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## Queering Center: A Critical Discourse Analysis of University LGBT Center Theoretical Foundations

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine the framing discourse of theorization and practice surrounding university-based Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) resource centers. Building on interdisciplinary work by critical feminist, race, and queer scholars in sociology, social work, education, and political science, this study proposed a vital shift from identity politics (Combahee River Collective, 1977) and multicultural (Jay, 1994; Ward, 2008) theorizing and practice frameworks to praxis grounded in intersectional understandings of identity and resistance to interlocking systems of oppression (Razack, 1999) which (re)produce logics of dominance such as racism, gender binaries, and sexism. Supporting this conclusion was my critical discourse analysis of three texts, considered by practitioners to be the “canon” of theorization and conceptualization of campus-based centers. The three unique texts, the only ones published prior to 2011, to prescriptively advise center development and programming, were discursively analyzed through a critical queer feminist lens critiquing the constructs of essentialized identity politics and multiculturalism. The textual analysis indicated that the three texts drew heavily upon the discourses of essentialized identity politics and multiculturalism, and in doing reified homonormative white regulating systems. While making no claims that the three manuscripts represented the entirety of theoretical discourse framing LGBT center development, sparse center scholarship and this study’s argument in combination with scholarly critiques of both identity political and multicultural frameworks, asserts a strong claim for reconceptualizing the project of campus centers through a critical, intersectional lens based in the dismantling of interconnected systems of oppression.

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## INTRODUCTION

University LGBT Centers and the professional roles attached to such spaces are roughly 45-years old. Cultural and political evolution has been tremendous in that time and yet researchers have yielded a relatively small field of literature focusing on university LGBT centers. As a scholar-activist practitioner struggling daily to engage in a critically conscious life and professional role, I launched an interrogation of the foundational theorizing of university LGBT centers. In this article, I critically examine the discursive framing, theorization, and practice of LGBT campus centers as represented in the only three texts specifically written about center development and practice. These three texts are considered by center directors/coordinators, per my conversations with colleagues and search of the literature, to be the canon in terms of how centers have been conceptualized and implemented. The purpose of this work was three-fold. Through a queer feminist lens focused through interlocking systems of oppression and the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA)<sup>1</sup>, I first examined the methodological frameworks through which the canonical literature on centers has been produced. The second purpose was to identify if and/or how identity and multicultural frameworks reaffirmed whiteness as a norm for LGBT center directors. Finally, I critically discussed and raised questions as to how to interrupt and resist heteronormativity and homonormativity in the theoretical framing of center purpose and practice.

Hired to develop and direct the University of Washington's first lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT<sup>2</sup>) campus center in 2004, I had the rare opportunity to set and implement with the collaboration of queerly minded students, faculty, and staff, a critically theorized and reflexive space. As a 16-year queer activist, practitioner, and scholar, I was

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<sup>1</sup>CDA was first brought to renown in the early 1990s by a network of scholars Teun Van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, and Ruth Wodak.

<sup>2</sup> I made the choice to use LGBT instead of LGBTQ because the three texts under scrutiny did not use the latter and it is only within the last decade that centers have been either changing their names altogether or adding the Q.

cognizant that LGBT spaces within public education (across the P-20 continuum) tended to reinforce racial, gender, class, and sexual sociopolitical norms. From a critical queer feminist perspective, I appreciated that my ascriptive<sup>3</sup> and subjective identities as a queer, genderqueer, middle-class, white, non-indigenous U.S. citizen, with access to higher education, positioned me as an institutional player who embodied transgression of gender, sexual, and psychological cultural norms as well as one who replicated whiteness, middle class status, and educational privilege. I recognized that without engaging a comprehensive, reflexive and liberatory praxis of planning and developing a center, I could create a space that catered to a homonormative (e.g., white, middle class, cisgender male, and monosexual) student population; this was an untenable and unacceptable outcome.

Roderick A. Ferguson (2005) argued in *Race-ing homonormativity: Citizenship, sociology, and gay identity*, that the rearticulation of homosexuality as cultural difference in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, transpired through homonormative notions, constructing homosexuality as white, middle class, and adhering to naturalized gender roles not inclusive of people of color and the working class. Consequently, white homonormativity racial formations exclude and regulate communities marginalized by other notions of normativity, regulations that are racialized, classed, and gendered. I was uninterested in creating that kind of center. Years of anti-racist/oppression (un)learning and training, building personal relationships, working within systems (higher education, criminal justice, and medical) which methodically abused, minoritized, and privileged according to one's ascribed positionalities and experiences of both personal and cultural grief fueled my intent to create a space and programming that centered the experiences of the most marginalized people within our queer communities, deconstructed the director's (my) sets of privileged identifications, and interrogated practices which reproduced white homonormativity. However, when I sought scholarly resources to assist in the endeavor, I

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<sup>3</sup> Identities that come about based upon the ways in which humans must situate ourselves in relations to power; how humans are ascribed to categories and naturalized into power relationships with sociopolitical forces and the physical world (Moya, 2006).

found merely three texts written between 1995 and 2011: the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender campus organizing: A comprehensive manual* (Outcalt, 1995); *Our place on campus: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender services and programs in higher education* (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002); and *CAS self-assessment guide for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender programs and services* (2009). Further piquing my interest in the question of how higher education professionals theorize LGBT campus centers, I surveyed my colleagues of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Professionals (in 2004, fewer than 150 programs in the U.S.) asking which texts they relied upon as they developed their centers and programming. All respondents indicated these three texts.

In this article, I use *LGBT*, a common acronym for Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (now trans\* or trans), which from the late 1990s to present has commonly been used by resource centers to represent their centers and the communities they serve. *LGBTQ* was also common. I use *LGBT* in this article to reference centers, given the frequency of the acronyms usage in center names, differentiating it from the use of queer. I engaged queer as a critical epistemology wherein I employed a politic of placing the familiar, assumed, and normalized into doubt. I use *LGBT* to identify centers and texts, entities and discourse more likely to be aligned with institutionalized norms (Renn, 2010; Ferguson, 2008). Due to the expanse of experience and identifications, I use *queer* to refer to students, those likely to be transgressing heteronormativity and living resistance to and questioning of normalized gender and sexual binaries. I made these choices with purpose and clarity knowing that both the use of labels and the labels themselves are contentious and always under debate. *Queer* is an identifier and an epistemological stance, fluid and multiple in meaning. Regarding identifications, I use the term *ascriptive* or *ascribed identity* to signify the ways that individuals situate themselves in relations to power; that is, how humans are ascribed to categories and naturalized into power relationships with sociopolitical forces and the physical world (Moya, 2006). *Ascriptive identity* contrasts with the more colloquial *identity*, typically used to describe

one's free construction and expression of their sense of self in relationship to their environment. Moya (2006) distinguished further between *ascriptive identity* and *subjective identity*, which she described as an individual's sense of self and lived experience of being a relatively coherent self across time.

