farming equipment. Being from an even smaller rural town in Mid-America, I am accustomed and

somewhat comfortable in these environments. However, it was the frequent conservative Christian imagery and the 2016 political signs supporting Donald Trump's America that solidified the reminder of what kind of community I might be entering. This current political climate was a present concern in MRU's home state, and it contributed to the need for LGBTQ advocacy at a place like MRU.

In this chapter I present the case of those engaged in queer leadership at MRU. First I introduce the campus climate, as experienced by the eight participants at MRU. Then I examine participant leadership strategies and experiences, specifically exploring the phenomenon areas of grassroots leadership and the tactics and strategies of participants to advocate for LGBTQ equity advancements. Finally, I explore the application of queer leadership at MRU.

Climate

Regional Impact

Campus climate at MRU cannot be removed from how it is situated within the larger state. Participants described the challenges of living and working in the conservative region and pushback by citizens and politicians against student activism at Midwestern University that influence queer activism on campus. Barbara shared:

I think activism on public campuses is, not necessarily just overtly stopped, but not encouraged because of the political and economic ramifications it might have. Around the state right now, those of us that are activists on campus, people are saying things like, "have you seen this", "have you read this article about Midwestern U", this fall out about that fall out.

A number of the participants shared their awareness of near-by campus activism and speculated how their campus would respond to similar issues of racial injustice and campus unrest. According to participants, MRU represents the stereotypical liberal-leaning institution in a conservative city and region, which led to concerns about pushback of their efforts from local, state, and MRU governing bodies.

Barbara continued:

Everybody is sort of on high alert. I think those of us that consider ourselves activists for whatever cause we might be activists for, feel like on public campuses, that right now the attitude is much more, can you be a little more low key about that, can you bring it down. That's kind of a bad thing to say to an activist, "could you low key it some," and an activist's normal response is, "well, no."

This activist identity resonated with half of the participants, which I explored in more detail later in the chapter. However, I introduce it here to contextualize how the state political climate presented challenges for how queer activists proceed or engage in advocacy at MRU.

The political climate in the state raised some concerns for participants. Although MRU has not been singled out, the legislative proposals from state representatives created concern for a number of advocates on campus. Jennifer, a staff member in the counseling center shared, "Everything that's been going on on a larger scale, not only in the wake of Orlando, the Trump campaign, the presidential election, so many bathroom bills, it's a really volatile time in general..." Jennifer leads a counseling support group for LGBTQ students on campus and is one of the facilitators for the campus Safe Space

training, which is an LGBTQ educational program designed to enhance awareness and support for LGBTQ communities on campus. This volatility created a heightened sense of awareness of possible LGBTQ discrimination for many of the participants, and raised concerns for backlash toward the LGBTQ community for those advocating LGBTQ equity and inclusion on campus.

Town and Gown

Rural City and MRU have been a part of each other's community for a long time.

At orientation today the RC Chamber of Commerce was there alongside the

Union bookstore. The two are very much linked. We are just on this side of rural.

Like the biggest thing we've got is the Wal-Mart and the Applebees. - Benjamin

All participants spoke about RC and the impact living in or near Rural City has on the MRU campus climate. The community has grown with MRU, but there are also tensions with the relationship between the town and gown. Tom Andrews, who has been at the institution since the 1980s, described a strong influence of Christianity within the town, "you can't swing a dead cat by the tail without hitting a church in this town." A cautiously vocal atheist, Tom shared, "I can't tell you how many times something starts off with a prayer," speaking primarily of his involvement at local RC events and the RC Rotary Club. Although some churches may be more accepting than others, the strong presence of conservative religious social values shape some of the experiences of the LGBTQ community in RC and, ultimately, at MRU.

Conservatism may contribute to a sense of separation between the campus and town communities of which some spoke. According to Barbara, "there is still in RC, a fairly good town and gown divide. What happens on campus is not necessarily what

happens off campus.” Campus becomes its own sphere within the larger RC climate. Thus, many participants reflected on how important it is to provide space for LGBTQ students to have a welcoming community on campus. Jennifer said, “RC is pretty isolated and still pretty small, so it’s important for me to be able to provide that outlet for people, to help create a sense of community.” Her work facilitating a social support group on campus reflects how she tries to address the lack of LGBTQ community.

Sheila moved to RC in the late 90s and was a student in the early 2000s. She also pursued her graduate education at MRU and now works as a staff member on campus. She reflected on her own experiences with the “town and gown divide,” at a time when LGBTQ students were even more isolated on campus. She reflected on a focus group she conducted with MRU students:

One thing the student group said that I always felt like was an individual thing, they wanted to know what was queer friendly in RC. I guess that’s something I maneuvered myself. Where was I treated good? Where was I treated nicely? What places have rainbow stickers on their door? It was interesting that the students that were here on campus really wanted to know what it would be like to go off campus. I can deduce that they’re feeling safe here, but a little more apprehensive off campus.

The students in the focus group were curious about RC, suggesting that the town/gown separation warrants attention so that students can identify places off campus that are welcoming to the LGBTQ community. Sheila’s role, a recently appointed position with direction to establish a multicultural resource center, demonstrates a growing

commitment on campus to officially advocate for minoritized students, including LGBTQ students.

Campus Climate

Barbara's quote at the beginning of this chapter exemplifies the importance of MRU's history in understanding the context for queer leadership at MRU. Historically, MRU's campus climate for LGBTQ individuals was not welcoming and, according to Barbara, finding community in the early 90s was often difficult. Dr. Barbara Shultz grew up in RC and has had a presence on MRU's campus since she was a teenager in the 1980s. Her undergraduate years reflect her experience as someone who was not out at the time, but was keenly aware of the LGBTQ climate on campus. Time has been favorable to the campus climate, as Barbara reflected on her experiences as an out non-tenure track faculty member, who eventually moved to a tenure line and recently received tenure.

Another longstanding faculty member for more than 20 years, Dr. Jeremy Nessie, shared that he also has noticed a shift in the climate. Today he says he hears fewer slurs used by students than he had in the past. He suggested the climate has improved, but he also recognized that the political climate in his home state has moved closer toward social conservatism, much like many states across the United States at the time of the study. For example, representatives in the state legislature just presented bills supporting religious liberty intended to allow businesses to refuse service to customers not aligned with their religious values, most notably demonstrated through a Christian owned bakery's refusing to cater gay and lesbian weddings. Additionally, legislative bathroom referendums sought to criminalize transgender people for using public restrooms aligned with their gender

identity or presentation. Despite this, MRU has been more progressive in its support of LGBTQ policies.

MRU has experienced incidents of violence and harassment by students and staff directed at the LGBTQ community on campus. Reviewing campus newspapers and reports, in the mid-2000s a gay student was physically assaulted on campus. In 2013, a gay first-year student living on campus reported being threatened with a knife by his roommate. Sheila, an out staff member who also instructed a number of Women and Gender Studies courses on campus said, “10 years ago, my wife and I got called dykes by a colleague in the hallway... we had another incident on campus where a fraternity defaced a homecoming float by the gay and lesbian group, which was about 6 years ago.” These incidents provide a context to the harassment LGBTQ individuals have experienced at MRU over the last couple decades, suggesting that the work of the queer advocates on campus is needed, but may also be risky.

Emergence of LGBTQ Policy and Practice

In the last few years MRU has implemented a number of policies and practices that has positively influenced the LGBTQ campus climate. Many of the participants were directly connected to the development or implementation of these policies and programs, and described having to navigate the hostile institutional climate and resistance from some colleagues. Barbara said MRU was one of the first universities in the state to add sexual orientation to their non-discrimination statement. She also advocated for domestic partner benefits on campus, an initiative she and Jeremy both put their efforts toward. Jeremy reported that the most recent campus president was surprised the university did not already provide partner benefits to same-gender couples, “so I put together a motion

for the [faculty] senate requesting that the administration and board of governors extend all benefits to domestic partners that any other employee would get.” Although he did not like to take much credit, Barbara and Sheila often referred to him as one of the campus’s biggest allies for queer folk on campus.

Jennifer contributed to some subtle and more pronounced changes when she joined the counseling center staff on campus. In addition to revising and revitalizing MRU’s Safe Space program, she began purposeful action to ensure campus records and intake forms reflected the most inclusive practices. Jennifer reflected:

Since I’ve worked in my office, I’ve gotten all of our brochures, I’ve changed to gender neutral language. I’ve changed all of our forms to specifically ask for sexual orientation, gender identity, sex assigned at birth, leaving, having some options, but leaving a self identify [option].

These efforts led to an even larger change with the software system the campus utilizes to maintain client data. Jennifer worked with the software company to create a module that allowed the MRU counseling center to record and store this important client information. This effort on Jennifer’s part, with the support of the software company, now allows other campuses that utilize the client software system to input clients’ chosen names and gender pronouns.

Sheila led the expansion of the LGBTQ graduate assistant position she supervises for the student support office. Within her role, she received a directive from the president to implement a Multicultural Programs Office, intended to provide support to MRU’s minoritized students, including the queer community. Benjamin serves as the LGBTQ graduate assistant and has carried forward some of the campus efforts to expand gender

inclusive restrooms on campus. The initiative to increase gender inclusive spaces is something Sheila identified as an important effort that she hopes to one day see at least one accessible restroom in each building on campus.

The emergence of these campus policies and practices is relatively new, although according to the more seasoned staff, were a long time in the making. Barbara reflect:

There's always been a good groundswell of faculty and staff and some administrators who were working. But like I said, the last 5 years or so, there's been an even stronger push to make the campus safer. Especially for those of us who are highly visible, and to make sure the campus is better engaged in understanding what the LGBTQ population is on campus, because I don't think the administration necessarily had a good idea of what that population even was until the last handful of years.

Although the campus climate is still relatively chilly according to some reports, it has experienced a noticeable thaw over the last few years, in large part due to the collective efforts of these queer leaders.

LGBTQ Staff and Faculty

The presence of out queer staff and faculty on campus has historically been minimal and according to Barbara and Sheila, only a few others have participated in queer advocacy on campus. Tom noted that the presence of queer staff and faculty seemed limited to out women; and there is a noticeable gap in out gay men, particularly those involved in any advocacy efforts. Tom shared, "these women, who are out, not only are a lot of them out but they're advocates. Whereas this guy, who is not out but everyone knows he's gay, he certainly doesn't function as an advocate." This gap is consistent with

the identities of the participants; none of the participants are out gay cisgender men. Although it is not possible to fully ascertain why, participant stories and newspaper accounts of physical violence in the community report those targeted are gay cisgender men. This raises questions about how gay men experience the campus climate and what barriers existed that prevented them from engaging in queer work.

Because of the small number of out staff and faculty members, identifying an LGBTQ community was important for many of the participants. Barbara shared, “there were five of us and we all know each other. We used to go to coffee and joke about it being ‘the meeting’ because there were only five.” Due to the limited number of out LGBTQ individuals on campus, community was limited, but provided essential social and emotional support. Sheila noted that more faculty and staff are out on campus, but the numbers remain small. She said “there are, I’m going to say a dozen or so out faculty or staff members on campus. Me, in this position, being out, I think is important.” For Sheila, her visibility is important for enhancing the campus climate for her peers and students. She spoke of her visibility as unavoidable, particularly because she and Barbara are considered the token lesbian couple on campus.

Hostility. Community was important in helping staff to navigate hostilities experienced on campus and in the RC community. Four of the participants identified as LGBTQ; however, all participants were aware hostilities on campus were present. Sue reflected, “of course I’ve heard a couple situations where faculty or staff members who are of the LGBT community have been kind of bullied by their own peers.” Hostilities varied from fear of job loss in earlier years, to verbal harassment, and incidents of assault reported by students. Barbara recalled:

Like I said, there were five of us and we all know each other. And not all five of us were out in classes, it wasn't safe. Even really in the late 1990s early 2000s, people were getting fired for being out to students. Yeah, it was not, as a faculty/staff person it was not a safe environment to be in. That has changed. The phrase I've always used: it was benign neglect.

She equated benign neglect to the institutions unwillingness to acknowledge its LGBTQ community. She continued:

There were hate crimes happening on campus; there were people being attacked on campus; there were people losing their jobs and there wasn't a whole lot of, sort of actively slowing that, until the last handful of years, maybe the last decade.

Despite recent progress, particularly in terms of campus policy and program advancement, microaggressions were not uncommon. Jeremy noticed that he hears fewer homophobic slurs from students, but it has not fully disappeared. Jennifer shared about some recent resistance from faculty toward the LGBTQ student organization. In the student organization's attempt to do educational outreach by organizing classroom panel presentations, a professor responded to her "saying that's disgusting, you guys shouldn't be putting that out there. I would never have you." Jennifer also reported some professors telling students to only use sources written by Christian-identified authors, "because those are people that you can trust," and other professors who were unwilling to respond to bullying in the classroom. Participants described some notable shifts in policy and individuals leading promising practices; however, from the perspectives of the participants, the campus climate remained hostile at MRU.

Tokenization. The visibility of being an out queer staff member positioned some participants to be expected to represent the entire LGBTQ community on behalf of their office or on campus. These experiences of tokenization are common for minoritized folk on college campuses (Garces, 2012; Hart & Lester, 2011; Pryor et al., 2016; Tillapaugh, 2015), yet actions of tokenization project microaggressive behaviors from the institution onto the few out queer members on campus. Barbara reflected on numerous occasions when she was expected to answer for or speak on behalf of the LGBTQ community. In addition, she and Sheila were the only out lesbians on campus at the time, they would frequently be asked to serve on institutional diversity committees. Sheila reflected:

But I think that my identity, speaking up if it's about a gay thing, it's hard, sometimes. Because I'm supposed to be advocating for all students who are underrepresented. Because I'm not a person of color, so they automatically go to my most obvious underrepresentation, which is queerness of some sort. But my cultural competencies are much more broad, but because they don't see it, and I know that usually queerness you can't see, but I'm sorry, even the straight people see me and go, "ah ha."

Experiences of tokenization also shaped Sheila's perception of how others see her purpose in engaging in diversity work. She said, "sometimes I have to shield my politics in queerness, or queer politics, because a lot of people may assume because I'm out that I have in this multicultural field or job or role, that it's a gay agenda. When in fact, it's not." Tokenization required Sheila to prove that her intentions in engaging in diversity work is inclusive beyond queer issues, which perpetuates a heterogenderist attitude and assumption toward her work. Any suggestions that her queer identity will override other

interests essentializes her role as a staff member on campus and dismisses her ability to advocate for other groups. These assumptions then only value her work when it is tied to her identity, a standard not typical of straight cisgender colleagues.

Jennifer discussed her challenges within her department, where she serves as the designated staff person to support queer clients. Although this part of her work is personally fulfilling, she recognizes the problematic position in which she is placed. She shared:

It's been an interesting balance within my office, not wanting to like push everyone who is LGBTQ to me, because we don't want the other, I don't want the other clinicians to be like, "I don't have to worry about knowing how to work with these people because Jennifer will do it all."

Her department supports her work with queer students, yet, Jennifer is relied on as the primary point of contact for the entire queer community. This may allow her colleagues to not have to engage, understand, or support queer students, perpetuating a tokenization of Jennifer but also limiting the support queer students may find from other staff.

Similarly, Jennifer has been the primary advocate for policy implementation within her office, as well as outreach to other offices on campus. Despite how taxing the expectation to represent the LGBTQ community is on these participants, they are persistent and have achieved some success in their efforts for change.

LGBTQ Allies

Participants perceived that the presence of LGBTQ allies contributed positively to the LGBTQ campus climate. Barbara's long tenure on campus allowed her to recount the efforts of important allies at MRU over the years:

The people who have worked with me, or on behalf of the community for change on this campus, have been great. The current president is fantastic, very supportive, very proactive, very responsive...Dr. Jeremy Nessie, who has always been at the front of the charge, for years... Jeremy has worked really hard and has not hidden under a rock. There have been excellent colleagues and friends.

At MRU, allyship has surfaced in multiple ways and recently, along many levels of administrative, faculty, and staff support. Despite Barbara's (and others') acknowledgements, Jeremy was resistant to accept any credit for advancing partner benefits on campus; yet he was a central figure on the faculty senate for advocating and voting on the issue.

Participants considered allyship to include a commitment to addressing microaggressions and instances of bullying. Allyship is then demonstrated as a behavioral commitment to LGBTQ education and bystander intervention. Sue reflected, "to me being an ally means supporting individuals on many levels. I think it has to come from pretty strong internal beliefs that something is either right or wrong." Sue continued, "so what I do in my capacity as an ally...[is to combat] microaggressions, pointing out things that are said that are not helpful or accepting." Among the non-queer participants, or allies, these actions of addressing microaggressions or other hostile language was a common component of engaging allyship.

Allies have served important sources of support for their queer peers, notably addressing issues of bullying or biased language, tools often used to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals at MRU. Tom spoke of his comfort calling out non-inclusive attitudes or language on campus.

You know a lot defusing myths, there are still people who think it's a choice. Like "pray the gay away," conversion therapy, there are still people out there doing that even though the [American Psychological Association] says it's unethical, and in some states, illegal. So I'll educate people sometimes when they say things that don't make sense.

The hostilities reported by all participants provide an important context for the importance of engaging in leadership and advocacy for LGBTQ equity at MRU. Next, I will further explore how these leaders navigated institutional struggles in their advocacy, specifically by exploring tenets of grassroots leadership and queer leadership in a chilly campus climate.

Engaging Grassroots Leadership at MRU

Most participants embodied grassroots activism on campus, using their roles within their respective areas to support LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff through social programs or policy initiatives. As grassroots leadership is typically focused on "bottom-up" efforts, engaging advocacy among members in non-authoritative roles. The participants in this study held various roles at MRU, but none at a senior administrative level. To unpack evidence of grassroots leadership, below I consider it through the frames of *individual, group, and organizational*. I explore how participants utilized tenets of grassroots leadership in their campus advocacy, particularly as they navigated power dynamics and the campus climate.

Individual

The individual phenomena captured participants' intrinsic support of students and LGBTQ causes through their involvement with LGBTQ advocacy. This support

manifested differently for participants, particularly when their personal identities intersected with their individual motivation. In this section, I explore what factors influenced individual leaders' motivation for involvement, how their identities surfaced through their work, and what strategies for continued success are employed.

Motivation. Participants expressed a number of reasons for being engaged with LGBTQ work, but analysis revealed two primary motivating sources: a) service to students and b) a personal commitment to the LGBTQ community.

Service to students. All participants worked directly with MRU students, providing support through student advising, counseling, or campus involvement initiatives. Although it is not surprising that participants demonstrated a commitment to support students, this motivation is also a manifestation of their own experiences as former students. Jennifer spoke of her work with the student support group as fulfilling her personal passion of student service. She shared:

The college I'm at, you'll get people who have never ever told another soul that they don't identify straight, to people who have been out for years, but are maybe negotiating trying to make friends in a new area or new environment. That's one of my passions, I love to do the group... I have seen students who have blossomed because of that, and that's really cool.