### **Center Scholarship Prior to 2011**

Remarkably, after a 44-year history in higher education, scholarship focused on LGBT campus centers is quite modest. The field of scholarship is largely descriptive, focused on service provision (Beemyn, 2012; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Ryan, 2005; Sanlo, 1998; Sausa, 2002; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005), the profession of LGBT campus administration (Albin & Dungy, 2005; Roper, 2005; Sanlo, 2000), and campus climate assessments (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Fine, 2012; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, 2005; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). These works have proven critical scholarly contributions to student services in higher education and center proliferation efforts. For, as is true across disciplines in marginalized fields of study and practice, legitimization of the people and the complexity of their concerns is demanded of scholars and practitioners. This body of work (LGBT higher education student services) solidly lays the foundation for the needs, legitimacy, and professional strength of the field. However, given the scant empirical studies (Fine, 2012; Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Sanlo, 2000; Teman & Lahman, 2012), articles which primarily provide empirical support for the development and implementation of LGBT campus centers, further scholarly exploration of the theoretical and praxis foundations of LGBT centers' work is warranted. This study directly addresses this dearth of research by tendering a critical interpretation of LGBT campus centers' foundational theorizing.

In addition to the gaps in literature content, modernist methods proliferate throughout the LGBT higher education literature and critical methods and methodologies remain a rarity. Researcher, Kristen Renn (2010) specifically noted that very few published studies focused on

college students and faculty used queer theory as a framework. While clearly some scholars have effectively engaged critical theory in LGBT higher education research (e.g., see Fox, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001), the field can gain considerable insight from interpretive and critical scholarship. Queering, or for the purposes of this article, interrogating and disrupting regulating norms such as white homonormativity (Ferguson, 2005), can provide new or renewed insights to intractable problems (Renn, 2010). Given the paucity of peer reviewed empirical literature, the LGBT movement's privileging of homonormative whiteness (Ferguson, 2005), the development of centers within and through the LGBT movement, the increasing call for centers at public universities across the country, the importance and longevity of queer campus work, and the clear gap in critical reflection upon our service provision, the moment was ripe for a critical examination of center theorization.

### **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS**

In this section, I identify and explicate the theoretical framing I used to analyze the texts. Critical queer, feminist, interpretive research is a subjective process, with clearly stated political intentions, primarily to expose and interrogate dominant power (Self, 2014). This approach situates the researcher within the project, requiring transparency and critical reflexivity in terms of theoretical assumptions. My central assumption is that knowledge of reality is socially produced through discursive systems inseparably linking power/knowledge, wherein certain "truths" are legitimized while others are delegitimized. Continuing, all knowledge is interpretive, qualified, and in constant relationship to regulatory norms (Ronquillo, 2008). Finally, in this type of research, researchers must reveal our biases or risk the integrity of our work. Certainly, my status as a director of an LGBT campus center, as well as my many intersecting social identities influenced every part of the project.

## **Critical Queer Feminism**

Critical queer feminism blends queer theory and feminisms to deconstruct racialized gender binaries and interrupt layered systems of oppression in both discourse and material realities (such as homonormativity). While some queer and feminist scholars elucidate distinctions between the theoretical fields, I developed my feminism and queerness within and through one another. As a white genderqueer child of the 1970s, parented primarily by a newly feminist mother, I encountered the cultural regulations associated with discursive categories of gender, sex, and sexual orientation, as well as the material consequences of being female bodied and gender transgressing. At the same time, I know I was spared ridicule and further marginalization due to my situated positions of privilege. Today, I claim both queer and feminist as personal, political, and professional descriptors and employ them as politics of liberation/transformation as I continually position myself in relation to interconnected systems of power in my scholarship, praxis, and my life. Critical queer feminist epistemology demands the ongoing discernment of one's relationship to systems of power and privilege.

At its root, critical queer feminist scholarship illuminates and disrupts heteropatriarchal power, which is integrally tied to white normative regulations (Ferguson, 2005; Frankenberg, 1993; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Muñoz, 1999; Smith, 2006; Ward, 2008). I attribute the majority of my learning to women of color feminisms and queer of color critiques, which have provided the foundation for my appreciation of interlocking systems of oppression, multiple situated truths, the partial nature of research, and LGBT center leaders' frequent complicity with marginalizing, minoritizing, and oppressive processes and practices. My theoretical lens is inscribed with the groundbreaking work of Ferguson, Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) epistemological liberation through critical consciousness, Cathy Cohen's (1997/2005) radical vision of queer feminism, calling for a queer consciousness with an intersectional analysis of regulation and policing through interconnected systems of oppression, and Andrea Smith's (2006, 2013) delineation of heteropatriarchy and the pillars of white supremacy, and her discussion of the

problems with privilege. Through these theorists work, engaging in anti-oppression education, and through personal experience, I recognize myself as a benefactor of white supremacy and colonialism. Their work illustrates clear and radical logics to deconstruct the systematized whiteness and homonormativity, which are inextricably bound.

### **Critique of Multiculturalism and Identity Politics**

Identity-based politics and multiculturalism laid the foundation for communities to articulate collective experiences of oppression and for the provision of representations of diversity, but not the acknowledgement of power imbalances or a more complex understanding of multiple entanglements of oppression. Women of color scholars, practitioners, and activists have been living and working with the realities/conceptualizations of multiplicity for decades, with Moraga (1981) and Crenshaw (1991) introducing the term intersectionality to first communicate the ways in which race, class, and gender co-constructed one another. Systems such as racism, sexism, nationalism, heterosexism, and cissexism (among others) inhabit and define one another to shape myriad controlling U.S. cultural norms, regulatory forces, or interlocking systems of oppression (Butler, 2004; Collins, 1990/2000; Moraga, 1981; Razack, 1999) that restrict, police, and produce marginalized subjectivities, not only molding U.S. cultural experience but colonizing global cultures transnationally. Ferguson's (2005) work extended that of women of color feminists when critiquing gay rights as a site of racial exclusion and privilege. It was my intent to call into question the theoretical framing of LGBT university centers through the frameworks established by these theorists.

Heterosexism and monosexism work in concert with other oppressions; they do not labor in isolation and cannot be dismantled singularly. Similarly, homonormativity operates as a site of racial, gender, and class exclusion. Influenced by the aforementioned forces, center theorization has direct implications for practice. I rooted my argument for re-examination of center theorization and practice in the "truth" of these linking assertions. To interrupt and resist white homonormativity, heterosexism, and monosexism practitioners must conceptualize these forces



within multiply and mutually reinforcing systems of oppression because how practitioners think about resistance effects how they enact it. While identity politics and multiculturalist efforts are politically comprehensible and purposeful acts of strategic essentialist resistance and representation on the part of oppressed groups, they have proven insufficient to interrupt and destabilize controlling U.S. racial, gender, and class norms operating as homonormativity within the central literature of campus-based centers and consequently within the thinking and practice of campus centers.

### **Essentialized Identity Politics**

Identity movements, frequently associated with movements such as the Gay Rights movement, Civil Rights, Black Power, and Women's Rights surged in the U.S. during the 1960s and 70s as powerful means of resistance to oppressive forces aimed at communities with racial, gender, sexual, class, and other culturally ascribed minoritized subject positions. Stokely Carmichael's cultural and political Black Power Movement gripped the attention of Black college students who found white institutions of higher education disinterested in empowering them as the institutions were structurally conceptualized and developed for white students. True to the movement, Black students sought to develop new historicized collective and personalized identities for themselves, centering higher education as a key player. Through the development of identity-based political action groups and fighting for educational rights, Black college students set the tone for identity-based movements which served to dictate higher education politics (Loss, 2011). The Combahee River Collective (CRC) and Barbara Smith coined the term "identity politics," which signified political action emerging from the life experiences of people who shared marginalized subject positions (Harris, 2001); the construct is now used widely and in varying ways by communities, activists, scholars, and practitioners. For the purposes of this effort, I used the historicized (CRC, Carmichael) definition of identity politics, wherein marginalized peoples resisted dominance by redefinition of the collective life experience from that perspective.

An interdisciplinary array of political and cultural critiques, over the last 50 years, argued that conceptualizations of the complex interconnectedness of oppressions, people's experiences with multiple subjectivities and the processes of interlocking systems of oppression were generally not acknowledged or addressed by U.S. identity political movements (Cohen, 1997/2005; Collins, 2000; Hall, 1996; Kumashiro, 2001; Razack, 1999). Consequently, identity politics bared out five weaknesses that I took up in my analysis. (1) Groups frequently conflated within group differences, ignoring the ways in which multiple oppressions intersected and operated in people's lives (Crenshaw, 1991). (2) Identity politics relied upon the supposition that the oppression around which the politic was centered, was privileged over intra-group differences or power differentials (Bernstein, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; Lamble, 2008) and that (3), oppression acted upon constituents in consistent, uniform, and unifying ways (Bernstein, 2005; Hancock, 2007). (4) Other marginalized identities were considered additively (gender + race + sexuality) while dominant identities (e.g., white, cisgender) remained hidden and unnamed (Fraser, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 2003). (5) Relatedly, multiple forms of oppression were considered separately rather than as related or co-constructed (Crenshaw, 1991; Ferguson, 2005; Hall, 1996; Hutchinson, 2000; Kumashiro, 2001). As educators and center practitioners, in order to create accessible spaces, programs, classes, and universities that even begin serving the greatest number of constituents possible, we must reject essentialist notions of identity. Most pertinent to this argument is the supposition that queer of color theorists' gender and sexuality are essentially always racialized and classed (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Ferguson, 2005; Kumashiro, 2001; Somerville, 1997). In other words, one cannot fully consider gender and sexuality without taking up considerations of nationality, race, culture, ethnicity, and class (among other subjectivities).

### **Multiculturalism**

As previously noted, since the 1960s identity politics and multiculturalism have informed higher education's applied policies aimed at addressing inequality and access to education,

thanks in large part to the failed assimilationist strategies of institutions of higher education and the swift political organizing of marginalized college students (Loss, 2011). Campus-based women's centers, cultural centers, and LGBT centers all originated through identity-based activism that ultimately pressured universities to address campus communities' needs for safety and institutional responses to systematized marginalization. For purposes of this study, "multiculturalism" referred to a paradigmatic move within higher education to make visible, recognize, and represent the racial, ethnic, and cultural subjectivities of students, faculty, and staff in order to reduce racial/ethnic prejudice and biases in policies and practices (Jay, 1994; Ward, 2008). Multiculturalism arrived on the educational and political landscape in the 1960s and 70s within the context of public school reform (Ward, 2008; Hoffman, 1996; Jay, 2008). Multiculturalism, in part, grew through and out of identity politics and as implemented in educational settings it often resulted in policies and practices celebrating diversity and those that failed to destabilize, but rather reaffirmed dominant racial, class, gender, and sexual norms (Jay, 1994; San Juan, 1994).

Multiculturalist strategies have provided more representation of peoples and narratives, though even in representation the marginalized subject position is named, whereas the dominant subject position remains invisible and unnamed (Radhakrishnan, 2003). However, other scholars have argued the continued value and necessity of representation, visibility, and recognition in an era of increasingly rigid standardized testing, extinguished Affirmative Action policies, and the school-to-prison pipeline (May & Sleeter, 2010). In universities, multiculturalism has often lent itself to one-dimensional representations of groups throughout textbooks or curricula as if representation were the end goal rather than equity and the disruption of stringent regulating practices. This skewed focus consequently obscures the issues of inequality that gave rise to social movements. The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) states in its definition of multiculturalism that "it prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions" (NAME, 2014); yet, frequently in practice

power imbalances go unacknowledged, instead equal access with equal effort is assumed (Rogers, 2001; Young, 1997).