A commitment to student development undergirds much of the participants' efforts on campus, and working to establish a welcoming community at MRU for queer students manifests that commitment.

Benjamin's service to students is also personal, as he seeks to ensure transgender students feel welcome and supported on campus. "My experience as a trans person has

been very different from the experiences of gay folks in the Midwest... So when it comes to the housing, the restrooms [issues], I'm fighting for my trans students." Benjamin's service to students is one way he demonstrates his leadership to create more welcoming environments for queer and trans students at MRU. This service to students is an important component and motivating factor for the participants to continue their work. It also speaks to their resiliency as campus leaders, pulling from intrinsic rewards of student success to sustain their momentum toward improving campus climate for future groups of queer students on campus.

Commitment to LGBTQ community. Much of the commitment of participants to LGBTQ community stems from personal experiences, such as those described in the previous section. Likewise, Barbara and Sheila reflected the notion that the "personal is political" through their support of queer students at MRU. For them, their personal visibility on campus is important to connect with and provide support to other queer colleagues and students at MRU. Despite any risks associated with being one of the few out queer persons on campus, they are compelled to be visible as to express their unrelenting commitment to the LGBTQ community.

Other participants' commitment to the LGBTQ community was also steadfast; for example, non-queer participants expressed their desire to support friends and loved-ones who were queer. There was a distinction between how commitment manifested for queer and non-queer participants; yet individually, all aspired to do the right thing by advocating for LGBTQ equity on campus. Often, other people assumed Tom was gay due to the number of close LGBTQ friendships he maintained. Similarly, Debbie maintained close friendships with queer people for decades, and shared that others thought she was

“gay by association.” Neither was concerned that their sexuality was mis-identified— moreover, these friendships were central to why they to advocated for their LGBTQ peers and students.

Identity. All participants shared their respective identities and how they inform their approach to leadership and LGBTQ advocacy. How identity is experienced is reflected differently when comparing queer and non-queer identities. Queer participants were most mindful of how their identity inspired their involvement, whereas non-queer participants described their advocacy as politically important because of social and personal political perspectives. As previously noted, Sheila’s visibility on campus was unavoidable, marking her as one of the token lesbians. She uses this as a source of power to ensure that students know there is someone like them on campus who will support them. Whereas, Tom’s identity as a straight cisgender man allowed him to advocate using his privileged identities to inform his peers with similar privileged identities about inclusive language and challenging heterogenderist hostilities.

Queer identity. Identifying as queer influenced queer staff members’ interest in engaging in queer advocacy. Although all acknowledged their queer identity was only one component of who they are, this identity inspired their activities to improve the campus climate for themselves, their peers, and students. Thus, possessing a queer identity, particularly living outwardly on campus, fostered a sense of obligation and duty as queer advocates. Sheila discussed the importance of being out, but also of coming out all the time.

I try to explain to people that coming out doesn’t happen once. You have to come out every day to every person, to every grocery sacker on up, talking about my

wife. We come out in a lot of different ways on a daily basis. In my undergrad, I pursued a social work education. The reason why I did that was because I wanted to help kids. When I got into the field, I realized my identity could be studied. It was a huge moment for me to understand that the things I liked to look at and study were actually things I could do for a job. In my social work program, I focus on LGBT kids and the coming-out process, and parents, and that kind of stuff.

This burden of constantly coming out has the logical potential to lead to burnout or exhaustion; yet for Sheila, this process is important to her as a way to support LGBTQ youth. Queer identity represents more than just her sexuality or experiences with gender; queer identity encompasses a need for advocacy, visibility, and support of other queer people.

Non-queer identity. Those who did not identify as queer were aware of their straight and cisgender privileged identities. This self-awareness demonstrates a willingness to critically self-reflect on how their identities afford them access to spaces or experiences that may not be available to their queer peers. Jeremy reflected on his inability to fully empathize with LGBTQ peers because he has never had to worry about his safety or discrimination due to his identities. However, his compassion and acknowledgement of the experiences of many of his queer peers inspires him to be an advocate and ally. Tom said, “Being a male, a cis man, is not particularly important to me. I mean, I’ve got all kinds of privilege, white man privilege. Another identity that’s important to me, interestingly...I’m a first-generation college student.” When asked about their identities, non-queer participant most often discussed their positionalities that

placed them in privileged categories; however, some also reflected on experienced identities that othered them. For example, Tom's experience as a first-generation college student, others' backgrounds as working class, or Jeremy's categorization as a nerd that sometimes left him vulnerable to bullying in his youth provided some degree of relatedness to some in the queer community because of their own experiences of harassment and discrimination. As such, they were even more empowered to advocate for others who shared similar experiences.

Persistence. As mentioned, Sheila and Barbara have been intentionally advocating for and supporting the LGBTQ communities for many years; whereas, Jennifer and Benjamin only more recently became employed at the institution and engaged in this work. No matter how long participants have been engaged, their persistence and self-care after the repeated rejections, experiences of hostilities, or reports of violence from students, were critical to maintain their commitment to advancing LGBTQ equity. Without this, participants would not be able to sustain their work. Through their reflections, there were two primary factors that fostered persistence and contributed to participants' sustained commitment: a) social support, and b) a sense of purpose and service to LGBTQ people.

Social support. Social support was an important component of queer staff members' networks, particularly for finding respite from their LGBTQ equity work. Being in such a small community, social support is often limited. For Sheila, Barbara, Jennifer, and Benjamin, they often relied on one another to process current events and work frustrations. Sheila recounted the support she also had at home and among her friends who are allies. She shared, "I wouldn't be a friend of somebody who wasn't [an

ally].” Her support structure is purposefully created to include those who include her, establishing a sense of family support with Barbara and their community. Similarly, Jennifer and Benjamin were intentional choosing not to live in Rural City. Instead, they chose to live about 45 minutes from town in the suburbs of Metropolitan City. Jennifer reflected that her deliberate choice created a separation from campus life. In addition, she did not have to worry about running into students or campus colleagues, which was particularly important in light of her professional responsibility to confidentiality. Going home, she and Benjamin have each other for familial support. Jennifer shared,

It helps to have somebody who understands, going through it at the same time, because we can lean on each other. We can complain to each other. We can decide as a whole, as a unit, like what things we’re comfortable taking on what things we aren’t. We’re able to support each other, so it’s really helpful to have somebody who understands and have a similar philosophy. Because if we had very different philosophies, I think it would be challenging.

Support of likeminded family and friends served as a primary strategy for persistence for many of the participants, and allowed them to create some distance between themselves and what happens at MRU.

Commitment to purpose and service to others. Despite challenges and a hostile campus climate, a leading strategy for participants’ persistence related to their commitment to the cause of LGBTQ equity and most importantly, creating space for other LGBTQ people on campus. Benjamin reflected on the excitement associated with enhancing others learning and making gains through his educational workshops or class he was able to teach.

I think the little successes burn brighter than the huge upsets. Being able to hook up my students with housing where they feel safe, I mean, that's awesome.

Having people come up after Safe Space and say, I really learned a lot. I taught a [Women's and Gender Studies] class and a few didn't pay attention, and most did their work... But then there are those four students who got it, who had their eyes opened, who wanted to learn more, who came to me. That's spectacular. That is so cool. I think that's why so many higher ed professionals stay in this grueling work, because you get those small successes and you love it.

These small gains served an important role in the success of participants. They provided hope for progress and satisfaction that their work is meaningful.

In addition to these successes, participants also spoke about their support to students and dedication to creating space for others as a strategy of success. Jennifer's work with the LGBTQ support group inspired her to continue her advocacy. Barbara recalled again how being out was a political act intended to create room for queer students. She reflected:

I take my work really seriously, all my work really seriously. In all of that work I take the safety of my students the most seriously...Being an out professor on this campus is a political act. It is an inherently political act. If you're an out professor, an out staff person, an out administrator on this campus, you're talking about a relatively small number of people, whose visibility makes it possible for other students to feel safe. And I consider that absolutely the most important part of my job. I really do. I consider that the most important part of my job. So I don't hedge... College is scary enough. I don't want them to see somebody who they

may share identity with flinching. I don't want them to learn to be scared, at least not from me. I want them to learn to be as resilient as I can. And at the same time, to learn if you can't be resilient today, it's okay to say so. You have a community here. Including me, who will catch you if your resilience doesn't catch you that day.

Barbara's support is consistent with that of many participants who can empathize with students in light of their own experiences feeling marginalized. Thus, her persistence is rooted in ensuring her students succeed. In this way, she knows that she can contribute to a positive environment for queer students, something she did not have during her undergraduate experience at MRU.

Group

Grassroots leadership often engages coalition building to advance the group cause or purpose (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Meyerson, 2003). At MRU, coalition building centered around the few out queer people on campus and their allies. The work of building community relied on those who were out or willing to be visible allies to the initiatives. However, there was no central organization during any of these processes. Participants worked collaboratively, but many also worked within their specific areas to further their causes. No matter whether their focus was collective, or within their individual sphere of influence, there were a number of tactics and strategies participants employed to advance their agenda.

Tactics and strategies. One effective means for participants to leverage support was to label their work as supporting student success on campus. Benjamin said, "I'll always kind of pull that line, valuing or supporting all of our students...reminding folks

that all of our work is related to student success.” Whether this was supporting student organizations, one notable strategy was advocating for gender inclusive restrooms, or seeking accommodations for campus housing, addressing concerns as efforts to improve student success. This was particularly effective when advocating within areas of student affairs, where many student affairs administrators have educational backgrounds focused on student development and success. Employing student success as a strategy positions others as not supporting student success if they challenge the initiative.

Similarly, another strategy was to define grassroots work as an effort to meet institutional expectations to support student retention and enrollment management initiatives. At MRU, there has been an increased focus on enrollment management, and campus leadership often asked faculty and staff to identify and implement programs and policies to support student retention. Sheila saw this as an effective strategy for engaging the president on LGBTQ student concerns by providing him data that supports both the institutions interests as well as her advocacy for inclusion. Sheila reflected:

I try to find out a way for my stats, or my piece of data to support their focus about LGBT stuff. I talked with the president about my research, and he’s like, “what’s in it for us?” He wants to know how to keep students here on campus, especially students who are different, so I told him how it would affect him.

However, Jennifer hesitated tying her work to student retention and university growth. She noted, that the institution does not have a system to collect data on its LGBTQ students, making it difficult to truly align efforts with retention. Despite any adverse feelings toward meeting institutional needs to justify the import of LGBTQ equity, these strategies were effective in communicating the need for LGBTQ inclusion.

In addition to framing their initiatives as opportunities to help students succeed and be retained, participants proposed new, and leveraged existing, policies as strategies for advancing their agenda for LGBTQ equity. For example, a few years back the university implemented gender identity and expression as protected classes under its non-discrimination statement. This policy has been leveraged as a tool for advocating for gender neutral spaces and inclusive practices within housing. Similarly, Benjamin utilized Title IX and the recent *Dear Colleague* letter as a tactic for advocacy. Released by the US Departments of Education Justice in May 2016, as a response to states and municipalities passing anti-transgender restroom legislation, the *Dear Colleague* letter outlined how Title IX protections extend to transgender students at public education institutions. With recent changes toward stronger Title IX reporting on campus, some on campus are concerned about the consequences for not meeting new expectations. Ben said, “I think the emphasis on title IX and its applicability to LGBT students has instilled a fear in other student affairs professionals. You don’t want to be responsible for MRU getting a reputation for not being inclusive.” For better or worse, these policies create a sense of security for doing the right thing, even for those who are not LGBTQ advocates and allies; the policies then have intended and unintended consequences that support efforts for LGBTQ equity.

Most participants leveraged education as another important strategy. Nearly everyone reported situations when they corrected others’ improper pronoun usage, problematic language, or common myths associated with the LGBTQ community. These strategies were successful in challenging the institutional climate at MRU, whether at the micro or macro level. Tom recalled challenging a colleague who believed being gay is a

choice, and he frequently worked to debunk the myth that individuals could “pray the gay away.” Similarly, Sheila worked with a religiously conservative student who struggled with having a transgender roommate. Sheila relied on educating the cisgender roommate, attempting to reach the student at her level of understanding. For Sheila, she used education as a tool for building empathy and human respect, following her personal mantra of “changing minds one heart at a time.”

On a broader level the purpose of the campus Safe Space training is to educate faculty, staff, and students, about best practices for creating inclusive spaces. Jennifer and Benjamin are the primary facilitators for the campus and reported success with the program. Safe Space has increased the visibility of self-proclaimed allies on campus, but it also brought with it a struggle often experienced with similar campus initiatives, a sense of preaching to the choir (Talbert, 2010; Woodford, Kolb, Durocher-Radeka, & Javier, 2014). Yet, by addressing “the choir,” they reeducated already interested campus partners on the importance of the program and highlight current issues for LGBTQ folks on campus. Some campus leaders might argue that programs that do not engage different groups is a poor use of resources. However, such an argument ignores that allies also need continued education to best support their queer peers and colleagues. Further, due to the climate at MRU, Jennifer noted the important symbolism associated with staff and faculty who place the Safe Space placard on their office. “We have seen a larger number of people completing Safe Space; we now have a public list of people who have been through and have consented to have their stuff publicly. So you can go on the Safe Space website, bring up the list and find people on campus.” This increased visibility of Safe

Space participants demonstrates the fruitful efforts of education as a strategy for advancing change on campus.

Power dynamics. Participants described various power structures that contributed to the sometimes challenging institutional climate for navigating LGBTQ equity advancement. Some of these power dynamics surfaced between faculty and staff, campus administration, and executive leadership. Awareness of these institutional dynamics was important in order to strategically prepare to work through any power struggles. Jennifer experienced the challenge of navigating power dynamics at a university; she noted that it is a unique setting where who you work for might not necessarily be the only structural authority who can help or hinder your cause. For example, as Benjamin explained, increasing the numbers of gender neutral restrooms required not only engaging the academic department where the facilities are located, but also required buy-in from campus facilities. Participants fostered these interdepartmental relationships through networking and relationship building, and were very important for advancing any agenda.

Although some campus units are viewed as supportive of LGBTQ inclusion, Jennifer discussed challenges she had with a number of departments that resisted her recommendations for improved practice. Despite her outreach to provide support, health center leadership did not understand the relevance for promoting LGBTQ inclusion in its practices, including how it collects client information. “I was trying to clarify what they can do as far as trans health care, and they were like, ‘well, we see anybody, why do we have to specify?’” The department’s lack of interest in understanding why it might consider LGBTQ health concerns, manifested as resistance. Resistance that could have broader implications by neglecting important factors such as transgender student health

concerns and other practices that can contribute to more inclusive patient care. Similarly, Jennifer struggled to obtain support from the registrar for a preferred name and pronoun policy. This was something she was able to implement within the counseling center records, but remained a struggle because other campus constituents have yet to support such a change. “I think just the resistance and closed-mindedness of people saying, ‘well it’s not an issue here.’ Or, ‘we don’t have that many students,’ or ‘things are good here.’” These justifications for not addressing issues of LGBTQ equity speak to an apathy among some administrators, who see the issues as not pressing or important. By suggesting they see “all” students or need a quota to rationalize their lack of concern, these offices are creating a standard of gender blindness; and in effect, are erasing the identities of LGBTQ students and clients.

Despite a history of institutional exclusion and ongoing resistance in many areas on campus, a number of participants described of the current administration as strong supporters for them. A surprising source of support mentioned by nearly all participants came from MRU’s current president. Jeremy gave the president credit for his support of partner benefits, stating that the president’s support was the reason it finally passed despite previous leadership’s disinterest in the benefits. The administrative climate has shifted from that of previous administrations that would not even consider such initiatives to one that a president and vice-presidents offer at least vocal support to increase campus support for LGBTQ equity. Yet, as Sheila shared, the president’s agenda has its priorities and some initiatives, like gender inclusive bathrooms, are not on top of his list. Although there is promise in some of his actions and rhetoric, failing to prioritize certain initiatives reinforces heterogendered environments.

Organizational

Participants engaged in the organizational phenomenon of grassroots leadership. Their efforts included collaborating and conducting outreach to advance their agenda, as well as attempting to challenge the institutional climate to engage in change efforts. As previously mentioned, MRU has made demonstrable advances in its policies and practices to support LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. These successes speak to an improving campus climate; however, the campus's location within a rural and conservative region, continues to create some barriers for queer leaders on campus.

Group formation. As discussed earlier, many of the participants acknowledged that there is a very small group of individuals on campus who have taken public advocacy roles for LGBTQ equity. Their work, over the period of a couple decades, is credited to an enhanced LGBTQ climate. Today, according to Barbara, things have improved dramatically. However, the group of LGBTQ grassroots leaders is still quite small. Accounting for the sources of support on campus, Barbara reflected:

I think it's like 5 people. Like literally, this many. That's the president, me, Sheila, Tom in the counseling center, and Tamara Williams, who is now the chair in sociology. But yeah, the five of us, have been at every event. Yeah. At literally every event. Sheila has been on every, Sheila has literally been in every multicultural focus group since 1999, every single one. There's two that I wasn't on; she's been on every single one. I think Tom has been on most of those as well. He's the head of the counseling center, so he gets called in all the time. And he was one of the first administrators on campus to require his staff to get LGBTQ awareness training. Before, well before Title IX...So Tom has always been out

front for us. So yeah, in the last 5 years, I'd say it's that little clutch of people, and a lot of other spokes in the wheel, other people that were attached too.

This intimate number of individuals faced a heavy burden, but, as noted, one that has improved over time. Indicative of the positive momentum, today the president is largely considered a source of support for the group.

As a newer staff member on campus, Jennifer's experience is mostly related to her engagement within her office, where Tom serves as her director. Jennifer occupies a role somewhat separate from her senior counterparts, despite working on some shared goals. She lamented:

So, I have found it kind of challenging to find support from other people who are engaged in some of this change, work for change. I have found support from, a lot of support from my boss. Support from my other colleagues, especially within, in working for change within our center, they tend to be really responsive, really kind of open to learning.

When Jennifer applied to MRU, she intentionally sought an environment that welcomed her queer identity. Support from Tom and her colleagues was affirming and it became a strong launching point for her to reinvigorate the campus Safe Space training. Outside of her immediate colleagues in the counseling center, Jennifer's primary source of support is her husband Benjamin, who works closely with Sheila to advocate for and support the campus LGBTQ initiatives. Overall, these individuals serve as a small collective, made-up of mostly seasoned staff members on campus and some newer colleagues to campus who do not have the institutional history compared to Barbara, Sheila, or Tom.

Campus department support. Participants identified a few offices or campus organizations that have contributed to recent successes. Most of these areas either have queer individuals working there or involved, or have important allies to the queer staff members. Most notable are the Counseling Center and the Student Life Engagement Program (SLEP). The counseling center facilitates the campus Safe Space training, and through Jennifer's work, has updated its practices to be more inclusive and welcoming to LGBTQ clients. Prior to Jennifer's arrival, the center started the Safe Space program under Tom's leadership, creating the office as a visible support for its LGBTQ colleagues and students.