### **CENTER HISTORY**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) college centers emerged in the early 1970s in response to a newly empowered gay identity-based movement, student, faculty, and staff activism and demands for safe and protective spaces from heterosexism and homophobia (D'Emilio, 1992). Since the establishment of the first university-based LGBT office/center at the University of Michigan in 1971, more than 200 such centers have developed in both public and private universities throughout the U.S. (Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory, 2014). While I use a more current acronym "LGBT" to describe these centers, the dominant discourse in the 1970s and 80s privileged "gay" as a collective community marker. The U.S. gay pride movement, similar to other identity-based political efforts emerged in the late 1960s as a powerful means of resistance to socio-political norms that produced "gays" as perverted and abnormal. Culturally referred to as heterosexism and/or homophobia, these pervasive discourses remain prevalent and productive forces into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Identity movements, while politically deliberate and culturally galvanizing, prioritize the experience of a shared subjectivity and in doing so marginalize other subject positions. Similar to identity-based efforts of the time, the gay pride movement was fractured by normalizing, regulating discourses and profuse systems of oppression that interlock and co-create one another (Collins, 2000; Foucault, 1977; Moraga, 1981; Razack, 1999) such as racism, sexism, and cisgender normativity, ruptures that mirrored the splintering of U.S. culture by these same processes. Consequently, the dominant U.S. gay movements have created organizations, political action groups, services, spaces, and other entities that privilege homonormative whiteness (Ferguson, 2005; Self, 2014), a production of gayness which constitutes the dominant "gay" body as white, middle-class, and cisgender, male complete with static and

binary conceptions of whiteness and masculinity (Cohen, 1997/2005; Duggan, 2003; Ferguson, 2005; Halberstam, 2005; Ward, 2008). Further, Ferguson (2005) asserted that through the modern gay rights movement, white gays and lesbians entered into the rights and privileges associated with American citizenship and in so doing accessed racial and class privileges by conforming to gender (binary cisgender) and sexual norms (monogamy and monosexism-single gender attraction), which created white gay formations or homonormative spaces that complied with heterosexual regulations and further marginalized, marginalized communities.

As direct outcomes of these movements, it is unsurprising that campus centers developed primarily within an identity-based framework that conceptualized “gayness” as an elemental and static identity, one that could scaffold across experience without regard to race, class, gender, and/or other social/cultural subjectivities (Barnard, 2003; Cohen, 1997/2005; Ferguson, 2005). Identity and multicultural frameworks have likewise dominated higher education’s responses to demands for attention to difference and/or diversity (Jay, 1994; Ward, 2008). While both recognition of identity and representation of diversity have proven vital tactics for educational and socio-political change, it is questionable to what extent these approaches addressed the complexity of institutional and systemic domination (Sandoval, 2000). Further, to what extent are LGBT campus centers, theorized through the lenses of identity politics and multiculturalism, prepared to provide respite and services to multiply marginalized students? As a critical queer feminist scholar-activist and 20-year veteran of the field these questions hold import for all those I serve and teach. This study interrogated the theoretical framing discourse(s) of LGBT centers, entities for which I have great love and which require ongoing critique.

### **STUDY DESIGN & METHODS**

To revisit, critical queer feminist scholarship highlights and destabilizes white heteropatriarchal power. To that end, critical queer feminist research/praxis is a vital and

productive tool to reveal, analyze, and interrupt dominant oppressive and normalizing systems, in this case homonormative whiteness, entrenched within LGBT center foundational theorization as captured in the discourse of the three texts under analysis (Self, 2014). Discourse, as conceptualized by Foucault (1977, 1980b) is historically situated systems of representation, including language and practices, that produce knowledge about a particular topic and dictate the way in which it can be meaningfully discussed, thought, and considered. Discourse influences the implementation of ideas in practice; it polices and regulates the behavior of others, creating, defining, and controlling the way in which topics and practices are understood and managed (Hall, 1997). Through discourse, one set of knowledge is privileged and normalized while all others are denaturalized and marginalized.

The three core texts I analyzed for this article are forms of social and political practice wherein socio-political domination can be reified through the language employed (Fairclough, 1995). This was the very reason I chose CDA as my analytic tool. My intent was to elucidate the ways in which unequal power relations (homonormativity and heteronormativity) were naturalized through the discursive work of the three texts bringing to light manifestations of homonormative whiteness and/or disruption to its production (Fairclough, 2001; Lemke, 1995). I make no claims that these three texts represent the entire “truth” of center theorization; rather, I argue they were representative of predominant discourses that acted within the field to define and distribute theoretical power relations (Gee, 2004). Through a close read and examination of the texts, I problematized and unsettled center theorization, questioning essentialized identity and multicultural frameworks through a critical queer feminist lens, arguing that these discursive regimes, while strategically and politically purposeful, privileged white homonormativity throughout the texts. While not representative of a central truth, given the canonical nature of the texts (the only documents produced nationally during the timeframe) they arguably communicated privileged discourse within the field. While each text drew upon numerous discourses (psychology, student affairs, human development, social justice, etc.) I focused my

analysis upon the ways in which the texts employed the discourses of identity politics and multiculturalism.

The three texts, written in three distinct historical moments (1995, 2002, and 2009)<sup>4</sup> each described the purpose, creation, and activities of campus-based LGBT resource centers. The texts I selected were the only nationally distributed works on developing campus centers between the years 1995-2011. I chose these three texts by researching the literature in the field (finding only the three) and asking my colleagues (other center directors) to direct me to the works most useful in their conceptualization of their centers. I was referred to these three texts exclusively, with one exception. One director referred me to the work of Gloria Anzaldua, Patricia Hill Collins, and feminists of color focusing on intersectional theorizing, a referral that hinted at the central concern of this inquiry. Continuing, approximately 75% or 158 of the more than 200 centers were established from 1995-2011; the timeframe in which this literature dominated the discourse.

The texts I selected for inclusion in the sample had to meet the following criteria: 1) each text focused on center development and practice, not other kinds of services; e.g., anti-homophobia training or counseling services, 2) key informants, members of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, identified them as central texts in the theorization and practice of LGBT campus centers (an assertion confirmed by a thorough review of scholarly and practice literature), 3) the texts were readily available to center practitioners and widely referenced in the literature on LGBT centers; and 4) the texts were written by leaders in the field (based upon literature review, knowledge of their service as administrators in this area, and collegial references). I did not ultimately include Gloria Anzaldua, Patricia Hill Collins, and feminists of color focusing on intersecting theorizing for a number of reasons: 1) they were not

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<sup>4</sup> Critical discourse analysis takes into account the temporal nature of the discourse under evaluation. Each text must be considered within its historical sociopolitical contest. Comparing the texts against one-another would be inappropriate and could be interpreted as presentism. I speak to the historical moments further when I describe the texts.

focused on center development; 2) only one director out of more than 200 directed me to the works; 3) the texts were not widely referenced in center literature; and 4) from my experience working in the field and having read the works to which I had been referred, few center leaders, at that time, operationalized the theorizing of feminists of color. Three texts met all four criteria, two developed in the context of higher education, and one produced by a national community organizing, advocacy, and political organization. The sample included 1) the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender campus organizing: A comprehensive manual-Chapter 12 Establishing a LGBT resource center* (Outcalt, 1995); 2) *Our place on campus: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender services and programs in higher education* (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002); and 3) *CAS self-assessment guide for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender programs and services* (2009).