Similarly, the SLEP office is where Sheila and Benjamin work, where Benjamin serves as the graduate assistant for LGBTQ affairs. Although Sheila has recently been appointed to lead the multicultural program development, her primary role is as the diversity coordinator within the SLEP program. She reflected on her office's leadership and believes it is one of the best places to work at MRU, and is a place that has hired many queer people.

In our office, we've hired lots of people who are LGBT. Not on purpose, it just so happens LGBT people gravitate towards this kind of work.... These are the best people I've ever worked with. Even the straight people I might even consider queer, because of their fluidity and their ability to, they don't pigeon hole anybody.

The strong support in her unit led to the creation of the graduate assistant position that is only a few years old. The position is a marker of progress for a campus that has historically marginalized its queer population.

Other notable sources of queer support came from the faculty senate and residential life. Although there was certainly resistance from some members of the faculty senate, Jeremy is a visible ally who helped advocate for partner benefits on the senate. Reflecting on that experience, Jeremy stated that even the dissenting voices were marginal, and the senate understood the importance of extending this benefits to all MRU employees. Not only was the benefit extension the right thing to do, but the senate argued that it would also assist the university to recruit stronger faculty candidates.

The LGBTQ grassroots leaders also highlighted strengthening partnerships with residential life. Benjamin and the SLEP program worked collaboratively with residential life staff to support transgender students who sought support while living on campus. The residential life department practice is to approach student housing for trans students on a case-by-case basis, something Benjamin struggles with, but something he recognizes as better than nothing. Although Benjamin reports this relationship with residential life as positive, this case-by-case practice is typical of campuses that have not engaged in writing a policy or enacted best practices for its transgender and non-binary students (Pryor, Ta, & Hart, 2016). Residential life does provide visible support to their colleagues and queer students, but as Benjamin noted, “they aren’t racing to the finish line” to completely restructure their practices.

Summary

Grassroots leadership served as a valuable lens to frame MRU’s leaders’ approaches to LGBTQ advocacy and support. Overall, participants engaged the primary tenets of grassroots leadership in higher education (Kezar & Lester, 2011), demonstrating varied strategies to navigate the institutional climate at MRU. However, from their

experiences, some unique experiences emerged that warrant further explanation. Specifically, the intersection of participants' identities and espoused commitments informed their leadership. Next, I'll explore how participants engaged queer advocacy and how their identities, strategies, and accomplishments contribute to a model for queer leadership in higher education.

Engaging Queer Leadership at MRU

If you're an LGBTQ person, we used to talk, it is glass closets, just door after door, you just keep coming out. Man (sic), if you're a faculty person or a staff member or an administrator, it's like glass closets with four doors. There's a door on every wall and you're just coming out again and again.-- Barbara

Barbara's statement above reflects her experience as a highly visible queer person on campus. In light of her visibility, it was unavoidable that she continuously shared one part of herself that historically left her quite vulnerable. Barbara's and others' experiences navigating being out at MRU differentially shaped how they advocated for LGBTQ equity on campus, in ways that non-queer advocates could not experience. Through these experiences, I sought to explore queer leadership as an extension of grassroots leadership, and findings illustrate the varied ways in which some leaders (i.e., those who are queer-identified) at MRU center their queer identities in their leadership strategies and push for institutional culture shift. Identity frames grassroots and queer leadership. Because of the role of queer identity for some leaders, queer advocacy operates as a continuum.

Participants at MRU revealed the continuum to encompass queer ally, queer advocate, and queer activist worldviews. Next, I explore how these multiple forms of queer engagement inform the role of queer advocacy in the model for queer leadership.

Queer Advocacy

A central component to queer leadership is focused on the identity of the leader as a queer advocate, someone working toward the advancement of queer causes.

Participants at MRU demonstrate a more nuanced connection to their identities within this frame. Sue placed allyship, advocacy, and activism on a continuum. A queer ally represents a passive approach to support of queer causes; a queer advocate represents some action taken and employs a more tempered and institutional strategy. A queer activist is an individual who seeks to disrupt the organization to create their change. Similarly, many participants drew a distinction between what it meant to be a queer advocate versus a queer activist, settling on some interesting distinctions.

Queer ally. It is difficult to fully understand the influence of claiming a queer ally identity. However, Sue and Debbie both identified with this term. Within the work environment, Sue supported LGBTQ students by connecting them with LGBTQ-friendly therapists and physicians, and has written letters on behalf of transgender students. However, neither has championed change at a higher institutional level. Sue shared part of this is due to her position and fear of political ramifications. She is also hesitant to fully embrace her allyship with students, as she does not want to compromise her integrity with students who may not agree with queer politics. These passive forms of allyship (Woodford et al., 2014) fall short of queer leadership, as the actions employed do not lead to the advancement of institutional policy or practice. Here, although individuals may engage in some individual advocacy, their work does not indicate intentional pursuits to disrupt institutional heterogenderism.

Further exploration of passive allyship is warranted, and my findings suggest the use of the term should be questioned. Some activists have criticized the term *ally* as an overused term for individuals' passive approach to support minoritized identities (Grzanka, Adler, & Blazer, 2015). Earlier I defined allyship as a verb, not an identity, particularly those engaged in social justice work (Washington & Evans, 1991), but the latter identity seems to cling most to those who do not engage in the brunt of the work. Although at its root, allyship may be an important form of engagement for folks holding non-minoritized identities, too many individuals claim it without challenging themselves to do better or know better about their role in the larger picture of social justice action. This form of passive allyship, while valid and important, is distinct from active allyship approaches toward LGBTQ equity work (Grzanka, Adler, & Blazer, 2015). Understanding these experiences in a higher education context can strengthen our understanding of ally leadership approaches.

Queer advocate. Most of the participants claimed a queer advocate identity, although defining that was difficult for many. Non-queer individuals suggested deferring to their queer peers for confirmation of their connection to queer advocacy. Tom and Jeremy both advocated for LGBTQ equity either through new programs, committees, or on the faculty senate; yet, they were hesitant to accept any credit. Tom relented, “with a lot of humility” would he affixed that label to his work on campus. In this light, advocacy is viewed as a stronger action and form of engagement than allyship. At MRU, advocates have been persistent and successful in achieving their goals on campus.

As it relates to how participants engaged with advocacy, those claiming an advocacy identity or agenda were tempered. Jennifer struggled with parsing out her role

as an advocate versus an activist, as she sees her history of political engagements as a form of activism. It was important for her to claim both an advocate and activist identity, as they both were central to her professional role and her political perspective. Yet, her professional role required her to pursue change a little more carefully, particularly when working with other departments on campus who expressed some hesitation or unawareness of LGBTQ issues. Many participants cited the importance of a diplomatic disposition in their approach to obtaining buy-in. Tom reflected on the distinction between advocacy and activism, surmising this tempered perspective on advocacy within the institution:

There's almost a sadness when something becomes professionalized what used to be an activist thing, but it's a good thing. That's kind of the role of activists. They are kind of like the artists of social change, whereas the advocates are kind of the administrators. It's like an old neighborhood in the city. Who's the first people to move in, the artists. They set up weird little shops and they do their paintings and do their art stuff. And then it becomes gentrified and hip, and the other people start moving in. And pretty soon the rent is too high and the artists move out into another rundown neighborhood. The activists always seems like they're the vanguard pushing into the dangerous terrain.

In spite of this sense of professionalization or temperedness as it relates to advocacy, while perhaps true at MRU, the work of queer advocates was ultimately successful. Their strategies in navigating the institutional structures led to some meaningful change in MRU's policies and practices.

Queer activist. If advocacy was a tool that allowed participants to navigate the institutional dynamics at MRU, activism was the tool that allowed queer individuals to be persistent and find success. The only participants claiming an activist identity were those who also claimed a queer identity; yet, findings do not indicate whether these identities are synonymous. Therefore, only those who are queer identified may inhabit a queer activist lens. For Jennifer, drawing a distinction between advocacy and activism was difficult; yet, she described her history of activism in the context of her personal engagement. She reflected on participating in demonstrations, lobbying politicians, attending marches; all very visible forms of activism. She said, “that’s a part of who I am and that’s an important part of who I am and it’s something that I want to continue.” Although her work to advance LGBTQ equity is different at MRU, her activist history informs her work efforts as a staff member on campus.

A queer activist identity was a distinguishing role for many of the queer leaders. They all engaged in various forms of demonstrations or lobbying that positioned their efforts differently than those of queer advocates. For example, Barbara’s experiences lobbying at Capital City or pushing for policy change at MRU marked her commitment to queer activism. She drew a distinction between advocacy and activism, sharing:

Advocacy for me means inertia, activism for me means push. And I think advocacy is necessary, important, there’s a lot of things I advocate for that I’m not necessarily an activist for. But for me the clear difference is that activism means active. That you’re literally pushing. It means you’re potentially stepping on toes. It means you’re potentially taking risks for yourself and maybe others. It means that you’re rolling the dice in some ways that I think advocacy can be safer.

Activism implies more risk, and for the queer activists in this study, a sense of giving more of oneself. At MRU, these queer leaders' visibility left them vulnerable to harassment and discrimination, yet they managed to work through barriers and employ successful strategies for queering leadership and practice at MRU.

Queering Leadership

Queering leadership requires queer advocates to center queer identities in leadership practice and necessitates a disruption of heterosexist and cissexist culture embedded in institutional leadership and practice. Participants utilized a number of strategies to center queer identities in their leadership process. In addition to individual core values of LGBTQ inclusion and advocacy, participants actively engaged in educating their colleagues and worked to connect institutional values to that of LGBTQ equity. These approaches are important strategies in centering queer voices in their leadership approach. For example, Jennifer's work centers queer students through her ability to influence practices within her office.

One of the ways that I center LGBTQ students in the work that I do has to do with things like, making the changes in our paper work, asking the questions. I always ask, anytime I meet with a new student, I ask names, pronouns. I ask "are you in a romantic relationship?" "are you in a sexual relationship?." I'm just, kind of the way I go about asking questions and the listing information in my initial conversation with students, I feel like doesn't say this is what I think we need to talk about, but it allows space to acknowledge that like, romantic and sexual relationships (a) aren't necessarily always the same, and (b) I'm comfortable talking about them.

Creating opportunities like those Jennifer discussed above challenges previous institutional practices, which either did not create room for students to disclose their sexuality on office intake forms, or assumed heterosexuality. For Jennifer, queering leadership is using her power within her given space to shift the institutional norms of how gender and sexuality are discussed and recognized. Simple adjustments of office forms opened up new possibilities for students to have their identities validated.

For Sheila, queering leadership surfaced as a strategy for combatting heterogendered attitudes related to professionalism in the field of student affairs. Queering leadership includes challenging the status-quo and actively speaking about queer lives:

When you're a professional, you're supposed to know how to reign it in and talk about important things, and maybe queerness isn't something we should talk about in a professional manner. I'm breaking that stereotype because I think it is something we need to talk about, especially on a [college] campus. Gender, sexuality, we still don't even use the right words here; yet, how do we expect students to feel comfortable? So my role now is more of an educator rather than a learner.

This philosophy is a demonstration of how queering leadership resists normative notions of who and how HESA talks about identity, students' lives, and the spaces created on college campus. Jennifer and Sheila advocate models of leadership that not only alter practice, but honor queer identities and challenge traditionally heterogendered institutional practices.

Queer Policy and Practice

A final component of queer leadership requires demonstrable change in either campus policy or practice. This extension of grassroots leadership organizational phenomena, emphasizes more than group dynamics or institutional culture. Outcomes associated with the engagement of queer leadership are critical. Thus, to queer leadership, normative notions of institutional practice or policy must shift toward greater equity for queer members of the community. Participant experiences at MRU date back to the 1980s and 1990s, when campus was considerably more hostile and unfriendly toward LGBTQ students, faculty, or staff. As Barbara, Sheila, Tom, and Jeremy recalled, MRU is in a significantly improved space for LGBTQ equity, in large part due to their collective efforts. Much of the progress described in this chapter was accomplished within the last decade. These shifts are largely attributed to their individual persistence, and their ability to find emerging support from administrative leadership. In the last 10 years, MRU has achieved: a) sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in their non-discrimination statement; b) partner benefits; c) implementation and continuous improvement of a Safe Space program; d) expansion of gender inclusive restrooms; e) LGBTQ counseling support group; and f) the implementation of LGBTQ graduate assistant position. These changes reflect the influence queer advocates and activists have had on MRU's campus, slowly shifting its climate, practices, and policies toward greater equity for queer students, faculty, and staff.

Queer Leadership at MRU

The experiences of participants at MRU provide a model for engaging queer leadership in higher education. Grassroots leadership provided an important frame for

considering how staff members, with the support of a couple faculty members, navigated the challenges of working on a campus that has historically been unwelcoming to its LGBTQ colleagues and students. Specifically, grassroots leadership allowed for thorough exploration of the individual and organizational dynamics that shape the MRU campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty and staff. Applying the lens of queer advocacy, centering queer identities, and the leaders' intentional application of queer centered change in policy and practice emphasized how queer leadership may function within an institution.

In exploring queer leadership at MRU, the identities of participants became especially salient, particularly the importance of activism among the queer-identified leaders. I will explore this further in Chapter 6, but leaders at MRU demonstrated two slightly different approaches: a) queer advocacy leadership, and b) queer activist leadership. Both approaches may lead to outcomes for LGBTQ equity, yet their personal engagement is unique and provide important distinctions for how queer and non-queer leaders engage in queer leadership. This exploration may be beyond the scope of this project, but these findings provide important implications for future scholarship and HESA practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: METROPOLITAN SCHOOL OF ART

We have lots of students from rural communities, in this two state region, and this might be their first experience living and working on a day to day basis with LGBT community members. This might be the first time that they've ever met somebody who was transgender. – Kerry

The Metropolitan School of Art (MSA) is located in Metropolitan City (MC), a large city on the border of two Midwestern states, with a metro region population of nearly 2.5 million people. As a city, MC has many of the typical amenities found in a Midwestern community: notable national athletic teams; numerous colleges and universities; a bustling arts scene; and growing development in fields of technology, engineering, and arts. Despite its location in a traditionally conservative state, MC has come a long way from its early days as a Cowtown. Today it is more known for its place in the arts community, hosting impressive performance venues, notable galleries and museums, and an increasing support for underground and rising artists. MSA is neatly tucked in the heart of MC, located near historic shopping sites and accessible to galleries and spaces for students to display their work. MC provides an important backdrop to the environment at MSA. It provides students the opportunity to engage with a diverse community, that is historically supportive of the arts, and located within a fairly socially liberal community.

In this chapter, I detail findings about MSA staff members' efforts to improve LGBTQ equity on campus. First, I describe the context of the case by exploring MSA's geographic context and the LGBTQ campus climate as experienced by six participants; then, I introduce grassroots leadership tactics and strategies participants employed to

advance LGBTQ equity on campus. Finally, I will explore how participants engage in queer leadership at MSA. I present the findings in the context of the proposed theoretical framework, illustrating important nuances in the practice of advocacy for queer students, faculty, and staff at MSA.

Setting

MSA recruits many students from rural communities, many coming from areas referred to as “the Bible belt,” making MC, as Bobby noted, “the belt buckle of the Bible belt.” For some students, MSA becomes a refuge from conservative family environments; for others from suburban city or rural communities, it is a culture shock. Brenda spoke of the challenges queer students face being a campus in the Midwest and the judgement some queer students encountered from their peers. Brenda shared:

They thought they were so open to those issues, but there were situations, and part of it is, we live on the edge of the Bible belt. We had some very conservative students. We had freshmen (sic.) students in the residence hall who would come to me and said “my roommate has told me I’m going to hell because I’m gay.”

Although its location in MC provided great access to local queer communities, the “Bible Belt meets Art School” atmosphere created dissonance for queer students and contributed to a sometimes hostile experience for the queer community. The benefits of Midwestern City did not always outweigh the conservativeness of the region.

Unlike many rural and suburban campuses, being located in Midwestern City meant that many students had to acclimate to the culture of MSA and the metropolitan area. The campus and the city are often difficult to separate. In addition, the urban environment exposed students to greater diversity than many students were used to,

particularly for young people coming from rural areas in the Midwest, as is the case for many MSA students. For some, MSA is the place they met out queer people for the first time. Bobby confirmed:

My impression was that most students were okay with their gay counterparts, but I also know that a lot of students came from small town middle America and probably were encountering gay people for the first time. So those were conversations that we'd have with the LGBT students.

Many participants took on the mantle of supporting students, particularly by providing physical and emotional space for queer students. For example, working in student affairs, Bobby was accustomed to listening to LGBTQ students recall their experiences. He also supported them as they navigated relationships with roommates in the residence halls or classmates who may not have known other queer people before.

I visited MSA's campus 10 times over the summer and fall semester, connecting with participants and visiting their bi-weekly Diversity Workgroup meetings. My engagement with MSA was more familiar than with MRU because of previous connections I had on campus. This helped with participant recruitment, but also informed my awareness of the campus culture and events in which MSA students regularly participate in the MC arts community. Like MRU, the MSA community is very aware of the state and national political climate, particularly the conservative political efforts around restroom and religious initiatives. As a private, independent institution, MSA exists autonomously from some external political forces. However, its location in the conservative region still contributes to some challenges in its attempts to advance LGBTQ inclusion initiatives on campus.

Campus Climate

Participants described the LGBTQ campus climate at MSA as fairly warm, noting there have been some improvements in the last few years. In some ways, it seems to be an open and affirming place, but it still has growing pains as the environment has been dominated by a strong White, cisgender, male, heterosexist history. In the early to mid-2000s, MSA lacked many of its current queer affirming policies and had no student organization dedicated to LGBTQ student support. More recently, participants described the campus climate as relatively accepting, especially due to the short-term initiatives detailed in this chapter. However, there have been some incidents on campus that has raised concerns among staff. For example, students attended classes in which their professor did not honor their chosen name or pronouns. Additionally, Bobby shared an incident when a student reported hostilities due to their gay identity. These hostilities did not seem common, but certainly speak to some challenges LGBTQ students may encounter at MSA.

Institutionally, there appeared to be support for LGBTQ students. Kerry reflected on the campus climate as improving, but one that still has room to grow.

I think it's a very accepting place. I think on a continuum of zero to ten, I'd say we're probably at an eight. I think what's interesting is people would assume that all of our demographics at the college are probably this far left liberal open place, this is great, everyone is great. The reality is that the majority aren't. We have lots of students from rural communities.

Although rural communities do not always equate to conservatism, participants described students from rural communities as largely conservative in their social politics. Kerry's

reflection above is indicative of the clash of cultures among students. Further, for many students arriving to MSA, they experience culture shock if they are not accustomed to a perceived liberal environment. Bobby discussed how artists are often perceived as the “counter culture,” those who “embrace difference,” and “challenge norms.” Despite such perceptions, MSA attracted a variety of students, including some who were newly adjusting to a culture that seemingly embraced those who identified as queer.

Despite a reputation for embracing diversity that is often associated with an arts campus, MSA had a normative and problematic history. Through some informal interviews, I learned of MSA’s reputation in the 1970s and 1980s as a campus where faculty slept with students and little student support was provided. Lisa, a long-time associate of the college said, “Back then, things just went unchecked and nobody questioned them. Faculty could do whatever they wanted.” The gender divide was obvious, and most faculty were White cisgender men. Although much has changed over the last couple years, particularly the addition of student services and an increase in women faculty, a general sense of faculty resistance and some pockets of privileged dominance remain as a challenge for embracing queer initiatives. Casey shared:

From my understanding, the professors tend to be a lot of White cisgender men. Not all of them are heterosexual, quite a bit of them are heterosexual. All of them from my understanding are cisgender, and did not have a good grasp of non-binary identities or trans identities in general, or queer identities in general, beyond lesbian and gay. And so you know, it seems like they’re very supportive in terms of feminism and very supportive of gay and lesbian students, a majority

of the faculty, they have that down. But it felt like, a lot of the students felt like the faculty in general is kind of hostile toward the non-binary students.

Many participants reinforced Casey's perception that campus climate for transgender and non-binary students was much chillier compared to their gay, lesbian, or bisexual peers.

Emergence of Inclusive Policy and Practice

Over the last few years, MSA witnessed an increase in supportive initiatives and policies that sought to enhance the campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. These changes were partially in response to individual student experiences and concerns raised by the LGBTQ student organization. Kerry described a student she knew who was outed in class because MSA did not have a mechanism to list students' chosen names on the classroom roster. One of the notable initiatives that resulted from experiences like this include the name and pronoun policy and recent efforts to expand the number of gender inclusive restrooms on campus. The name and pronoun policy allows students to list a chosen name and their gender pronouns on class rosters and other college platforms (e.g., email, online courseware). The intention of this is to prevent outing students who may not identify with their legal name, as well as to allow students to name their own gender markers if they choose.

In addition to responding to student experiences, Kerry and David Owen discussed their efforts to remain aware of best practices in HESA. For example, David Owen recalled completing the Campus Pride Index profile and the shortcomings it revealed for MSA. The Index is a tool many campuses utilize to gauge their support of the LGBTQ community, focused on campus policy, practices, and resources. He shared, "It was disappointing in a sense, our overall score was 3.5 out of 5 stars. Which to me

says, you're not terrible but you could do a lot better." Kerry and David Owen used the Index to reveal where MSA performed well and what areas needed improvement. David Owen continued, "The part that was really positive to me was that our student life scored between 4.5 out of 5 stars in all of the student life areas." The Campus Pride Index provided affirmation of their progress and a guide for what work they needed to continue to pursue.

More recently, Kerry and David Owen have been working on expanding the number of gender inclusive restrooms on campus, with a goal of having at least one accessible restroom in each building on campus. Additionally, they added diversity content to their new student orientation program, providing tutorials on mental health, diversity issues, and gender identity. Kerry discussed the program and the opportunity it provided to discuss concerns critical for the transgender community on campus.

For the gender identity part, we talk about pronouns, and how important it is to use those pronouns, and why people are choosing to use different pronouns. Not to make assumptions. We also talk about gender neutral bathrooms and where those are on campus. I think that's it for now, for that group. It's just an awareness that there will be people that you're working with or living with, that identify this way.

The bathroom initiative and the educational program at orientation demonstrate two recent efforts to improve campus support for LGBTQ students. These shifts in policy and practice support students and also impact the broader campus climate; yet, LGBTQ staff and faculty were noticeably lacking, and likely, underrepresented.

Lack of Diverse Staff and Faculty

There was a notable lack of MSA staff or faculty members who openly identified as LGBTQ. Bobby commented that at times not only did he perceive himself to be the only gay person on campus, he would encounter tokenization from other staff members. For instance, he explained that being charged with advising the LGBTQ student group happened by default, “since I was the only out gay person on campus, or at least within student affairs... and our charge was to enhance the student life experience.” He also recalled a time around the winter holidays when a senior administrator “gave everyone little presents and she gave me two martini glasses, and said, ‘you know, I know the gays love cocktails.’” Although he interpreted this interaction as harmless, he reported that it was strange because their relationship had always been professional.

The lack of a critical mass of LGBTQ faculty or staff also stood out to Brenda, who commented on the importance of having a diverse representation of both faculty and staff members. She shared:

One of the things we didn’t have was a lot of LGBT faculty. Nor did we have a lot of LGBT staff. That to me goes back to all diversity issues; if you’re going to support the students, you also need faculty that reflects the student body. You need a board that reflects the student body.

Given MSA’s reputation as a liberal environment, the lack of LGBTQ faculty and staff was noticeable. Likewise, the campus also lacked a broad representation of racial diversity. Overall, many participants acknowledge that MSA today is a welcoming and inclusive environment for the LGBTQ community, but there are still areas that need to be

improved, including structural or representational diversity among faculty, staff, and students.

David Owen acknowledged the lack of racial diversity among faculty and staff.

He reflected:

Despite the fact that we're relatively diverse for a Midwest institution, we're still predominantly White. Our students who are in the minority here aren't going to see faculty and staff who look like them in those positions. If they do, it might be people who are in less prominent positions on campus. I think our trades and custodial staff might be more diverse than our faculty and administrative staff. It's better than none at all, but it doesn't help really. Our students are really asking for our faculty, our leadership too, what are we doing to diversify?

Like David Owen, a few participants acknowledged the lack of racial diversity at MSA. Many also recalled incidents in the past that created a chilly racial climate. Bobby described an end of semester art project by a White student who painted the "n-word written on the wall" he had permission to use. The incident caused a debate on campus about artistic expression, but ultimately the president, a Black woman, required that he paint over it. Brenda also recounted the same incident, sharing that the Black students were upset, and found little support at the time. The campus was divided over the issue, with many disagreeing with the president's decision. As the campus works toward inclusive efforts for queer students, it has progress to make in terms of its support for communities of color, leaving questions about the support for queer students with multiple social identities. Recognizing these challenges, Kerry and other staff members organized the Diversity Workgroup, intended to engage students, faculty, and staff on

improving the overall campus climate. Although the Diversity Workgroup aims to address issues of inequity on campus, the group is still in an early developmental phase working to secure buy-in for increased education on these intersectional issues.

Although many of the participants report a fairly warm climate for LGBTQ individuals at MSA, as previously noted, more attention to the climate is needed, particularly for transgender students and communities of color. Overall, staff foreground student success and interests as they work to support LGBTQ equity and are working to ensure students' experiences are positive and fulfilling. Although there is some attention paid to improving the climate, there is a need for LGBTQ-centered advocacy, including grassroots organization, particularly for MSA students. Next, I explore how staff participants who were committed to LGBTQ equity at MSA engaged in grassroots organizing.

Engaging Grassroots Leadership at MSA

The Midwest School of Art is a small campus, with fewer bureaucratic structures in place than I found at MRU. Its small size has its benefits, particularly when staff members take on an initiative for change. A core aspect of grassroots leadership is to navigate change from the bottom-up, leveraging support from others on campus, to create change from a non-authoritarian role. In the MSA case, Kerry and David Owen's roles mean that their efforts, although extremely important, are not entirely consistent with a grassroots leadership framework. Kerry is the Dean and David Owen is the Assistant Dean of Students. Their roles are significant and their titles may provide important credibility to their colleagues on campus; however, the collegial environment at MSA still requires them to navigate power dynamics similar to grassroots leaders. Yet, in their

advocacy, they had to obtain buy-in from senior leadership, consistent with grassroots leadership. They also had to seek support from faculty. Thus, their strategies demonstrated the need to leverage grassroots approaches, despite their job titles. This is perhaps most salient in coordinating the aforementioned Diversity Workgroup. The workgroup's purpose is to advocate for diversity initiatives and support programs on campus, directly support student or campus programs, and draft recommendations to senior leadership on campus. This is one example of how they employ grassroots strategies. For example, not only did Kerry and David Owen engage in grassroots strategies, but staff did as well. Next I explore how grassroots leadership emerged among staff experiences at MSA.

Individual

Analyzing findings within the context of the individual phenomenon of grassroots leadership, I uncovered nuances in how participants engaged in grassroots efforts. This phenomenon emphasizes individual factors for leadership engagement, which included participant motivation, identity, and persistence through challenges. The intrinsic factors that contributed to participants' involvement in grassroots leadership primarily revealed strong personal motivations, but also spoke to participants' identity and their willingness to pursue their advocacy. Five of the participants are White, all hold middle-upper class privilege, and four do not identify as LGBTQ; yet, all possess a commitment to LGBTQ inclusion.

Motivation. Participants demonstrated a variety of reasons for their motivation to support LGBTQ equity on campus. Staff members' personal and professional philosophy of student support, as well as their personal commitment to the LGBTQ community,

represent their motivation. Consistent with their work with students and in areas of student support, they placed a strong commitment to student development at all levels of their student experience.

Service to students. Service to students was a prominent motivating factor for staff members' involvement in supporting LGBTQ students at MSA. Many of the participants reflected on moments of engagement with students that demonstrated their motivation. For example, Elaine and Brenda frequently referenced nurturing students, recognizing that many students may not come from supportive families and that MSA is an intense rigorous academic institution. Both told me about students who came to them with family, academic, or personal concerns, finding support by their open-door policy. Elaine reflected on this by noting that she took on the role of the students "mom on campus." Elaine's position on campus focused on academic support and disability services. She reflected on why service to students is important to her:

You have to look at the kid and say, what is it about you that makes you unique. And with all students, they are all unique. Every single one of them has something amazingly special. But you look at them and say, what is it that I can do for you that makes life manageable? And for the LGBT kids, especially I think of a freshman (sic.) coming in, they want to know, am I going to be accepted? Is there somebody I can talk to? Are people going to think I'm strange? Are people going to want to room with me? Eat with me, talk with me, you know. For the most part they're coming out of high schools where they're such a minority...So, they're not only struggling with the normal teenage angst and puberty, and parental

issues, but then it's where do I fit in this world? Who's going to love me? Are my parents going to hate me when they find out? Will my teachers respect me?

Elaine supports students in ways she thinks they may not be experiencing elsewhere. She is acutely aware that LGBTQ students may experience isolation, not fit in, and be at risk for mental health concerns and/or suicide. By providing this welcoming environment through listening to students' needs, building relationships with students, and taking action to address their concerns, she and others hope to mitigate any of the potential concerns they may face.

Similarly, Kerry hopes to prevent students from unnecessary harm or exclusion on campus. Her drive to create an inclusive environment is a strong motivator, particularly so students can experience sense of belonging and acceptance on campus. She shared:

It pains us to see a student hurt. It pains us to see a student need, that we know that we can't make an impact on. That we know. There's a solution and we need to come together. Because there's a difference between a challenge and there's a difference between hurt. And I want to make sure that we're constantly doing better to make sure that we're in a place that is inclusive here, and student feel comfortable.

Student support is integral to the participants' practices as staff members and student affairs professionals. Their commitments exceed student support expectations, particularly in the ways they foster relationships with students and intentionally advocate and listen to student needs. Staff embrace empathy and compassion for students, particularly those most marginalized. Best practices in student affairs certainly echo participants' work (CAS, 2009; Dixon, 2001; Sanlo et al., 2002); yet, like the LGBTQ

climate scholarship, I found that colleges and universities, like MSA, remain unwelcoming environments for the LGBTQ community (Marine, 2011; Rankin et al., 2010). Thus, more work is needed to transform MSA and many other campuses.

Commitment to LGBTQ community. Another prominent motivation for participants was their personal commitment to diversity, particularly for those in the LGBTQ community. Brenda and Kerry both recalled individuals in their lives who led them to strengthen their personal convictions to support LGBTQ peers and students. These personal connections provide an important foundation for advocating for LGBTQ students. David Owen also shared how his personal connection with LGBTQ people inspired his current work on behalf of the LGBTQ community. He reflected, “During my time as an RA and working in that role, I was pulled into a lot of diversity training and opportunities for learning around human difference that were very impactful.” David Owen is from the rural Midwest and had not been exposed to racially, sexually, or gender diverse communities prior to college. Serving as a residential assistant at his alma mater was foundational to his commitment to social justice, and was when he first became aware of his privileges. Now as a staff member at MSA, his developmental experiences guide his service in student affairs.

Identity. Awareness of participants’ own identities was very important, particularly regarding how their identities supported or influenced their involvement supporting initiatives on campus. Participants’ described their identities as non-queer (e.g., cis woman/man, straight) and queer identities. Four of the six participants identified with privileged identities (i.e., White, non-LGBTQ), which led to unique insights about their self-awareness as allies for social justice.

Non-queer identities. As noted, a majority of the participants claimed dominant, non-queer identities. Although identity was important to non-queer participants as advocates for social justice, identity generally did not hinder the work they accomplished on campus. David Owen and Brenda reflected on their identities and upbringing, commenting on the immense privilege they each had in their respective communities. On campus, holding a non-queer identity meant they took less personal risk in their LGBTQ work on campus. Unlike queer identified leaders at MRU, participants at MSA did not speak about concern associated with an assumed queer agenda. Although all were instrumental in advocating for LGBTQ students and initiatives, their sexual and/or gender identities did not compromise their professional standing on campus.

For the four non-queer participants, Kerry was the only one who expanded on the role her sex and gender played in her life and work. She shared:

Identifying as female is very important to me and I think it's because I was raised by a single mother. A very strong single mother who always taught me you have to depend on yourself, no one else. So when I was young, I watched her struggle to excel in the workforce. And quote unquote, "the man's world," which was still very much a part of our world at the time. So I think maybe in the position I'm in now, and achieving what I have, and being a female, is very important to me. And I take that very seriously.

In her time at MSA, Kerry discussed the steps she took to increase her credibility, in light of her sex and gender, with peers, students, and parents. For example, during move-in weekend, she was often mistaken for a student, so she intentionally dressed more professionally to reinforce her status as a staff member on campus. She also leveraged

David Owen's identity as a man who may hold more credibility with other men; she would ask him to push some conversations forward with specific groups who may be more receptive to his approach. Kerry's self-awareness of her own and others' identities was not only an effective strategy, it demonstrated how identities mattered in their roles on campus. Kerry's experience highlighted sexism, which was a barrier in some of her experiences.

Queer identities. Bobby and Casey shared that their queer identities played a role in supporting queer students; but, it also left them feeling tokenized. In his interview, Bobby discussed this numerous times. In particular, his experiences becoming the "default staff member" to advise the LGBTQ student organization, highlighted his tokenism. Although he did have some interest in supporting LGBTQ students, especially considering the difficulty some students encountered, he recalled feeling isolated:

I felt like I was the only gay person there. The other gay person there who left the year I came in, was the previous supervisor of the LGBT student organization that was defunct. So I feel like a lot of times, especially when you're in a small community and you might be the only one, sometimes people just look to you to do that, "oh you're gay so you should do that," or "you're gay, they'll listen to you."

Bobby's queer identity was not the catalyst for his involvement, but it did lead him to support queer students. Bobby expressed apathy for his role. He supported students when necessary, but did not take on an activist agenda. Counter to his non-queer colleagues, he was expected to support LGBTQ students.

Casey was a graduate student completing a counseling internship on campus, and was closely connected to their (Casey's pronoun) queer identities, particularly in how they engage students and provide recommendations for improving the campus environment. Casey noted that one of the reasons they were brought to campus was because of their experience in the LGBTQ community. With Casey's experience, they were often asked to speak on the experience of trans students at MSA. "I was expected to speak for the whole group or something, or the experience for the whole group, which can be perceived as negative by some people. But because I'm cognizant of that, I know how to phrase things." Casey appreciated being included and saw this as a logical strategy for ensuring campus was more welcoming to trans and non-binary students. Yet, both Casey and Bobby shared similar experiences that represent forms of tokenization, regardless of their interest or willingness to support queer programs. Further, both of their experiences draw a distinction between those of their non-queer counterparts, who never occupied a defacto LGBTQ support role.

Persistence. Participants did not connect resistance to their advocacy efforts with their identities; however, they did face resistance to the LGBTQ-centered initiatives toward which they were working. Although they did not experience overwhelming rejection, they did encounter pushback. I will discuss resistance in further detail later, but I introduce it here to emphasize that participants were persistent and did not abandon their advocacy work. To foster persistence, participants relied on support from colleagues and their sense of purpose and service to students.

Colleague support. The collegial environment at MSA contributed to participant support and engagement. Brenda, Bobby, and Elaine specifically described the strong

sense of support they received from colleagues. Kerry shared similar sentiments that at MSA, a small campus, they are reliant on only a small number of partners. Kerry said:

You have to depend on other people. If I didn't have the team that I work with, it couldn't have happened. Imagine if there was a registrar that I worked with that wasn't on the same page. Imagine if there wasn't an assistant dean of students who wasn't so great at articulating and being careful and empathetic in moving through that process.

Yet, Kerry continued, "I've just learned the different personalities and the way campus works. You can get things done in a short amount of time but you have to get the buy-in, because we are such a small school." Without a shared interest and willingness to advance their initiatives, their motivation to continue would likely be hindered.

Purpose and service. All participants expressed a passion to supporting LGBTQ students. This commitment kept the participants engaged and focused on pushing forward, despite any potential setbacks. Kerry commented, "We love what we do, and we know what we do makes a difference, and it's very rewarding." Bobby echoed this sense of service and ability to impact student's lives. "I like when I'm able to help a student get from point A to point B...I like that feeling of being able to help someone where a student comes back and says, thank you." Participants described intrinsic rewards for service, especially because extrinsic rewards were not guaranteed. Such intrinsic motivation and reward reaffirmed their commitment to support the LGBTQ community at MSA. At the core, a variety of personal philosophies guided staff members at MSA in their support of LGBTQ practice. The individual phenomenon illuminates the relevance of motivation, identity, and persistence toward successful navigation for change at MSA.

The role of the individual is part of the fabric of grassroots leadership; however, without group engagement, grassroots leadership would not be fully realized. Next, I explore the role of the group in advancing their advocacy agenda.

Group

Collaborative support among staff members at MSA for practice and policy change initiatives reflects the importance of a group phenomenon. Coalition building and establishing networks is an important tenet to the group phenomenon of grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Meyerson, 2003). To accomplish these goals of student support and policy change, participants relied on a few distinct tactics and strategies to obtain buy-in from colleagues on campus. These strategies employed also speak to institutional power struggles experienced between staff and faculty, and what challenges and support MSA staff members encountered in their work.

Tactics and strategy. To support LGBTQ students and advocate for inclusive policy participants used a number of tactics and strategies to advance their work. Much of this work emphasized supporting students first, relying on a sense of doing the right thing by supporting student success. In this section I explore these strategies further, specifically illustrating how participants advocated student support, maintained a sense of persistence through resistance, and attached initiatives to institutional values and mission.