The NGLTF Manual, hereafter referred to as *Establishing a LGBT resource center*, written by Charles Outcalt, PhD, in consultation with Curtis Shepard, PhD, of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and Felice Yeskel, PhD, of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, was published by a grassroots LGBT advocacy organization. This came at a time when campus-based centers were just beginning to develop at a more rapid pace and in greater numbers than during the 1970s or '80s (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). Outcalt was the first director of the UCLA LGBT center, established in 1995. At the time, the construct "multiculturalism," having firmly taken root within higher education, was beginning to be the subject of critique in the scholarship of the day; however, its persistence in higher education was unrelenting.

*Our Place on Campus* (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002) was edited by three founding leaders in the creation of campus-based centers and produced in collaborations with members of the Consortium of Directors of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources in Higher Education (now known as the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators



(NASPA), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Collectively, the editors and higher education organizations produced the first comprehensive, pragmatic “how to” book on campus centers supported by higher education and scholarly efforts. At the time, more than 70 institutions had paid LGBT professionals (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002), but save the *Establishing a LGBT resource center*, scholarship focused on campus centers was scant. *The CAS Guide* (2009) developed by the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), a pre-eminent force for promoting standards in student affairs since 1979, first developed guidelines for LGBT programs in September 2000 (The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013). This text is considered a set of suggested best practices for campus centers and until the late 2000’s was the only national organization publishing suggested best practices for LGBT higher education programs.

Given the varying historical and political contexts of the texts, avoiding presentism within the analysis was of particular importance. In the analysis, I aimed to read each text for the indicators of multiculturalism and essentialized identity politics. Because this was a critical piece, my efforts were not geared toward reporting on the achievements of these texts and their authors, though I want to be clear, there were many of note. Campus LGBT resource centers owe a debt of gratitude to each of these texts, as each stands as a measure of resistance not only to cultural heterosexism but institutionalized heterosexism. Additionally, while this article argues that these three texts represent a dominant theoretical discourse regarding LGBT campus centers, it is abundantly clear, as the director of an LGBT campus center, that the leaders of centers bring to their work their life experiences, their knowledge, and the discourses in which they are conversant. This paper does not address those individualized processes, rather, the argument here was that three texts dominated the academic and practice discourse of campus LGBT centers for 16 years and they were ripe for critique.

Of note to the analysis and the findings, though outside the scope of this article for exhaustive consideration, were the institutionalization, legitimization, and professionalization processes through which LGBT campus centers were produced. Universities have responded to and been reshaped by social justice movements and have developed unique relationships to “difference.” In dedicating physical, academic, and psychic space to marginalized groups, universities incorporated “difference” even as those spaces remained embedded within dominant systems of oppression. While most queer spaces, women’s centers, and cultural spaces developed through resistance and unrest, universities tend to adapt to difference in an attempt to dilute, neutralize, and normalize diversity (Ferguson, 2008). Consequently, the three texts were developed within competing, yet ever-normalizing discourses.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### **Establishing a LGBT resource center**

In 1995, there were 37-42 campus LGBT centers. *Establishing a LGBT resource center*, written in 1995 by an entity outside of higher education, was the oldest text and the one most clearly influenced by conceptions of multiculturalism. Nationally, Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell went into law two years earlier, the American Medical Association (AMA) had recently declared homosexuality to no longer be an illness, the first version of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) had been introduced, and Susan Stryker had just become the first “out” trans\*/trans person to publish in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal (LGBT Timeline, 2014). Anti-gay politics was a significant part of the national political scene, with several states (Oregon, Colorado) facing repeated statewide initiatives aimed at criminalizing homosexuality. The generational and national context places this manual squarely within a timeframe when multiculturalist discourse dominated higher educational spaces and it was considered groundbreaking.

Throughout its 24 pages, the text focused on representations of difference, noting examples of LGBT people of color (QPOC), and reminding directors to recognize diversity in

different programmatic areas. While these mentions were more frequent and consistent than either of the other two texts, I contend that the manual, in whole, assumed a white readership, white homonormative leadership of centers, and readers who knew little about the mechanisms of interlocking systems of oppression. The phrase “people of color” was first used in the fifth paragraph under the heading, *Embracing diversity within LGBT communities*.

A few (extremely important) words on diversity at your center: It will not live up to its full potential if it does not embrace the diversity that exists within the LGBT communities. It goes without saying that lesbian priorities and needs differ from those of gay men, and that members of ethnic and racial minorities are chronically under-represented in the most popular LGBT publications. If you have any doubt on this point, flip through the nearest LGBT publication and count the number of people of color you find represented (Outcult, 1995, p. 213).

I chose this paragraph as an exemplar because it was the first place the phrase “people of color” was used, because it directly addressed the concept of “diversity” so one might have assumed that the paragraph would have read as “inclusive” or not problematic. This paragraph opened with assumptive discursive moves positioning me (the reader) and the constituents of the centers as homonormative gay, white, cisgender, middle class, and men. The title directs me to “embrace diversity within LGBT” communities. While not explicit, “diversity” in 1995, came to mean people with marginalized subjectivities. Hence, I read this opening sequence as personifying campus centers as homonormative “embracers” of the marginalized. The text encouraged me to embrace the “other,” a discursive move that situated me as someone of white homonormative subjectivities who would need to be educated, presumably because I lack an understanding that QPOC and lesbians were part of LGBT communities.

Through the phrasing of the need to “embrace” diversity to reach “full potential,” this passage emphasized inclusion and representation, multicultural strategies, and remained mute on the production of inequity. This choice flattened power relations, reified whiteness, cisgender

binaries, monosexism, and middle class maleness as norms. The language asserted a paternalistic authority through an “embrace” that could eliminate gendered and racialized barriers to accessing centers. In line three the language states, “it goes without saying” that lesbians were different, paradoxically showing that it was necessary “say” in order to counter sexism, otherwise this claim would not need to be made. Discursively lesbians were non-racialized (aka white) but also “other” as opposed to the non-diverse constituents of the centers (white, gay, cis-men). Lesbians and QPOC (rather than ethnic and racial minorities) were held up as separate and not intersectional examples of diversity, a discursive move, that reified LGBT whiteness, centering the “non-multicultural” gay, white, middle class, cisgender men (among other unmarked subjectivities). The non-racialization of “lesbians” further cemented white homonormative racial formations. The paragraph then shifted to discuss ethnic and QPOC separately, a racialized but non-gendered non-sexualized group, a move that reconstituted a false dichotomy between sexual orientation and race/ethnicity and male cisgender normativity. Unmarked norms developed visibility not through description but through the “diversity” described around them.

Though lesbians and QPOC appeared to be centered as subjects of the paragraph, these groups remained “others” while a descriptive absence of the presumed reader constructed a homonormative audience, the “non-diverse.” “Diverse” lesbians were compared to the normative audience just as “diverse” QPOC were compared to their representation in LGBT publications. Again, this pointed to unmarked, unspoken white homonormative assumptions about the reader and centers. When I was invited to count the number of QPOC in a popular LGBT publication I bristled at the objectifying discursive move which assumed me to be white and indicated that numeric representation could adequately account for the experiences of QPOC. Again, in an attempt to recognize and represent multiply positioned communities, the passage reified whiteness. Regardless of the racial or gender identities of the author(s), this text

positioned the diverse as white lesbians and QPOC while continuing to reaffirm a white, gay, cisgender male norm.

This paragraph highlighted numerical representation, a central feature of multiculturalism. The text encouraged doubtful white readers to “flip through” publications and “count the number of people of color.” The casual choice of words here suggested a cursory glance. The tone and language choice denoted one might flip through a magazine when they had little time, little interest, or were not giving full attention to the stories and images. The example reduced substantial constituency groups to objects, numbers, and images represented in popular cultural LGBT publications. Indeed, this sentence undermined this section’s central point: the need to embrace diversity, not minimize it. In a move that distracted from the racial, sexual, gender, and class normalizing regimes present in centers (confusingly acknowledged by the insistence that centers embrace diversity but unacknowledged within the content) the text shifted my attention from LGBT centers to popular publications. This discursive strategy indicated that I, the “doubter” was white and would not understand nor think about the consequences of racism and exclusion. The text’s directive to “count the number of POC” would produce quantifiable images of “the other” for my consumption and that of the presumed white man “embracer,” which effectively distanced him from QPOC and further detached the white reader from the more unpalatable realities of racist marginalization and invisibility. Without the reader positioned as QPOC, I contend the text could further alienate QPOC readers by trivializing experiences with exclusion and racism. Were people of color the intended audience, the text might convey a less casual tone and address the more significant costs of racism than lack of “representation” in popular LGBT publications.

If you forge a link between your center and other underrepresented groups, you’ll lessen the complications and difficulties faced by students who fall into more than one minority group. To put it another way: a lesbian Chicana shouldn’t have to choose between

putting her energies into working with the Chicana Caucus, the Feminist Discussion Group, or the LGBT Center (Outcalt, 1995, p. 214).

Build relationships with the other, the text encouraged, so that others could better access my center with fewer difficulties. While oppression and power imbalances went unmentioned, they were acknowledged through the messaging and tone of the paragraph. The homonormative director was dubbed with paternalistic power to reduce “complications and difficulties” of multiply marginalized students through inclusion measures. I read this section as the nullification of power and privilege through the attribution of “complications and difficulties” of accessing centers to the “problem” of multiple minoritized subjectivities. While the paragraph suggested that difficulties would decrease if I forged a link with underrepresented groups, that reasoning assumed equal power and privilege among all center constituents and failed to acknowledge power imbalances between me and the constituents or between white queers and QPOC.

Continuing, the text presumed that “underrepresented” groups would have complications/difficulties with centers. I acknowledge this language was likely an attempt at addressing oppression. However, I read the latent meaning of this section as discursively blaming underrepresented students for trouble in accessing LGBT centers. Perhaps heterosexism was an additional barrier, but the text focused on LGBT centers and the difficulties faced by multiply marginalized students in accessing centers, rather than systems of power and privilege embedded within centers. By 1995, both Black and Chicana Feminist theory had developed the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking systems of oppression, but the text written through a multiculturalist lens, did not address the ways in which “underrepresented” students managed those experiences in every aspect of their lives. Power dynamics related to homonormative regulating systems went without interrogation.

The text grounded multiply positioned students in material reality by suggesting that a Chicana lesbian would “have to choose” between three different spaces in order to have an

integrated and validating experience. Yet, this example was indicative of the very regulating norms of those spaces; e.g., whiteness, cisgender, gay, maleness within the LGBT center, heterosexism, monosexism, and cissexism within the Chicana Caucus, and racism, heterosexism, monosexism, and cissexism within the feminist caucus. This additive approach to multiplicity suggested that three spaces might be necessary to meet the needs associated with each subject position. Continuing, the text reproduced the controlling norms it attempted to address, through a multicultural frame, by omitting any reference to problematic forms of dominance persistent in LGBT centers. For instance, the text called for “forging linkages” or building coalitions, but did not explore the reasons coalitions were needed and why there were fractures between student groups. Processes of structural inequality remained hidden within a multicultural frame and dominant power was essentially falsely leveled.

### **Our Place on Campus**

Written in 2002, this text was the first produced in the context of higher education. At the time, there were 79 to 87 LGBT campus centers in existence, less than one-quarter of the number that exist today (Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory, 2014). The book was published just four years after the death of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr.; two hate crimes covered voraciously by the national media (Petersen, 2011). Women of color feminisms had brought to bear the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking systems of oppression through scholarship, art, and activism. Where some argued pre-9/11 that there had been a positive cultural shift in the direction of multiculturalism and the “browning of America,” in the new post-9/11 reality, Islamaphobia and racism were heightened, anti-gay politics were crucial political footballs, and the prior positive response had transformed into fear and renouncing of those considered un-American (Bloodsworth-Lugo & Lugo-Lugo, 2010).