Purpose. A prominent strategy staff employed was an appeal to individual interest in supporting student success. Brenda spoke about engaging with other staff members about the importance of the name and pronoun policy. Part of implementing the policy required educating and training faculty and staff so they could become familiar with the policy and how to support students who elect to use the policy. For participants like

Kerry, Brenda, and Elaine, adopting and implementing this policy was simple because their personal interactions with students reminded them of the need for the policy.

Personal stories helped campus leaders grasp the importance of the name and pronoun policy, and for participants, tying it to students opened the door to convince others of the need for the policy. David Owen shared:

I try to make a connection to bring it back to [student development]. These efforts are not meant to be tedious, but they're meant to contribute to student success. It doesn't always work, but if I can try to show people that it's not about me trying to tell them how to think and more about us as a collective trying to help our students feel cared for and accepted, and hopefully be successful, they are more likely to listen. That has had some success in helping them see the value.

Participants argued that the appeal to student success led to the successful policy creation and implementation, but it also begs the question as to why such a policy had to be linked to student achievement to succeed, rather than creating it because it is the just thing to do. Further, it is curious why they did not think they would get the traction needed by aligning it with the needs of faculty and staff, in addition to students. Although the staff members' intentions are noble and nearly all expressed genuine interest in ensuring LGBTQ students feel welcomed on campus, the need for this strategy might also indicate how challenging MSA can be for LGBTQ individuals if they must appeal to other faculty or administrators through the lens of success.

Leverage student feedback. Kerry and David Owen's initiative to expand the number of gender inclusive restrooms on campus was quite successful. They were able to make some quick changes in some areas; however, they received consistent pushback

from a few people responsible for a couple of areas on campus. Working through this pushback, David Owen shared his strategy to move forward. He said:

If we had eight out of ten say yes, there were two who didn't. We've since gone back to those. Actually there were three that didn't. We've gone back to those three areas and represented the information saying, hey, we're still hearing from students, we've been able to compile student feedback.

Despite initial rejection from some of the academic areas on campus, Kerry and David Owen were intentional in letting their request "cool" before attempting again. Not only did time allow them to reconsider the proposal, they returned with student feedback that reinforced the need for the changes. David Owen continued, "Whether it's a Facebook post or emails to us, or general ideas, students have been saying this. We had these artifacts of student feedback to share with these areas."

Using feedback and personalizing the student experience led to success in their continued efforts for advocacy. Kerry noted how some faculty became more open to the concept of these gender inclusive spaces once they personally knew students who wanted these facilities and better understood students' non-binary identities. Kerry reflected,

But the success on the other side is often times, I see someone who is resistant at first and then gets to know a [trans] student...and working with them one-on-one they start to notice and start to see the impacts. And we've had faculty come to us and say, "you know I said I didn't want a gender neutral bathroom or I wasn't in favor of pronouns and changing of first names, now I get it."

Not only are personal connections to LGBTQ students important in advocating for change, but Kerry's reflection also indicates how policy and practice changes can

ultimately challenge the larger culture. Seeing community members move from not agreeing with the policy to accepting it can positively influence the students' experience and the attitudes of other faculty and staff. Participants relied on strategies of time and persistence to successfully navigate these policy shifts.

Values and knowledge. Another primary strategy leveraged by participants relied on adhering to institutional values and best practices in the field of higher education student affairs. In so doing, leaders believed they were more credible in their advocacy for policy and practice initiatives. David Owen shared, "I try to articulate the value of what we're doing in any given moment. Just try to bring it back to how it edifies the mission of the institution." For him, the mission is an important value of which members of the MSA community are keenly aware. He continued:

The mission of our institution is to prepare individuals to transform the world creatively through art and design. If our students happen to be minorities on some level, and they're struggling to feel like they belong here because of their identity not being valued, how is that hurting our mission? Because we're not supporting them or doing what we can to get ourselves to support them.

Ideally, highlighting these shared values provides a connection among all students, faculty, and staff, and may be a strategic way to garner support from those who disagree with having gender inclusive restrooms or a gender pronoun policy. By reminding stakeholders of these values, participants changed the attitudes of those who struggled to support the initiatives.

Leaders also relied on best practices in HESA to leverage the development of LGBTQ-inclusive programs. Brenda recalled, "Kerry had done all her homework and it

was laid out ‘this is how schools are doing this.’ That is how she legitimized it.” Kerry was intentional in sharing knowledge she gained from other campuses or professional conferences she attended to facilitate change. If it made sense for MSA students, and she received the buy-in from colleagues, she pursued it. As previously mentioned, the Campus Pride Index served as an assessment tool to measure how campus is performing in regard to its efforts toward LGBTQ inclusion. This use of the Index allowed campus leaders to see what areas needed improvement and gave some credibility to change efforts moving forward. Thus, sharing what they learned from professional associations and best practices, helped these grassroots leaders better advocate for students.

Power dynamics. Power dynamics primarily surfaced between faculty and staff. Staff relied on buy-in and support from academic units as they pursued their policy initiatives; in seeking that support, participants encountered some apathetic faculty. In particular, participants reported that faculty expressed resistance in participating in training. Reflecting the power faculty held at MSA, Casey recounted:

I think the people who were in administration that really wanted to move forward with these programs didn’t really have the power to. I think the biggest barrier was just administrative disconnect in terms of that. Some people in administration really want to push this initiative, and some people were just kind of like, “well we don’t want the faculty to have to do more trainings, we don’t want to make them uncomfortable with the bathroom situation.” And so we have to take that into consideration.

Thus, appealing to the faculty became a primary role for the staff members. They had to obtain faculty buy-in and increase their awareness of the importance of these

LGBTQ initiatives for students and for the campus. Brenda also described the significant role faculty played in facilitating change on campus. She shared, “Faculty pretty much always thought they were the ones in charge, which is problematic in a number of ways.” Thus, advancing any of the leaders’ agenda relied on the appropriate support from faculty on campus. Although these accounts position faculty as a barrier for some initiatives, in the end, staff efforts were effective, as many faculty were persuaded by appeals to student interest. Furthermore, along the way, a number of faculty became engaged in the Diversity Workgroup, working alongside staff to advance a campus diversity agenda. Because of the perceived and real power of faculty, faculty participation in the workgroup proved helpful as new initiatives emerged.

Compared to faculty, resistance from campus administration was minimal. Administrators would not intervene in participant efforts as long as they put student needs as the rationale for their work. David Owen said, “[Administration] is very supportive and, up to this point, left it in the hands of us and the individuals in those areas. I think they’d say they support our efforts as long as we’re working collaboratively in that area.” This sense of autonomy provided great opportunity for Kerry and David Owen to push forward with the bathroom initiatives, working closely with academic units and campus facilities. Kerry reached out to her vice-president sharing, “I actually had a person above me say, ‘convert the bathrooms. Convert the last three that you need to.’” However, as Kerry moved forward and presented the initiatives to her colleagues in the academic units, there was some reservation. “And I said to my colleague on the academic side, I’ve been given permission to convert, I’m going to go do it. And that person said ‘no, I don’t think so’. Again, that’s why we pumped the breaks, stopped, and I took a

more one-on-one approach.” These moments of resistance illustrate how and with whom challenges surfaced, leading Kerry and David Owen to strategically reframe how they navigate some of these power dynamics.

Organizational

Considering the organizational phenomenon is critical to reveal how a small arts campus sustains a collegial environment fertile for collaboration and quick action for advancing change initiatives. Participants’ engagement with LGBTQ advocacy revealed some successful strategies for navigating change, ultimately improving the climate and culture at MSA. Some of the most relevant strategies, which were also consistent with the group phenomenon, were engaging with one another and intentionally reaching out to academic units and faculty colleagues.

Leader development and group formation. Brenda reflected on efforts to engage faculty and staff to implement the name and pronoun policy and subsequent training efforts around the initiative. “Students come and go, and yes, the purpose was for them and they were supportive, but we really had to educate the staff and faculty in order for these things to become institutionalized and actually functional and working.” There was buy-in from a core group of the leaders, including all of the participants, but additional outreach was necessary. Brenda continued:

We would interact with other people on campus, trying to bring them into conversations and stuff. A lot of what I found there, the best way to go about things was to say, you need to go to a training so we can teach you about this. It was more through casual conversation and bringing up things and trying to make

them understand, through conversation and one-on-one, versus doing any formal outreach.

As previously mentioned, these one-on-one strategies for outreach were effective in implementing the policy, a strong marker of grassroots leadership. This outreach was also effective for engaging individuals on campus and enhancing group formation around the newly implemented initiatives; participant efforts fostered group development among staff and faculty.

As previously mentioned, the establishment of the Diversity Workgroup was a prominent outcome of Kerry and David Owen's efforts. This workgroup met every other Tuesday over the lunch hour, and was open to a diverse group of campus constituents. The workgroup has become the mechanism for some campus leaders to generate and put forward recommendations to campus administration. These larger efforts to increase diversity initiatives on campus reflect the progress participants have made through their leadership commitments.

Collaborative support for students. Wanting to support students facilitated faculty and staff engagement. For example, Kerry said:

One thing that I found that was very helpful for me in talking to faculty is giving an example. It might not have been the most politically correct example, but it's the only one I can think of that would really help them understand, saying to them, "imagine if you were in a wheel chair and there wasn't a restroom for you to use." You know, somebody, who doesn't identify that way, they don't have a restroom to use. So I thought that was a very clear point I was trying to make.

Sometimes people would go, “oh, I never thought of it that way.” Sometimes it took.

Kerry was aware that conflating gender diversity with disability was problematic, but this was an effective strategy to obtain buy-in with faculty. In the end, gender accessibility of space on campus became a universal appeal, in part because it supported students who have different needs compared to their cisgender peers. Leveraging a common desire to support students was an important component of the group phenomenon. Participants argued that without making a case for student success, they would not have witnessed changes in policy and practice.

Brenda recounted how Bobby, Elaine, Kerry, and David Owen served an important role in advocating for LGBTQ campus programs and supportive initiatives. “It really helped to have at least the core group of people that worked directly with students, on board. It was in general a great group of people who had the student needs in mind.” Elaine and Bobby shared similar sentiments about the collaborative nature among staff members in supporting student success. Because of a strong group connection between staff members, participants were better positioned to recruit faculty advocates, particularly during the development of the Diversity Workgroup.

Structures and culture. The culture of MSA and the structure associated with working at a small arts college contributed to the organization phenomenon that is part of grassroots leadership. Participants reflected on the benefit of working at such a small institution and how this small arts campus and single-degree-serving institution shaped the student environment and the ability to navigate change on campus. David Owen reflected, “we have a high degree of administrative agility at this institution, to make

change based on needs. There's not the red tape or politics that larger institutions have to make things happen." This dynamic is important for how these staff members enact their advocacy for queer and trans students. These structures and culture contribute to an environment that, in recent years, is flexible and open to shifting toward progressive values. For example, the success of the name and pronoun policy and the expansion of gender inclusive restrooms reflect the nimble campus culture and improving campus climate for LGBTQ individuals.

Elaine argued that progressive values must be integrated not only into the culture of the institution, but also in the policy and practice. She shared:

Whether it's art school or another campus in the country, you're going to have an LGBT population, so your school should strive to have an equal playing field for all students. So if that means you have to have policies in place to ensure non-discrimination, you have to have policies in place. Because, as a society, we have not come so far that we don't need them. We need them. We need them.

By emphasizing policy, staff recognized the necessity of having LGBTQ supportive policies in order to more formally prohibit exclusionary practices. This can lead to shifts in the organizational culture, as discussed within the frame of the organization phenomenon. Like an institutional mission, policy can ultimately guide the values, norms, and assumptions that shape the campus culture (Kezar & Lester, 2011), which may ultimately lead to a warm LGBTQ campus climate.

Small arts campus. Kerry reflected on the benefits of working within a small campus community. "The nice thing about being on a campus this small, is that I don't have to go through this giant process to change something. If I just want to drop preferred

from the name change policy, it's done. I just make the changes." The lack of bureaucracy created a sense of ease for addressing issues on campus. This facilitated improvements to the campus climate for queer students at MSA, as issues that staff were working on could, in some cases, be easily implemented.

This small institution type also allowed for collegial relationships among some staff members, contributing to small group organizing and developing strong relational connections among staff and students. Kerry shared:

We all have this philosophy of we're all going to do whatever is necessary to be there for our students. So I think just with the small nature of the college it helps me to do that. That's why I always like small private, that's where my heart is.

That's where I know I can be the front line one day and the next day I can be the leadership.

The small campus allowed for agility in change and it allowed the participants to connect with students to support them personally, but also through policy.

The organizational phenomenon illustrates how MSA fosters a culture of collaboration within some of the units on campus. Further, findings demonstrated how staff members advocated for diversity initiatives and made successful inroads toward practices of equity, particularly on behalf of LGBTQ students. Although barriers to their efforts were evident, the collegial small arts college environment facilitated opportunities for individuals to advocate, both in their relationships with students and on behalf of initiatives supporting students on campus. As such, participants credited the campus structure and culture as helpful to implement policies, as well as to form the Diversity Workgroup. These efforts provided important contributions toward improving the

campus climate and culture and evidenced staff grassroots leadership strategies. The next section illustrates how staff members center queer advocacy in their work on MSA, contributing to a stronger culture of queer allyship at MSA.

Engaging Queer Leadership at MSA

Advocacy to me means a more thoughtful, methodical, careful, approach.

Activism I automatically think of protests, and our campus just has not been that kind of a place. It almost seems like when you go to that realm, people get defensive. So having close enough relationships with students to help them understand you don't have to go to that place, because you didn't even do the advocacy part, don't jump there before you do this. I think it's a very good way to help students learn how the world works. Because there are issues where activism is important, where you don't have an opportunity to walk into someone's office and not have an appointment, and say "Kerry I really need to talk to you about this." -- Kerry

Kerry's distinction in the above quote of advocacy and activism illustrates a tempered leadership philosophy for navigating change. Her approach to support queer initiatives at MSA is measured, accounting for the systems of power within the institution. She is also cognizant that some change can be easier when thoughtfully employed. This approach for Kerry and her colleagues has been extremely successful in implementing the name and pronoun policy and expanding the gender inclusive restroom initiatives. These successes demonstrate how staff members can influence change initiatives by leveraging their relationships from the bottom-up. However, the work

centering LGBTQ students at MSA provided additional consideration for these grassroots processes.

Most of the participants at MSA were non-queer advocates, who sought to advance campus initiatives to increase LGBTQ equity at MSA. These identities provide an important distinction when considering queer leadership. Their queer advocacy was not tied to a queer social identity, but to their personal commitment for LGBTQ advocacy and social justice. Participants who were queer had different experiences and engagement with LGBTQ equity on campus. Bobby and Casey were both invested in supporting LGBTQ students, but Casey's time on campus limited their ability to engage in queer-oriented work and Bobby did not claim a queer advocate identity. Instead, Bobby's commitment was imposed or expected due to his queer identity, but not self-driven. Therefore, my analysis of grassroots leadership at MSA primarily reflects the experiences of the non-queer advocates. I explore these participants' commitment to queer leadership through a lens of advocacy, as they claimed an advocacy identity rather than an activist identity, and how their leadership practices disrupt heterogendered norms at a small arts college campus.

Queer Advocate

A core tenet to queer leadership is the role of the leader as a queer advocate, someone who is committed to advancing the work of LGBTQ equity. The findings at MSA reveal that most participants have a strong connection to advocacy and identify as advocates within their individual work. Their identities as advocates consisted of three primary components, addressing: (1) their commitment to issues of social justice, (2) their positional ability to move campus policy forward, and (3) their willingness to evolve

in their awareness of LGBTQ issues. Most non-queer participants rejected an activist identity, drawing a distinction between activism and advocacy. For them, activism was more aggressive and less organized action resulting in reactionary events such as protests or disruptive events, whereas advocacy relied on a more collegial proactive approach to working toward specific goals within institutional structures.

Claimed advocacy identity. For the majority of the participants, their queer advocacy manifested in how they supported LGBTQ students through their roles on campus. Although many reported supporting the broader LGBTQ community, most only spoke of their advocacy within the context of their roles on campus. Only Casey engaged in queer advocacy work outside of MSA; they were involved in other local organizations. When considering their roles as advocates outside of MSA, others spoke about personal connections to individuals who are LGBTQ and how those relationships helped inform their own commitment to being an advocate for the LGBTQ community. However, those relationships and their dedication to efforts on campus did not translate to queer advocacy in other contexts.

Social justice commitment. Some participants connected their queer advocacy to a larger commitment to social justice. Elaine described her commitment to LGBTQ students as the same for all minoritized students on campus. “I would consider myself to be an advocate for LGBT students, for any minority student, for disability students, I’m an advocate for every student to have a level playing field and an equal opportunity to be successful and happy.”

David Owen's social justice dedication emerged as a part of his own development during his undergraduate experience. His background as a middleclass, White, straight, cisgender man afforded him many privileges he did not have to confront until college.

I've learned how my privilege was a thing that most did not experience. That I was blind to this world of racism and homophobia, heterosexism, which I benefited, that also served to oppress others and cause them a very negative experience. I think it was positive to learn that, but very hard to see that others whom I had very close relationships from a different level, were having this other life experience that was very negative. It was hard to know that and I think it was very inspiring to think that it was possible that I could use that privilege I have to maybe edify or use that voice to build that up in some way.

His self-awareness shaped how he approaches his work at MSA, using his positional and social privileges to advocate for other minoritized students. Commitments, like those described by Elaine and David Owen, to support minoritized students serve as an important part of participants' queer advocacy. Combining participants' self-awareness and their actions toward broader social justice initiatives, including the Diversity Workgroup, suggest promise toward improving the campus climate for minoritized groups. This commitment to broader diversity engagement challenges the participants to focus on multiple issues, and not just LGBTQ initiatives. This demonstrates a holistic approach to change, where all concerns are discussed and considered.

Moving campus policy forward. David Owen expounded upon his support for students, explaining the importance of using his position for good. He shared, "When I know there's a cause out there students or employees have, I'll try to jump on board and

use my position and resources I have available to try to help further that. So maybe an activist advocate, maybe.” Here David Owen suggested that his involvement may teeter on activism, but he is hesitant to incorporate that into his self-perception as an advocate for the LGBTQ community. Yet, his willingness to act is an important component to being a queer advocate. Brenda also spoke about her role advocating for students. She shared,

I think my role there was bringing in the student side of it, and saying this is why we need this policy, because this has happened on our campus. Or these have been issues or students are frustrated because, and this policy will help us support those situations.

Advocacy was enacted through working toward policy and practice improvements for most of the participants, with the ultimate goal of seeking to improve the lives and experiences of their students.