The final paragraph on the opening page of *Our place on campus* (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002) summarized three examples of tragic events experienced by a gay man (Matthew), a lesbian (Gwen), and a trans man (Masen). The paragraph worked to convey the

negative, shaming, and often life-threatening impacts of heterosexism and cissexism. However, each character lacked complex subjectivity. The final paragraph read, “Matthew’s death dramatically demonstrates how unsafe it is to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) in America. Gwen’s dilemma illustrates just one of the challenges facing LGBT youth that their heterosexual peers do not encounter. Masen’s issue raises an entire new set of challenges for an underserved population” (p. 5). Through a lens calibrated exclusively for sexual orientation and gender, I was left to assume the characters’ other subjectivities. Speaking to the challenges of heterosexism and cissexism, the final paragraph textually separated heterosexism from cissexism. Both Matthew and Gwen’s stories were discursively related by the two phrases “how unsafe it is to be LGBT” and “the challenges facing LGBT youth” (p. 5). However, the text constructed Masen’s “issue,” gender transgression, though ostensibly included under the LGBT rubric, as different and raising “an entire new set of challenges” (p. 5). Heterosexism and cissexism were thus textually silo-ed as distinct and separate forms of oppression. Continuing, Masen was not marked by the block letters LGBT as were both Gwen and Matthew, again separating Masen from LGBT. Thus, though trans\*/trans was included in the LGBT rubric, the discursive movement in this opening paragraph made it evident that the T was considered as “other.” Resistance to this kind of exclusion frequently bears out in discursive moves such as denoting queer and trans\*/trans people or queer and trans\*/trans space.

This example from Chapter 3: *The development and administration of campus LGBT centers and offices: The constituencies of LGBT centers/offices* (Beemyn, 2002), reflected an essentialized identity politics framing in three distinct ways.

Initially, centers/offices almost exclusively focused on sexual identity issues...But in the last few years, many centers/offices have begun to make connections between sexual identity and gender identity, as transgender people including many transgender students have become more visible and have sought to be formally recognized by lesbian, gay, and bisexual programs and organizations (Sanlo, Rankin, Schoenberg, 2002, p. 28).



The opening sentence essentialized sexual identity as if it were stable and uniform across all social subjectivities, even as the language hinted at the separation between sexual identity and gender identity. Continuing throughout this entire section (three paragraphs), though ostensibly geared toward people who might use centers, the text focused exclusively on sexual orientation and gender identity while all other cultural and social subjectivities go unnamed (race, class, ability, and more). Further, gender identity was considered additively and sexual identity and gender identity were not recognized as mutually occurring as the verbiage literally separated them in the phrase, "...transgender students have become more visible and have sought to be formally recognized by lesbian, gay, and bisexual programs..." (p. 28). This phrasing suggested that trans\*/trans students could not also have queer sexual orientations or be a part of "lesbian, gay, and bisexual programs." Additionally, here and throughout all of these documents, the use of lesbian, gay, or bisexual cements notions of fixed sexual orientations rather than fluid sexualities that may change over time.

The next example, from Chapter 16: *The lavender leader: An inqueery into lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student leadership* shifted the book into a multicultural paradigm representing cultural and racial differences in conjunction with sexuality.

As if sexual identity issues were not enough, LGBT students deal with their various cultural and ethnic identities as well. Integrating two or more central identities are important issues for LGBT people" (Sanlo, Rankin, Schoenberg, 2002, p. 140).

The passage then describes how "Latinas/os generally identify as bisexual" (p. 140), how in Black communities men may be pressured to conform to traditional gender roles, that in both "Hispanic and Black families" (p. 141) religious influences are significant, and that in Asian cultures sexuality outside of procreation does not exist and homosexuality "can be expressed only if it doesn't interfere with the person's prescribed role" (p. 141). Cultural and racial groups were essentialized, while whiteness remained invisible but also open to possibility, which reified it as dominant and also preferred.

The next sentence of text, states that, “LGBT students face a minority stress similar to that of racial or ethnic students...” (p. 141). Queer students were once again made white through their separation from racial or ethnic students, who were certainly not LGBT. This reproduced a fictitious binary between whiteness and gayness and POC. Cultural, ethnic, and racial groups were shallowly represented always in the shadow of white homonormativity. Further, the focus remained on individual and group subjectivities with no focus on oppressive structures that act to produce these subjectivities. Finally, the additive approach to “diversity” illustrated one of the major critiques of both identity politics and multiculturalism.

### ***CAS Guidelines (2009)***

The 2009 CAS guidelines were written at a time when, nationally, organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and The Task Force focused their attention on marriage equality. A trans\*/trans-inclusive version of ENDA was reintroduced by Representative Barney Frank, the first of its kind. The country had elected our first multiracial Black President, an historic event which inflamed the U.S.’s deep racism. The 2009 CAS guidelines addressed the concept of coming out and developmental processes, both of which remain hotly contested concepts within all queer communities.

Second, some surveys rely on people to identify themselves through labels such as homosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. While some LGBT people may use these labels, many others, especially LGBT people of color, may not. Either they have decided to not attach a label to their non-heterosexual identity; or they have not journeyed through the “coming-out” process sufficiently to yet identify with a label; or they use different terminology, all of which are the experiences of LGBT college students (CAS, 2009, p. 3).

Each of the texts used the acronym LGBT, which reasonably stands in for a list of identity terms that folks may wish to avoid repeating. Understandably, this acronym grew out of the same identity political movement(s) that gave rise to campus centers. However, LGBT used

monolithically and repetitively conflates gender, sexual orientation, sexual practice, physiology, assigned sex at birth, cultural practices, and global northern discourse into an acronym that carries the regulatory baggage of U.S. dominant social subjectivities. LGBT conjures white, monosexual, cisgender, middle-class, men and then lesbians of the same statuses. Once solidified into an acronym, the identity politic ridden text assumed that I would understand the verbiage “coming out,” and that the language would be meaningful to me and other readers. Further, a racialized category (POC) was introduced authenticating me, the white audience through use of the word “they” to refer to POC. Whiteness was centered, with the white reader learning about the non-white “other.”

The phrase, “have not journeyed through the ‘coming out’ process sufficiently,” accomplished othering work in several ways. The text gave no indication that a “coming out” process may or may not be applicable to everyone. “Coming out” is a highly contested concept. For instance, Martin Manalansan (1997) has designated the LGBT movement focus on coming out as a site of racial and gender regulation. Ferguson (2005) argues “this logic presents coming out as the standard of liberation and modernity and racializes the closet as the symbol of premodern backwardness” (p. 64). This section further implied that “the coming out process” was a uniform, natural, and teleological process that all LGBT people experienced. Next, “sufficiently” indicated that perhaps some POC are deficient or insufficient, as they have not moved through the normalized and naturalized “coming out” process, which would allow one to label oneself. It further implied that there were sufficient and insufficient ways of “coming out,” but the bottom line was, it had to be done in order to liberate oneself.