Openness to improving allyship. Another sub-theme among participants’ role as queer advocates was their willingness to learn. All participants spoke about their willingness to learn and how they handled situations when they were corrected. Allyship was viewed as a commitment toward self-improvement, without assuming that their political or social views dictated their behavior or earned them some credibility. This openness to learn was an important nuance to the queer advocate frame, as it allowed them to have a stronger connection to student concerns. Particularly when students approached them with issues related to issues in the classroom, being misgendered, or not having their name respected. To support queer students required an element of authentic listening and learning. Kerry reflected,

First and foremost, I think allyship means to listen. To listen, to ask questions, and understand. It also means to, in my opinion, ask what are the needs? I think so often, sometimes we jump, and sometimes it's not a need to jump. It's a need to listen and just be present. And to be a caring person. And I think the other part is doing what we can as individuals to help move initiatives forward to provide a welcoming and equitable education.

Kerry's experience reflects how a campus administrator may choose to support student voices by listening and hearing what students need. Kerry continued to reflect on moments when she adjusted practices based on newly learned information. "I've also learned not to call them preferred pronouns, because they're not preferred," she shared. This openness to change not only reflects a dedication to queer advocacy, but it also demonstrates how non-queer people can better engage in queer advocacy work, through listening and learning.

Queering Leadership

As an addition to the group phenomenon, queering leadership seeks to disrupt power dynamics or shift practices that perpetuate heterogendered norms. Participants at MSA relied on a couple different strategies that centered queer identities in their leadership process, namely by relying on student voices and the pursuit of small achievable goals. Within this realm, queering leadership relied on a combination of evidence-based best practices and using student voices to inform staff members approach for centering queer voices in their work.

Small wins. In order to expand the number of gender inclusive restrooms on campus, Kerry and David Owen had to obtain approval from the academic departments in

each respective building, noting that some of these areas would be more resistant. As noted previously, they were intentionally cautious, aware that rejection was likely, but strategic in how they sold their ideas. Kerry reflected,

Where we were careful, again with the gender neutral restrooms, David Owen went specifically to each department chair and faculty, and got them on board. If they weren't on board, we didn't push. That's where we had to choose to step back a little bit, and be careful. And what we did, I said David Owen, let's just convert the restrooms where people are on board this year, that was like 2 years ago.

The strategy of accepting small wins allowed their efforts to move forward, despite some areas of hesitation. Speaking about a couple of individuals on campus, Kerry said, "And there was a bit of resistance from those two individuals not understanding, and David Owen did a really good job of being patient and explaining and re-explaining." This persistence ultimately paid off and helped them expand gender inclusive restrooms to nearly all buildings on campus.

David Owen reflected on this experience and his strategy for obtaining support, navigating the power dynamics among other departments. His efforts reinforced a need for patience and an ability to politely persuade the departments in those buildings. He stated,

Rather than being somebody to get in there with the staff, my role was rather to just be a researcher and a person to ask the questions, a try to articulate the value of adjusting our infrastructure around bathrooms to hopefully better meet our student needs. So rather than kind of developing the enthusiasm, which I don't

think there's a lot of enthusiasm for bathroom use, it was more about trying to just maybe share information or share some opportunities in trying to advocate for what they were. I don't think it was vastly different, but trying to apply the same principles that I would to lead people to convince people that it was a good idea. So maybe more sales than leadership.

Thus, for David Owen and Kerry, persuasive strategies, just like in sales, were necessary. Also, Kerry's strategy of leveraging David Owen's positionality indicated an awareness to possible gender dynamics and a deference to power given her role. In leveraging David Owen, Kerry not only challenges any socially constructed attitudes about gender, her goals are met while not rocking the boat. David Owen was effective in working through those power structures, and as an advocate for queer students on campus. He continued pursuing the agenda regardless of any rejection. His persistence was effective, but it raises questions about the impact on his resilience and how that might look different for a queer person compared to a non-queer person. As a cisgender straight person, David Owen's identities are not minoritized; whereas, a queer person may experience rejection, due in part to their queer identity, when confronted with resistance to supporting queer students on campus.

Student narratives. Kerry's advocacy for the recent implementation of the name and pronoun policy was in response to an experience she had with a student. Here, she discussed how the student's experience challenged her to begin advocating for others like him.

And I had a trans man come and see me, and unfortunately it was his last semester, which was a horrible experience for him his last semester. But he said,

my legal name is this, and it has a very feminine sound to it, and at that point we didn't have any mechanism on campus for a student to declare their preferred (sic.) name and pronoun. So unfortunately what happened, an instructor on the first day of class stood up and as he's calling roll, said this name, not once, not twice, but three to four times, and finally the student had to raise their hand. And was outed. And so I saw the hurt in him, and thought there's got to be a different way. And we worked, from that moment, I got that report in the summer, and found a solution.

Kerry and her team acted quickly to rectify this situation for future students, despite their inability to improve this student's situation. This demonstrated the important role student voices played in Kerry's leadership process, as she relied on student narratives and lived experiences to advance change on campus. By establishing herself as someone who will listen and act on student concerns, Kerry established trust with students and was able to advocate for change to improve the LGBTQ climate.

The name and pronoun policy created opportunities for staff members to educate faculty and staff about its importance. In addition to this policy, Kerry and the Diversity Workgroup had been working toward implementing a more thorough diversity requirement for students, faculty, and staff. Yet, the challenge of time and campus buy-in made their effort difficult. Reflecting on student experiences that demonstrate this struggle, Kerry noted:

One of the biggest things we're up against now is understanding on misgendering and how it really impacts someone. I'm just as guilty at times to say he or she instead of they, and it's difficult. But it's helped to learn students' specific

experiences, and to also share again information about misgendering and how impactful that is on somebody, through articles or videos, or something like that, to send to faculty and staff and students, so they understand it a little bit more.

Sharing personal examples with faculty or staff have been very impactful.

It was important to Kerry to continually inform and educate herself and her colleagues on the experiences of students and the impact of misgendering. In so doing, she intentionally centered LGBTQ students in her leadership process.

Working through resistance. As discussed, when participants pursued their initiatives, push-back was relatively common. Brenda commented, “The biggest resistance was that the perception that we didn’t need these things. It was the convincing them that these things were needed.” Brenda spoke of the difficulty of getting campus colleagues to understand the necessity of queer inclusive policies, particularly the pronoun and restroom initiatives. Part of queering leadership was working through these hurdles and advocating for the queer and transgender students who were most hurt by a lack of policy. Overcoming resistance required outreach to partners across campus. Kerry spoke about the importance of knowing the audience with whom she was working, using her relationships with units on campus as entree for advocating for the change. Kerry pointed out,

But if you come at it in the right manner and get to know your audience, then you can know how to speak with them and know how to deliver the news and how to work with them in a collaborative manner, to get to your end goal... Trying to find what your audience is, trying to figure out how do you get them to buy-in. How do you help them to understand? Is that through telling stories about true life

instances of misgendering and how that feels or how would you feel if you couldn't use the restroom in the building that you are working in? Trying to get them to place themselves into that arena. Or sometimes asking students if they feel comfortable, putting them in an advocating role, "would you mind helping us with this cause, because your voice is so important?"

Student voices, whether used in storytelling or by engaging students in the process, was an important component of Kerry and David Owen's strategy for working through resistance. Students' personal stories helped convey an urgency to better support the students most affected, while also personalizing students' experiences to develop empathy among campus colleagues. The most notable approach participants used to work through resistance was through personal appeals and student voice. This strategy shifted perceptions of those who did not initially support participants' goals to advocate for LGBTQ centered practices. A final important component to queer leadership is advancing queer inclusive policy and practice.

Queer Policy and Practice

Movement toward inclusive policy and practice is a cornerstone to queer leadership in higher education. As discussed earlier in this chapter, MSA has made considerable efforts toward improving the campus climate for its LGBTQ students. The most notable improvements were increasing the number of gender inclusive restroom spaces, the campus name and pronoun policy, and the development of the Diversity Workgroup. Additionally, as previously mentioned, David Owen discussed how the student affairs team has been actively working toward increasing their Campus Pride Index ranking by assessing their Index progress in other campus areas. The work of these

campus leaders to implement these changes and reinforce their support of LGBTQ students is promising for the LGBTQ campus climate at MSA. Coupled with advocacy and efforts to center LGBTQ issues in their leadership approaches, staff at MSA have engaged in purposeful efforts toward LGBTQ equity, that could result in lasting changes to campus policy and practice.

Conclusion

Overall, MSA has made significant progress in its efforts to expand support for LGBTQ students on campus. Without the work of dedicated staff members who were passionate about supporting their students, leveraging their positions, and organizing to address student concerns, it seems unlikely that any of those efforts would have come to fruition. These grassroots leaders engaged in primary tenets of queer leadership, but positioned their work differently than the leaders at MRU. Instead, MSA leaders embraced a queer *advocacy* leadership approach, compared to a queer *activist* leadership approach embraced by participants at MRU. I will explore this further in Chapter 6. I will also answer the research question and discuss the implications for policy and practice in higher education student affairs, as well as recommend future research in light of my findings.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Colleges and universities have witnessed considerable expansion of LGBTQ centered programs, policies, and practices over the last decade (Campus Pride, 2016; Marine, 2011), demonstrating an important shift in support for LGBTQ equity in higher education student affairs. This project sought to understand how staff at two different campuses engaged in change efforts toward improving their campus climate for LGBTQ individuals. More specifically, this project explored a model for queer leadership in higher education, applying a grassroots leadership in higher education (Kezar & Lester, 2011) framework to understand the leadership strategies employed by staff members at MRU and MSA. In this chapter, I revisit this study's research question and explore the contrasting experiences of grassroots leaders at each campus. I then provide theoretical and practical implications from this study.

Research Question

The research question I sought to explore in this study was: How do professional staff campus leaders on two different university campuses engage in grassroots and queer leadership in order to change policies and practices to improve the climate for LGBTQ individuals? To address this question, it is important to break this question down to reflect each campus strategy.

MRU

Some staff members at MRU had been advocating for LGBTQ equity and inclusion for nearly 2 decades. Participant accounts reflect a historically hostile campus climate for LGBTQ people that continues to permeate in recent years. The LGBTQ campus climate is consistent with findings on other campuses that report unwelcoming

environments for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff (Rankin et al., 2010). Only in recent years has a shift occurred, evidenced by staff who found success in advocating for new policies and programs. Up until recently, MRU lacked non-discrimination policies that support sexual and gender diverse people, partner health benefits, and campus resources dedicated to LGBTQ support. These improvements were the result of small number of campus leaders engaged in advocacy for LGBTQ equity, who leveraged grassroots strategies to organize and advocate for colleagues and students (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Although participants at MRU carefully navigated the bureaucratic structures of the institution, their approach to activist work was only tempered when threats of institutional authority loomed (Gehring, 2001; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). They found success in establishing a tight-knit network of queer and allied individuals. The work of these participants is consistent with other research about improving campus climates for LGBTQ equity. For example, efforts to expand partner benefits and anti-discrimination policies has been at the forefront of LGBTQ equity work for the last couple decades (Marine, 2011; Sanlo et al., 2002). Recent changes at MRU are promising, but MRU participants recognize a need for other improvements and many of the leaders continue to advocate for best practices, most notably to establish gender inclusive housing and name and pronoun policies (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Krum et al., 2013; Pryor et al., 2016). Much of the success at MRU was due to a small few who were willing to challenge the pervasive heterogendered climate, and at the time of the study, it appeared these grassroots leaders will champion future efforts.

The staff's collective approach to address issues of campus climate, including work toward policy initiatives to support the lives of LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff

on campus, demonstrates the primary ways they engaged in grassroots leadership. These grassroots leadership strategies will be examined further in the next section. The strategies employed reflect important considerations for engaging in queer leadership, identifying potentially transferable strategies from staff experiences at MRU.

As queer leadership presupposes queer identity, the queer identities of the primary leaders at MRU reflect an important vulnerability, contributing to their identity as an activist and their willingness to support and defend their queer community, most notably MRU's LGBTQ students. Staff members' work has contributed to an important cultural shift at MRU, but because this study is not longitudinal, it is difficult to assess the long-term impact and larger community response these changes will have on campus. How these campus leaders' experiences and work contributed to queer leadership will be explored further.

MSA

Findings illustrate the strength of support MSA student affairs staff provided, particularly their commitment to LGBTQ allyship, their interest in supporting LGBTQ centered initiatives, and educational outreach. Participants described the campus climate at MSA as relatively warm; however, they acknowledged that changes were still needed. Much of their equity work focused on enhancing climate for transgender and non-binary students (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin et al. 2010). Consistent with Brown et al. (2004), staff carried the biggest burden in working to address these issues on campus. They directed their efforts on student issues, specifically focusing on the implementation of a name and pronoun policy and the expansion of gender inclusive restrooms. Their work contributed to positive improvements on campus for LGBTQ students, and they

continue to press forward with mindful work toward LGBTQ equity through the Diversity Workgroup.

The leadership approach MSA staff utilized was often tempered; they did not advocate an activist approach. They acted quickly, leveraged support from colleagues in student affairs, and took measures to ensure buy-in from other campus partners. Their efforts reflected some of the approaches employed by the tempered radicals framework (Meyerson, 2003), notably using negotiation strategies and small wins to gain larger results. For example, Kerry and David Owen's strategy to expand gender inclusive restrooms on campus, effectively negotiated one bathroom at a time, reflected how they leveraged small wins to make larger gains (Meyerson, 2003).

Meyerson also argued that tempered radicals may attempt to step back and allow personal experiences to subside to effectively negotiate change initiatives. For the primary leaders at MSA, most did not claim activist identities and were non-queer. They engaged in LGBTQ advocacy by supporting students and doing what is right, not fighting for their personal queer identities, as was the case for many of the leaders at MRU. Leveraging their privileged identities served as an important strategy for engaging in the work. Staff at MSA enacted components of the tempered radicals framework to advocate for, and successfully change, institutional practice to support greater LGBTQ equity on campus.

Unlike participants at MRU, staff at MSA were largely not activist-oriented. As Kerry indicated, activism on campus was discouraged, instead suggesting change should occur by using institutional structures. This is consistent with Preston and Hoffman's (2015) critique of college campuses that discourage the development of activist

leadership identities around student organizing. Despite campus efforts toward LGBTQ equity and the genuine interest in supporting LGBTQ students and colleagues, these findings illustrate a tendency to perpetuate the traditionally heterogendered institution (THI) model. MSA supports students through campus policies and programs; however, supporting student interests in organizing or resisting institutional policies is necessary to create broader ways of doing queer work on campus (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). This lack of queer-oriented thinking draws a distinction between the work of staff at MRU and MSA.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that MRU is not a THI, staff at MRU expressed that queer organizing and activism was important. They held a disposition that activism can be an effective means for achieving success. These differing perspectives of and approaches to activism reflect two unique ways to engage grassroots and queer leadership. Both campuses engaged components of grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), leveraging important tactics and strategies to advocate for LGBTQ equity on their respective campuses. Yet, these differences demonstrate how queer leadership can function on campuses through a tempered advocacy or queer activism approach, both of which will be explored more later. Next, I discuss the cross-case analysis of how staff members approach grassroots leadership, comparing the experiences at MRU and MSA to demonstrate the varied approaches to grassroots leadership in higher education.

Examining Grassroots Leadership

As previously discussed, grassroots leadership served as a valuable tool for analyzing the experiences of campus leaders at MRU and MSA. Their efforts were the results of a collective few and leveraged bottom-up leadership. A number of tactics and

strategies used by participants are reflective of grassroots leadership approaches.

Grassroots leadership may employ intellectual opportunities to raise consciousness about the need for their causes, or leverage data to tell a story important to their initiative (Kezar & Lester, 2011). In line with grassroots leadership, leaders at both campuses, either formally or informally, created intellectual opportunities to raise consciousness about the need for LGBTQ policy on campus. Sometimes this happened in the casual conversations with other campus partners, educating them on LGBTQ issues, or through more formalized presentations that emphasized the need for a name and pronoun policy.

Using data to tell stories of LGBTQ students experiences and success was another strategy participants leveraged on both campuses (Kezar & Lester, 2011). As educational institutions, research proved to be a valued tool for demonstrating a need and advocating for LGBTQ populations. At MRU, Sheila presented research about LGBTQ students as a tool to garner support for her agenda from the president who valued the contribution of research and data on student enrollment and retention. At MSA, David Owen relied on informal student data to communicate student needs to campus constituents who often asked about student needs and interests. These examples illustrate how compelling and instrumental data can be in advocating for this minoritized population. Further, given the positive outcomes of this strategy on both campuses, this reinforces the need for institutions to gather data on LGBTQ students to accurately assess institutional retention and student support initiatives (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015). If these campuses are truly committed to their LGBTQ students' success, they must intentionally include LGBTQ people in their institutional data systems. Otherwise, leaders, grassroots or otherwise,

have little leverage to make a case for changes in an academic environment that privileges research and data-driven decision making.

Grassroots leaders demonstrated the importance for staff to foster stronger faculty relationships to advance their agenda (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Although some faculty were often barriers to their progress, participants on both campuses identified faculty who became important allies and champions of their cause. For example, Kerry and David Owen's relationship with faculty colleagues on the diversity workgroup highlight the role faculty members might play in the future efforts to enhance the climate for minoritized communities on MSA's campus. Similarly, MRU saw a small number of faculty engaged in queer initiatives on campus. As a result, they were able to work with the faculty senate to pass a resolution for domestic partner benefits. Engaging faculty members was critical due to their privileged status in the organization; when participants received their buy-in, they could make stronger gains to shift the campus practices toward greater LGBTQ equity. For example, with faculty buy-in, grassroots leaders were able to leverage change within their respective areas on campus or even through the faculty senate.

Both MRU and MSA experienced their own forms of resistance, particularly from other faculty and staff, and administrative influence was contextually situated, both in time and space. For example, MRU witnessed considerable movement from upper administration in its support of the LGBTQ community. This created room for new policies and practice, and for the first-time campus started to see support from the university president when he would attend LGBTQ-centered programs. Prior to the last few years, MRU LGBTQ staff could not recall, or even fathom, such visible support. However, despite gains, reports of harassment on campus and in the conservative town of

RC remain and influence the climate for the LGBTQ community. Although MRU administration has become more supportive, the campus location and rural student population contribute to a pervasive socially conservative environment. This environment slowed the progress of grassroots leadership, but due to the work and persistence of queer leaders on campus, small wins contributed to larger cultural shifts.

At MSA, upper administration was noticeably absent in their change processes. In fact, participants identified instances when they were supportive of staff, particularly when student interests were being met. Unless prompted, upper administration was disengaged. This lack of engagement provided considerable leverage for campus staff, particularly Kerry and David Owen, as they pursued their initiatives. As such, instead of negotiating with upper administration, participants relied more heavily on garnering faculty support. Power struggles manifested primarily from resistance of some faculty members, most likely due to the small campus environment that created a stronger collegial, rather than bureaucratic, structure. Once Kerry and David Owen achieved buy-in from academic units, they were able to quickly adjust practices.

Grassroots leadership examines various forms of power obstruction in the change process, and focuses particularly on the ways in which grassroots leaders are resilient or work through obstacles that lead to success. The most visible forms of power grabbing at MRU occurred through silencing, stalling tactics, and microaggressions (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Silencing surfaced through claims from other faculty or staff that their ideas were not valuable, or there were not enough students to justify the need for shifting practice. For example, Jennifer felt silenced due to dismissive responses to her inquiries from staff in the health center about changing their intake practices to be more inclusive of LGBTQ

students. Similarly, participants experienced stalling tactics from faculty senate members and upper administrators in the process to secure partner benefits. Attitudes from administrators and other faculty and staff that MRU and Rural City were not quite ready for such open support pervaded much of the MRU culture. Finally, queer staff reported many instances of microaggressive behaviors, such as hostilities, tokenization, and snubs from colleagues, which reflect other ways in which power obstructions were realized.

At MSA, participants also experienced instances of power grabbing and obstructions. They reported being silenced by others who questioned the validity of their initiatives, particularly as they faced questions about the need for a name and pronoun policy on campus. Participants knew they would face resistance in their efforts when they heard stories of faculty or staff who invalidated students' experiences, refusing to call them by their proper pronoun or dismissing some of their chosen names. Faculty used stalling tactics most effectively when participants were advocating for gender inclusive restrooms; some faculty took a wait and see approach, intently observing the outcomes of more willing colleagues who embraced the gender inclusive restroom initiative. Finally, although most staff participants were not queer, the two queer participants, Bobby and Casey, reported microaggressive comments from colleagues. Their experiences were not dissimilar from queer leaders at MRU, which reflects the added vulnerability of queer leaders in traditionally heterogendered environments.

Grassroots leadership was a useful heuristic to deconstruct staff advocacy for LGBTQ equity. The framework not only provided guidance for understanding bottom-up organizing, but it also captured the tactics and strategies used to navigate institutional resistance and power dynamics at both campuses. Despite its applicability to these two

cases, I uncovered nuances that were not fully explained through the framework. Findings revealed two different approaches for queer leadership in higher education. Next, I explore how each campus engaged queer leadership efforts.

Models for Queer Leadership

To establish a queer leadership model, the grassroots leadership framework was essential, particularly due to its bottom-up approach and its accounting for higher education structural dynamics. Despite its applicability to these cases, some important distinctions arose from the data, especially around participant activist identities. Kezar and Lester (2011) noted that outsider confrontational strategies and institutionalized practices typically differentiate activism and leadership. However, they claim activism and grassroots leadership may be interchangeable, yet note that many grassroots leaders do not adopt an activist approach. They found many faculty and staff took tempered approaches to their grassroots leadership and felt the term *activist* best fit individuals willing to risk their job for their change initiative. Thus, activism was generally situated outside of institutional practices, not nested in the bottom-up institutional organizing of grassroots leadership.

Kezar and Lester (2011) also noted that grassroots leaders were less likely to be confrontational on campus due to having longer tenure at their institution. Confrontational action may create possible personal and political conflicts over the course of a grassroots leader's career. Yet participants at MRU not only claimed an activist identity, but maintained long standing roles at the institution while experiencing success in campus LGBTQ equity initiatives. Further, their activist identities played an important role in their advocacy on campus, but did not preclude them from also

engaging tempered approaches in their work. Participants at MRU balanced their roles as activists and as agents of the institution, which informed their roles as queer leaders on campus.

The proposed framework for this study conceptualized queer leadership as an approach embodied through LGBTQ-centered activism, leadership, and change. This model is informed by previous literature that illustrated the success of queer activists in higher education and the resultant growth of LGBTQ support in higher education student affairs (Dilley, 2002; Lugg & Tooms, 2010; Marine, 2011; Renn, 2007; 2010; Sanlo, 2000). In my analysis, queer leadership manifested differently in light of the experiences and reception of campus leaders at MRU and MSA.

MRU and MSA serve as unique cases, allowing for a rich contrast between a rural university and a private art school. Despite their differences, the cross-case analysis also revealed some shared experiences that provide a valuable frame for others who are considering various ways to engage queer leadership in higher education. Figure 3 illustrates these different approaches. Compared to the proposed model in Chapter 2 that assumed a queer advocate identity, the Queer Activist and LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership models illustrate the experiences, strategies, and tactics of individuals embracing either an activist lens and queer identity or non-queer individuals engaged in LGBTQ advocacy. It is likely that leadership experiences are context, campus, or even person specific; yet, findings from each case study identify at least two ways that the grassroots leaders in this investigation engaged queer leadership that other leaders may find transferrable: (a) Queer Activist Leadership and (b) LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership (see Figure 3).

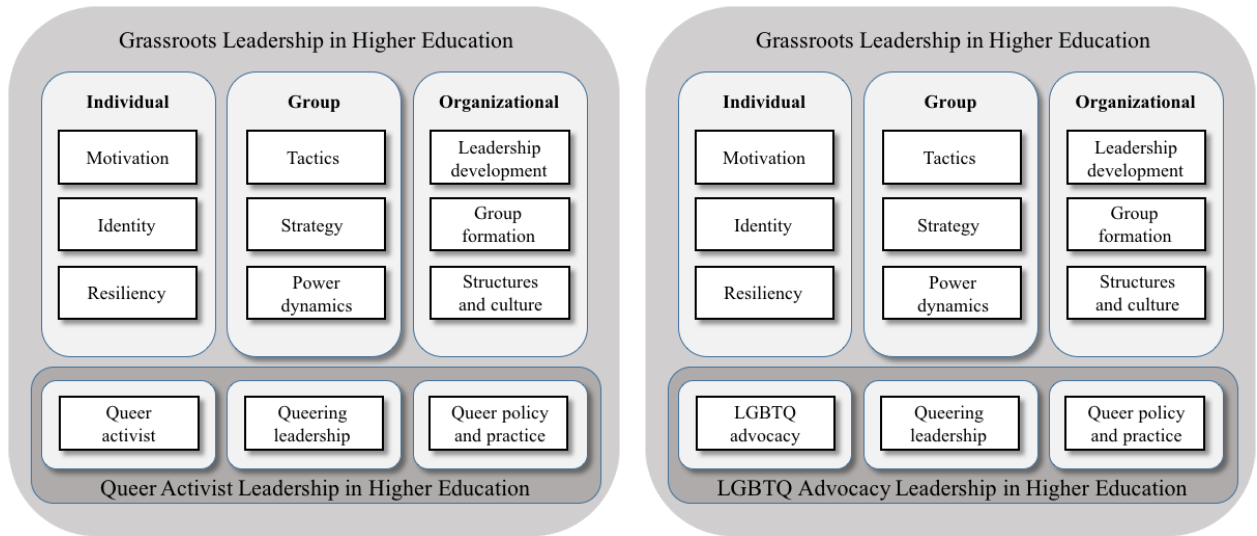


Figure 3. Conceptual models for queer leadership in higher education.

Queer Activist Leadership

A primary distinction between Queer Activist Leadership and LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership is the nuanced experiences related to the queer and non-queer identity of the participants. Although a non-queer person can certainly engage, advocate, and create change, their privileged non-queer identities are not subject to the kind of scrutiny experienced by queer participants. At both campuses, queer participants shared experiences of discrimination, dismissal, and tokenization, that non-queer participants did not. For example, Barbara and Sheila both faced discrimination that surfaced through name calling and harassment at MRU, Bobby encountered numerous microaggressions from the MSA vice-president. Although once a more prevalent (or at least explicit) aspect of campus climate, these acts of disrespect and threat, especially for participants at MRU, were still routine. Barbara recalled numerous times that she was called “dyke” on campus, and was harassed by peers in her office. Working through these forms of harassment became an important form of self-care for many of the participants, and are an added layer not experienced by their non-queer peers.

Nearly all the queer participants at MRU felt they were always and only representing the LGBTQ voice; they also received dismissive and invalidating comments about their work in general—whether or not it focused on equity and inclusion. As such, Sheila shielded her queer politics to maintain her credibility with colleagues. For non-queer leaders, Kerry and David Owen never spoke of interactions like these at MSA. They were aware of their privileged identities, and despite several initiatives focusing on improving campus for queer and transgender students, their identities did not lead others to question their professional position or assume they had a queer agenda.

All queer participants also reported tokenization. This is not uncommon for highly visible minoritized group members on a college campus (Garces, 2012; Hart & Lester, 2011; Pryor et al., 2016; Tillapaugh, 2015), and this left some of the participants feeling othered and as if their LGBTQ identity was all they had to contribute. Sheila was asked to serve on nearly every diversity committee, which created feelings of being the token lesbian voice on the group. Jennifer was also the de facto staff member to educate the office on the needs of LGBTQ students. Although her specialty area focused on counseling LGBTQ youth, relying on her minoritized voice to inform others on best practices is problematic. Similarly, Bobby felt unequipped to support the LGBTQ students at MSA; yet, as the only out gay person on campus, others believed he was the best person to organize a safe zone training for campus and become the default staff member to advise the LGBTQ student group.

Collectively, these forms of isolation demonstrate unique challenges for queer participants compared to their non-queer peers, pointing to an important difference between the queer activist and LGBTQ advocacy leadership strategies. These experiences

reflect more than just the participants naming their leadership strategy or philosophy, but how they navigate leadership work within or outside of institutional expectations, and how they are perceived as individuals in a THI. In addition to the resistance all grassroots leaders experienced about their equity agendas, queer activist leaders faced personal discrimination, dismissal, and tokenization. Thus, queer activist leadership is more nuanced and complicated than an LGBTQ Advocacy approach, which I discuss below, particularly when identity is central to a grassroots agenda.

However, it is important to note that identifying as LGBTQ does not equate to maintaining a disposition toward queer activism. Although Bobby reported experiencing tokenism, demonstrating how his experiences differ from his non-queer peers, he did not embrace a queer activist agenda. His approach to his work was through his commitment as a student affairs professional who also held an interest in supporting queer students, but not through a lens of queer activism. His experience illustrates how possessing a queer identity does not necessitate action or conviction. Bobby does not position himself as a queer activist; however, his experiences reinforce that being LGBTQ is a necessary, but not sufficient, aspect of queer activism. These experiences of marginalization, tokenization, and heterosexism are too unique to a queer person's experience, that even the most engaged non-queer person could not assume a queer activist role.

LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership

Like their queer activist colleagues, participants who did not identify as LGBTQ had a strong commitment to support LGBTQ colleagues and students. Their advocacy was often personal and value-driven. All non-queer participants claimed a commitment to LGBTQ advocacy or allyship in their work, many taking on public and active roles on

campus to support LGBTQ-centered initiatives. This was most evident at MSA, where Kerry, David Owen, Brenda, and Elaine supported LGBTQ students, advocating for individual students and campus policy change. LGBTQ advocates had a personal connection to LGBTQ individuals, whether it was family or students, but they all identified as cisgender and straight. Although their work was meaningful and personal, consequences of their privileged gender and sexual social identities related to LGBTQ advocacy were minimal; they were not perceived as a threat nor were they recipients of threats from colleagues or peers because of their work and/or identities.

In addition to their individual connections to LGBTQ advocacy, their personal values and commitment to advancing best practices in higher education student affairs drove these leaders to advocate for LGBTQ equity. Tom, Sue, Jeremy, and Debbie discussed their personal values and how they surface in their work at MRU. Sue's allyship manifested in challenging microaggressions she heard from students, whereas Debbie became engaged in local town events to extend her support to the LGBTQ community. Their values are communicated in their behaviors and support of LGBTQ students or organizations. Kerry and David Owen both articulated an important adherence to best practices in HESA. As practitioners in the field of student affairs, these values are ingrained in the field (CAS, 2009; Campus Pride, 2016; Sanlo et al., 2002), and were guiding principles for several of the participants at both campuses. Participant values informed their motivation for doing the work. However, as previously noted, compared to queer activists, the personal risk in their advocacy was minimal. Such differences between advocacy and activism argue for two unique approaches toward LGBTQ equity.

The models for Queer Activist and LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership provide important distinctions for how queer activists and LGBTQ advocates may approach their work. The differences extend the individual phenomena of the grassroots leadership framework (Kezar & Lester, 2011), and are important for understanding how campus leaders may be informed by and engaged in queer-centered work to advance change on their college campuses. Although identity contributed to different experiences for queer and non-queer participants, leaders at both campuses often placed LGBTQ concerns at the center of their work, ultimately improving policy and practice support for the LGBTQ community on each campus. These two models are not intended to place limitations on how individuals may engage in queer-centered advocacy on campus. They simply suggest there are at least two ways of doing queer leadership. Queer leadership should not be confined to a single monolithic definition; such an approach would limit the myriad ways of being queer and would fall into perpetuating heterogendered norms (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). Also, limiting a queer leadership definition assumes leadership is not contextual. Instead, the proposed framework serves as an extension of grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011), informed by my findings and extant literature.

Implications for Research

Findings from these two cases raise important implications for higher education student affairs scholarship. As leadership scholarship often overlooks staff contributions (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004), my findings illuminate the role of campus staff members in advocating for LGBTQ equity. Staff provide invaluable support toward student success; yet, we know very little about their involvement in campus

advocacy efforts (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). My findings address this gap. Staff at MRU and MSA participated in bottom-up grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Meyerson, 2008) that led to important changes on their respective campuses. The important role of staff, as described in this study, argues for institutions to foster environments that support staff involvement to address institutional inequities. These findings also reveal the need for future scholarship to continue to explore student affairs and campus staff experiences, particularly their investment in challenging oppressive environments to support minoritized communities.

An additional implication for research is that we need to understand more about the individual student affairs staff members who support social equity on campus. In this study, staff primarily advocated for the needs of students, but at MRU, their work also meant they were advocating for themselves and their queer colleagues. Staff efforts reflected previous scholarship that demonstrated the role of student affairs staff as mediators, those who seek to constructively respond to student needs or demands (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004). Yet, the experiences of queer staff at MRU also demonstrated a need for continued exploration of LGBTQ student affairs staff support and experiences. Participants, especially queer identified participants, at MRU demonstrated great resilience through a hostile and oppressive climate. How do these staff members take care of themselves when this work is expressly personal? Understanding their stories is invaluable for student affairs educators to prepare or continue to challenge institutions that inadequately support queer faculty, staff, and students.

The proposed models for queer leadership in higher education require further exploration, but they provide an important foundation for considering how queer

leadership may operate within the context of a higher education institution. For example, queer leadership may surface differently at a large research university, a community college, an institution in the northeast, or one in the south; thus, future scholarship should explore how staff members at varied institution types and locations advocate and advance LGBTQ equity in higher education. Future research also must explore the experiences of queer leadership to continue to demonstrate and support the progress of queer equity on college campuses. These models provide a framework for considering how campus LGBTQ advocates advance important work to improve LGBTQ campus climate. Future research must test and expand on the ways in which other LGBTQ advocates and activists pursue change in their particular contexts, informing new ways for doing queer work in higher education student affairs.

By proposing two models, I allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how staff members engage in queer work differently. However, the queer activist model must be considered with some caution, as it relies on queer individuals who must confront their experiences of otherness throughout their efforts. Institutions must not require queer faculty, staff, and students to be their own advocates. Non-queer colleagues must learn how the THI minimizes queer experiences, and work collaboratively with willing queer leaders to address systemic issues on their campuses. Otherwise, a queer activist model will be necessary, always leaving queer folk to do the work, which reproduces tokenization, discrimination, and otherness. Although it is important for queer folks to be a part of change initiatives, tokenization that can occur by only relying on the queer activist model to transform the academy is problematic and will likely lead to further marginalization.

Implications for Practice

In addition to implications for research, findings from this study point to important implications for practitioners seeking to navigate change on their campus. The application of queer leadership in higher education provides an important framework for higher education scholarship and leadership theory. Findings illuminate the processes campus staff employed, centering queer students and experiences in their leadership and practice. Higher education scholarship has called upon researchers and practitioners to center queer experiences in HESA practice (Abes, 2008; Dilley, 1999; Preston & Hoffman, 2015); advocate for LGBTQ equity through policy and practice (Marine, 2011; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Sanlo, 2000); and disrupt heterogendered leadership practices (Lugg & Tooms, 2010; Renn, 2007; Preston & Hoffman, 2015). Participants at MRU and MSA demonstrated a strong commitment to queer advocacy and activism that led to meaningful change on their respective campus. Overall, findings from this project advanced two models for engaging in queer leadership for change in higher education policy and practice, furthering our knowledge about grassroots leadership, advocacy, and activism at two distinct institutions. I hope that leaders on other campuses who want to advance LGBTQ equity may find these models transferrable to their own settings.

Particularly important for both campuses, and at the root of grassroots leadership and queer community organizing, is the establishment of community and support (Dilley, 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2002). In addition to reinforcing the importance of community building, findings illuminate the value of college and university staff members to leverage their networks and personal power to advocate for minoritized communities. Participants at MRU relied on their allies within faculty senate

and other leadership roles to push forward agendas important to growing LGBTQ equity. These allies were actively engaged, drawing a contrast to the passive forms of allyship exhibited by Sue and Debbie that were outlined in Chapter Four. Similarly, staff at MSA leveraged their roles and experiences to advance substantial change. Finding allyship among their peers required participants to be engaged and purposeful in interrupting heterogenderist attitudes and practices on campus. Thus, fostering allyship and establishing strong community, is an important consideration for future queer leaders.

Consistent with the group phenomenon in grassroots leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2010), community among participants contributed to much of their persistence and ultimate success. Participants at MRU often referred to themselves as the handful of likeminded queer individuals who fostered strong support for one another. Not only did these relationships provide interpersonal support, they expanded the reach of queer advocacy on campus. Similarly, at MSA, Kerry and David Owen established a strong working relationship that helped them form a community of allies, and ultimately creating the Diversity Workgroup. These relationships provide an important narrative for staff members at other campuses to consider and they demonstrate the influence a few individuals can have on transforming their communities.

Another important implication from findings was the role of student engagement. To establish an environment of support for students, participants reflected on the importance of using student voice to advance their cause. Student voice was helpful at MRU when staff engaged with upper-level administrators, as well at MSA in their efforts to solicit faculty buy-in. Although student voices were a useful tool, there is an important line to draw to ensure students are empowered and not tokenized, that their involvement

is collaborative and not objectified. At these campuses, it may seem as if the student voices were relied on to push issues forward, rather than the practitioners relying on already recommended best practices as proposed by the Campus Pride Index or recent scholarship (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Garvey & Rankin, 2015a; Nicolazzo, 2016; Pryor, 2015). The staff leaders' intentions were rooted in compassion; however, their strategy to call upon students to be their own advocates risked further marginalizing students. Thus, practitioners should be mindful to not just use student voice, but to empower and engage students in change and leadership processes.

Transforming the THI

Transforming the THI requires institutional buy-in and a cultural shift that disrupts normative programs and practices. One way to begin this process is to increase students' awareness of the THI and to educate them about applying queer theoretical concepts to their personal experience (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). These applications allow awareness of how power structures and heterogendered practices in higher education limit queer students' sense of self (Abes, 2008; Preston & Hoffman, 2015). To more effectively challenge the THI, practitioners must apply these queer concepts to their daily practices, employing critical examinations of what they are doing and why they are doing them, and what is the greater impact when doing so. This critical praxis was only partially realized at MRU and MSA, as the participants challenged institutional policy and daily practice, but the limitations of this study did not allow for enough time to lapse to gauge its systemic application. Because initiatives on both campus were relatively recent to the time data were collected, it is not possible to assess what the lasting

influences these changes will have on their respective campuses, as a cultural shift ultimately takes time and substantial buy-in.

Further, to fully transform institutions, practitioners must empower queer students by creating co-curricular queer spaces that enhance their engagement with critical thinking about queer identities and education (Abes, 2008; Preston & Hoffman, 2015; Talburt, 2010). At MRU, Barbara echoed concerns about the institution's response to activism. Similarly, Kerry asserted a leadership philosophy that suggested activism would be an unproductive approach to change at MSA. These experiences and assertions raise questions for each campus. If staff activism and empowerment was not fully embraced, how likely is it that queer student activism and empowerment will be? Given past incidents of administrative pushback and unwelcoming attitudes toward activism, fostering and encouraging queer activism among students may not be welcome practice on these campuses. Although the purpose of this project was not to explore the experiences of queer students, support of queer students is central to the work of these practitioners, thus warrants reflection. To foster environments of support for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff, programs should promote empowerment and activism for faculty, staff, and students, embracing queer activist, and advocacy frameworks to support student development. It is through these strategies that leaders can better overcome the obstacles presented by a THI.

Engaging as allies. MRU and MSA provide interesting considerations for the role of allyship toward challenging the THI. It is important for staff advocating for LGBTQ equity to consider the ways individuals who are perceived to be non-queer are allowed to navigate heterogendered contexts more freely than their queer peers. Although each

campus context is different, Kerry and David Owen's progress was fairly smooth in their efforts to establish the name and pronoun policy and inclusive restrooms on campus. In contrast, queer leaders at MRU experienced significant pushback in their efforts to expand LGBTQ equity, and they were ultimately reliant on non-queer partners on campus. The implication here is not only might queer leaders' progress be slowed, but their experience also reflects a hostile campus climate where meaningful change would not be possible without non-queer support. This demonstrates a troubling reality of whose work and identities is privileged and most listened to. It also demonstrates the importance of allies engaging in LGBTQ equity work and captures how privileged people possess power to advance change. The work of LGBTQ advocates on both campuses proved invaluable and their experiences serve as a call to non-LGBTQ colleagues to leverage their roles and authority to advocate for LGBTQ equity through policy and practice, but not at the cost of their queer colleagues who are invested in equity work as well.

Moving beyond best practices. As a theoretical lens, the queer leadership models provide guidance for practitioners who seek to engage queer work in higher education. Recent scholarship has called upon scholars to critically assess how we support minoritized communities and advance equity (Abes, 2008; Kincheloe, 2005; Pasque et al., 2012). Traditional approaches for recommended best practices in HESA often fall short in shifting the very structures that limit the potentials of LGBTQ students (Preston & Hoffman, 2015), perpetuating a cycle of critique without change. Too often, best practices are only considered within the limited frames of binary practices where institutions may make positive strides toward LGBTQ inclusion, but ultimately create a dichotomy of otherness (Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2016). These binary practices in

higher education are structured by defining gender along the rigid norms of masculine/feminine identities, which establishes a system in which any individual not falling within this definition of gender is discriminated against (Bilodeau, 2009). Nicolazzo (2016) noted that this can surface in the establishment of transgender inclusive housing, where campuses have shifted to designated spaces for transgender and non-binary students, creating othering spaces for them. Similarly, another example is within campus locker room spaces that provide transgender or non-binary students with a third separate, but private, space for changing. Although the intention is positive, such responses continue to perpetuate limited choice, leaving the student to choose either the “trans option” or the “cis option,” or in many cases only the “trans option.” Instead, institutions could shift facilities so that the student can choose any of the three options, where the originally binary restrooms are spaces that include all bodies. Yet, traditional approaches to best practices, including shifts toward third restroom options, for which participants advocated in this study, ultimately reinforce heterogenderist practices (Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2016; Preston & Hoffman, 2015), not leading to any significant shift in cultural or institutional embrace of gender or sexual minoritized students.

To advance evidence-based practices, campuses must resist heterogendered norms that limit the ways in which queer identities, and bodies, are affirmed and upheld (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). Preston and Hoffman (2015) argued for institutional practices that shift the discourse of LGBTQ communities as needing to be saved—where they are at the mercy of the institution for protection—to a discourse of unlimited potential for activism and social transformation. In practice, this may surface in not only implementing a name

and pronoun policy for students, but also implementing intentional training programs for faculty and staff to shift the institutional awareness for why such programs are needed. Staff at MSA were successful in their implementation of this policy, but struggled to obtain support for a mandatory campus wide training of faculty and staff—although their educational outreach was notable. Policy alone is not sufficient for addressing the traditionally heterogendered institution, as a systemic shift requires buy-in from all levels of the institution, a gap toward which MSA began to address with the diversity workgroup and other diversity presentations.

At MRU, the LGBTQ counseling support group was the most successful and well-attended of all groups that meet at the counseling center. Although groups like this provide an invaluable form of support, there is risk of limiting queer empowerment if the only option of organized support for students focuses on emotional support. Expanding typical support practices for LGBTQ students is another way institutions can challenge previous practices and possibly escape the *institution as savior* mentality. In addition to a support group, can there be institutional support for a queer empowerment group, designed for empowering queer activists and leaders? Such ideas require practitioners to recognize that best practices must include not just the simple short term solution, but must also question how can the institutional climate and culture shift in a way that does not reinforce perpetual otherness. Although both campuses have made strides in their policies and practice, and participants at both campuses have made advancements toward LGBTQ equity, they were susceptible to limitations reinforced by the THI. These models for queer leadership can serve as a guide for campus leaders to move beyond evidence-based best practices, employing advocacy that creates meaningful change, yet functions

through a lens of practical criticality that disrupts the traditionally heterogendered institution.

Limitations

The two approaches I presented make it impossible to define a singular approach to queer leadership, which I originally conceptualized in chapter two. Instead, the queer leadership framework(s) embrace varied approaches for advocating for LGBTQ equity. Ultimately, the focus of queer leadership centers minoritized sexual and gender identities to advance change to improve the climate for LGBTQ communities, and seek to transform the THI. What is right for one institution or individual may not fit for another. Thus, the importance of continuing to explore staff experiences advocating for LGBTQ equity make room for to the varied ways in which practitioners may engage in queer leadership. Furthermore, these models capture the experiences of staff members engaged in queer work, and advances one of many possibilities for addressing issues of inequity at traditionally heterogendered institutions. Challenging the THI cannot be limited to queer activism; this study shows that resisting the THI is possible through other forms of queer leadership.

These models may also be limited in their ability to understand and address issues of structural inequality and dominant power regimes. Although participants at MRU experienced some resistance from leadership, at the time of this study neither campus reported blatant hostility and refusal to shifting practices. Such threats to staff or faculty engagement in LGBTQ equity work, particularly for staff and faculty members not protected by tenure, could shift how these models are enacted. For example, as the group phenomenon suggests, those engaged in queer leadership should seek to disrupt power

dynamics and challenge any perpetuation of the THI. Given the constraints staff may experience in their advocacy, they may need to rely on other strategies for queering leadership that were not explored by participants at MSA or MRU. Future research should explore how LGBTQ advocates navigate other unwelcoming climates, which may indicate how these models might shift in such differing environments.

Further, these models do not establish a playbook for LGBTQ advocacy. This open-ended approach may allow individuals to self-identify their LGBTQ advocacy, thus unable to measure individual commitments to advocacy for *all* queer students. For example, having staff members who advocate for gay students does not mean they will have the knowledge or empathy to advocate for transgender or non-binary students. Participants at MSA were particularly sensitive and aware of issues facing transgender and non-binary students on campus due to the number of trans and non-binary students sharing their experiences with staff. Transgender and non-binary students experience higher rates of discrimination and are less likely to be out in campus spaces compared to their LGBQ peers (Garvey & Rankin, 2015a; 2015b); thus, it is important for staff to advocate for these students regardless of their knowledge of any “out” students. Staff who engage in LGBTQ advocacy must continually engage in self-education and professional development to ensure they are meeting the needs of all LGBTQ students. Claiming an advocacy identity, does not equate to engaging in inclusive advocacy work.

Another limitation to this study is the lack of other minoritized identities at the intersections of queer leadership. Because of the salience of queer identity in the advocacy/activist frameworks, this cannot be overlooked. Most of the participants were White; as such, it was difficult to explore how queer leadership may intersect with other

social identities. For example, how might the social identities of Black or Latinx staff members inform advocacy for queer leadership? The racial campus climate may further limit the potentials for LGBTQ students' success, particularly for students of color. Like all research, findings from this study are limited in scope, but provide an invaluable foundation for practitioners to consider as they seek to work through and advance change within their respective climates.

Conclusion

This project explored the experiences of staff members at two different college campuses who advocated for LGBTQ equity through policy and practice. I conceptualized a queer leadership framework based on grassroots leadership in higher education (Kezar & Lester, 2011), to capture the nuances of staff leadership strategies on each respective campus. Findings demonstrated two unique approaches to engaging queer leadership: a) Queer Activist Leadership and b) LGBTQ Advocacy Leadership. Overall, staff participants were responsible for creating meaningful change on each campus, organizing to advance institutional policy and practice for LGBTQ equity. Their successes provided important consideration for student affairs practitioners, particularly those who do not host formal programs of support dedicated to LGBTQ advocacy. Findings from this study identified gaps and successes in staff advocacy, while also recognizing there are multiple ways in which higher education student affairs staff may engage in queer leadership work. As most institutions lack such formal programs (Campus Pride, 2016; Marine, 2011), understanding staff experiences has invaluable implications for HESA scholars and practitioners, as well as for LGBTQ equity on campuses.

As scholars and practitioners continue to advance work toward LGBTQ equity on college campuses, it is imperative that their work dismantle normative practices that perpetuate heterogendered institutions (Abes, 2008; Nicolazzo, 2016; Preston & Hoffman, 2015), which includes the policies and practices identified through the work of staff leaders at MRU and MSA. Thus, critical queer policy work must not only trouble the normative histories of LGBTQ exclusion and oppression, but it also expands the ways practitioners do queer work on campus (Bilodeau, 2009; Preston & Hoffman, 2015) by disrupting binary approaches to LGBTQ policy expansion and creating multiple ways of being queer and supporting queer identities. Scholarship increasingly finds colleges and universities as troubling sites for LGBTQ discrimination and exclusion (Rankin et al., 2010; Garvey & Rankin, 2015a; Nicolazzo, 2016; Preston & Hoffman, 2015), and these models for queer leadership, coupled with critical queer policy work, may provide guidance to improve campus climates through these recommended HESA practices.

Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Dear colleagues,

My name is Jonathan Pryor, and I am a doctoral candidate and researcher in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri (MU). I am conducting a study on the experience of higher education and student affairs professionals who have served as LGBTQ leaders on their campuses. I am interested in exploring the experiences of campus staff leaders who have served as agents of change on their campus to improve the institutional climate by advocating for LGBTQ inclusive policies or practice.

Specifically, I am interested in speaking with current staff members who are: a) not currently in a position specifically dedicated to LGBTQ equity, b) not in administrative roles (e.g., Assistant Dean, Dean); and c) have had some involvement in LGBTQ leadership (e.g., advocating for policy change, providing service to a campus organization).

I am writing for your assistance by participating in this study, if you meet the above qualifications, or by assisting with identifying other individuals to participate. People are free to volunteer for the study, and when the interview is being conducted (lasting approximately 60-120 minutes), they are free to withdraw from it at any point if they do not wish to continue. My research design has been approved by MU's Institutional Review Board, which determines whether a study is ethical and appropriately protects participants from harm during the research. Participants' identities will be kept confidential and any identifying information will be removed or changed in publications and presentations resulting from this research.

This project recognizes that advances for LGBTQ equity often is not the result of university administrators and seeks to explore the successes and struggles of LGBTQ leaders in higher education student affairs. Your participation may provide other higher education and student affairs professional with valuable tools for improving LGBTQ equity on other campuses.

If you have any questions or wish to see my IRB approval letter, please e-mail me at pryorj@umkc.edu. I hope to hear from you soon.

Most sincerely,

Jonathan T. Pryor
University of Missouri

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Research Involvement

PROJECT TITLE: Queer Leadership: An Exploration of LGBTQ Leadership in Higher Education

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jonathan Pryor, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education Leadership & Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri. **Your participation in this study is voluntary.**

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this project is to explore the successes and struggles of LGBTQ leaders in higher education student affairs. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the experiences of campus leaders who have served as agents of change on their campus to improve the institutional climate by advocating for LGBTQ inclusive policies or practice. I seek to understand the strategies of these self-identified LGBTQ leaders, through their campus involvement (e.g., LGBTQ Councils, staff organizations, volunteer services) or positional experiences (e.g., campus diversity officers, salaried LGBTQ center staff).

TIME AND PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:

- Fill out an optional demographic form.
- Participate in at least one interview lasting 60-120 minutes. Your contact information will be retained for possible follow-up conversations.
- With participant permission, interviews will be audio-recorded.
- Additionally, if possible, I will request to attend at least one meeting where you have served as a leader for LGBTQ equity on your campus.

POTENTIAL RISKS/BENEFITS: Beyond the sharing of personal experiences, there are no other foreseeable risks to your participation. You may choose to withdraw from this study at any time. This study can provide educators and student affairs professionals important information regarding LGBTQ leadership and may provide a valuable frame for other institutions seeking to advance LGBTQ equity on their campuses

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION: None

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your identity will not be revealed in transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality.

1. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from the transcripts and any reporting of the data.
2. Your name will be changed on the transcripts to further protect your identity.
3. You can refuse to answer any question asked.
4. Audio recordings will be password protected and only accessible to investigator. Participant may choose to not have interviews audio-recorded.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL: You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS: Jonathan Pryor is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri. Jonathan serves as the Primary Investigator under the advisement of Jeni Hart, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Jonathan at pryorj@umkc.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS: You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of Research Services at:

University of Missouri Office of Research
190 Galena Hall DC074
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-9586
umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

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.

Appendix C Interview Protocol

- I. Introduction
 - a. Thank you for participating in the study; review and obtain informed consent; receive consent to record the interview; and review confidentiality
 - b. Interview anticipated to last 60-120 minutes
 - c. Purpose of the Study

- II. Background
 - a. Tell me a little about yourself: what identities are most important to you? What's your professional background and experiences?

- III. Institutional Climate
 - a. What is the LGBTQ campus climate like at your campus?
 - i. Possible probes: What is your understanding of the campus history? What policies or practices are in place? How are LGBTQ people treated on campus—faculty, staff, or students? Are there visible LGBTQ leaders on campus?
 - b. What kind of trainings or programs are in place for LGBTQ awareness?
 - i. Possible probes: How does this vary across sexual diversity and gender diversity issues?
 - c. What are some current issues LGBTQ people on your campus are experiencing?
 - i. Possible probes: How has the campus responded? What's the community or alumni support like? How might this vary for students, faculty, and staff?
 - d. What advancements have been made to enhance the campus climate for LGBTQ people within the last 5 years?
 - i. Possible probe: Or lack of advancements.
 - e. How does the climate for LGBTQ compare to other minoritized communities?
 - i. Race, ethnicity, women, disability, age, etc.

- IV. *Individual*
 - a. Tell me about your experience supporting change initiatives for LGBTQ inclusion on your campus.
 - i. Tell me about how you became involved in supporting your campus LGBTQ community?
 - ii. Do you consider yourself to be an advocate for the LGBTQ community?
 - b. How has your identity influenced your involvement?
 - i. Can you tell me about a time that it may have hindered your desire to speak up or be involved?

- ii. How did you handle any resistance associated with your efforts in leadership?
- c. What actions or steps have you personally taken to advance equity for LGBTQ people on your campus?
- d. What motivates you to be involved with LGBTQ initiatives on campus?

V. *Group*

- a. Tell me about your experience with others navigating this change on your campus?
 - i. How did you go about this change? Where did you find support? Where did you find resistance?
- b. Tell me about your experience working with upper administrators?
 - i. Where did you find support? Where did you find resistance?
 - ii. What strategies were helpful for advocating for LGBTQ equity?
- c. How have you found resilience during your change efforts on campus?

VI. *Organizational*

- a. Tell me about your experience obtaining support for the initiative.
 - i. Did you need to train or coach others? What groups supported you the most? What groups provided no support?
- b. In your time on campus, how has the institution changed in terms of its support for LGBTQ equity?
- c. What has been your biggest barrier in advocating for LGBTQ equity at your campus?
- d. Who has been the biggest champion or advocate for advancing LGBTQ equity?

VII. *Language*

- a. What does it mean to be an *ally*?
- b. Describe what it means to create a safe space.
- c. How do you define activism?
 - i. What does it mean to be an activist? Is there support for activism on campus?
 - ii. Do you consider yourself to be an activist? Why?

VIII. *Conclusion*

- a. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience on your campus?
 - i. Thank you for your time. If I have any follow up questions do you mind me contacting you?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol #2

- I. Introduction
 - a. Thank you for participating in a follow-up conversation to the study; review and remind participant about informed consent; receive consent to record the interview; and review confidentiality
 - b. Interview anticipated to last 30-60 minutes
 - c. Purpose of the Study

- II. Leadership Philosophy
 - a. Can you tell me about your leadership philosophy? How does this guide your work supporting LGBTQ communities on your campus?
 - b. How has your experience on this campus shifted or affirmed your approach to leadership?
 - c. Do your leadership practices vary depending on the cause or initiative with which you're working? What strategies do you use to advocate for LGBTQ equity?

- III. Supporting Queer Students
 - a. What strategies do you use to center students in your leadership practices?
 - b. What kind of resistance or support have you encountered in your time advocating for student voices?

- IV. Administrative Support
 - a. In light of recent events impacting the LGBTQ community, how has campus administration responded?
 - i. Have you felt a need to engage your campus in discussions?
 - ii. How have other students, faculty, or staff responded?
 - b. How do you anticipate any current events impacting campus support for LGBTQ students, faculty, or staff?

- V. Closing
 - a. Is there anything from this conversation or since our last meeting that has come up, that you'd like to share?

Appendix E

Demographic Form

Please complete the following questionnaire. Do not place any identifying information that may be specific to you on this form, such as your name, birthdate, or contact information. This information is strictly voluntary, please leave any spaces blank that you wish to not provide. This document will remain confidential throughout the process of this study.

Pseudonym: _____

Position Title or Campus Role: _____

Department or Division: _____

Education history: _____

Age: _____

Length of employment/time at your campus: _____

What is your racial/ethnic background?: _____

What is your gender identity?: _____

What is your sexual orientation identity?: _____

How “out” are you on your campus (if LGBTQ identified)?

(1—not out; 5 – out to nearly everyone) 1 2 3 4
5

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VITA

Jonathan Thomas Pryor lived.