Importantly, this was the only paragraph in the 35 pages of CAS standards in which the phrase “people of color” appeared. Deployed in such a manner, the phrasing “othered” QPOC people and reaffirmed white homonormativity. Finally, the text contradicts itself when it stated that some folks might use labels others may not “especially LGBT POC.” This discursive move illuminated a textual contradiction as the text conveyed that the people being labeled LGBT

were especially unlikely to use these labels. Arguably this is a form of discursive colonization in that the move demonstrated dominant white masculine authority to displace, rename, represent, and include under the guise of “doing what is right,” while maintaining all power imbalances.

This next example read like mandated civil rights/affirmative action language; however, this pragmatic reality did not change the discursive work of the word “regardless.”

LGBT programs and services must address the needs of all LGBT students regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, religion, age, socioeconomic status, disability, and degree or enrollment status. In addition, LGBT Programs and Services must plan for and recognize the diversity among the LGBT student population. LGBT Programs and Services should advocate for the human rights of LGBT persons (CAS, 2009, p. 16).

“Regardless of” read as “in spite of” or “without taking into account.” I interpreted this text as setting up an unspoken and invisible norm “the way LGBT students are treated,” and then clarifying that “the others” must be served, though *without regard* to the very things that make them different from the norm. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) categorized this type of systematic practice, when referring a group’s skin color or ethnicity, as color-blind racism. However, the concept readily applies to the consideration of other subjectivities as well. When these subjectivities were not considered, homonormative whiteness was reaffirmed. However, this example dealt scantily with multiplicity and continued to reify an invisible dominant center. This paragraph illuminated, among other subjectivities, white, male, gender normative dominance, as these subject positions persisted in silence. Furthermore, this paragraph called for LGBT programs to “plan for and recognize diversity,” (p. 15) a sentiment central to multicultural frames of recognition and representation. The author could have written “...address the needs of all LGBT students *across* all intersections of ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, religion, age, socioeconomic status, dis/ability, indigeneity, and degree or enrollment status.” In

the latest version of the CAS standards (2011), such language appears throughout the document, a testament to the efforts of a changing profession.

### **DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS**

While I make no claims that these texts represent the whole of the discourse concerning the creation of LGBT campus centers, I assert based on my experience as a director and upon this discursive analysis that these texts played centrally important roles in the theorization and creation of campus centers across the country between the years 1995-2011. My analysis is one way of reading the three texts in question and the revelations indicate substantive primary theorization of each text within and through both identity political and multiculturalist frameworks. The analysis bared out four major points. (a) Within the context of resisting and responding to heterosexism and cissexism, each text acknowledged “difference” and/or diversity, but made repetitive discursive moves fundamentally based upon the assumption of equitable racial, gender, and class power distribution. (b) Though the texts referred to difference, the references served as points of recognition and representation while white homonormativity went uninterrupted or challenged and was actually reestablished by these texts. (c) Considered separately, if at all, were forms of oppression other than heterosexism and cissexism, while within group differences were additively conceptualized. (d) Although each text acknowledged racial, ethnic, and gender diversity (not class) within queer communities, I found no indication of theorization through the lens of interlocking systems of oppression.

Emerging from struggles against heterosexism and cissexism, the texts are certainly resistance strategies unto themselves. Each text speaks volumes as to the context in which it was produced. By offering necessary recognition and representation regarding sexual orientation and gender, these works made important discursive moves to disrupt heterosexist norms, open psychic and physical space for queer folks, and shift the ways in which sexuality and gender could be discussed and contemplated, particularly within higher education.

*Establishing a LGBT resource center*, written collaboratively through the work of a non-profit queer activist organization in the mid-1990s, confronted the challenges of diverse and multiply identified queer communities. The text did so through a multicultural frame, but it was produced at a time and in a space that perhaps provided more support for an attempt at a more integrated approach. Whereas, *Our place on campus*, written in a politically divisive and threatening time, reflects a more additive and silo-ed approach to writing about multiply intersecting identifications. Finally, *The CAS Guide*, written most recently showed the least integration of material related to multiple identifications, again using the phrase “people of color” just once in 35 pages.

Arguably, the authors’ discursive choices reflect an adherence to the singularized experience of the LGBT community. While my analysis reveals the repetitive instances in which the texts replicate identity and multicultural frameworks, I caution against a dichotomous understanding of the strategies of the texts as “good” or “bad.” Given the premise that a matrix of oppression operates at every level of culture, and knowledge is produced through discursive power relations, the authors could not avoid these discursive trappings (Foucault, 1980b, Spivak, 1989). Even as the manuscripts critique the heterosexism and cissexism endemic to dominant U.S. culture, they cannot help but recreate white homonormativity because they were produced within and through these very systems. This is not to excuse work that reproduces systemic marginalization; rather, it is a note about the challenge of altering, growing, and enhancing the discursive formations and strategies available to us.

The analysis revealed embedded power relations that naturalized and reproduced the fiction of the white, cisgender, male, gay body. Not only did the texts further cement this gay mythology, but they also mapped out the creation of physical spaces and programs entrenched within the same discursive formations. While the authors may have strategically chosen to focus solely on sexual orientation, in doing so, they effectively negated complex intersections of subject position and forms of oppression, theory that put into practice makes for spaces and

programs with a singular understanding of “gayness.” Further, I maintain that the analysis of the theoretical framing discourse revealed myriad ways in which the textual commitment to identity political and multicultural frameworks failed to interrupt and resist homonormativity; rather, the discourse reinforced U.S. homonormative whiteness as scaffolding for center structure. Simply representing difference as the goal, the texts foster essentialized conceptualizations of culture and cultural differences and reaffirm unmarked, inextricably bound racial, gender, sexual, and class subjectivities of normalcy and privilege.

Much like identity politics, the texts’ multicultural framing provides and advocates for representation of difference, but fails to interrupt processes of oppression leaving privilege and power differentials untouched (Fraser, 2005; McLaren, 1993; Radhakrishnan, 2005; Young, 1997). Rather than interrupting racism and other forms of oppression, arguably the multicultural discursive approach creates new dominant (racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc.) formations within the texts themselves, thus maintaining the status quo (McLaren, 1993). Arguably, the texts discursive attempts at “inclusion” fail to deal adequately, if at all with the multiple subjectivities and interlocking systems of oppression at play in the lives of many center constituents. While doing the work to decenter heterosexuality, the texts’ multiculturalist strategies fail to radically decenter other dominant norms that co-construct heterosexism and cissexism. Consequently, essentialist ideas of subjectivities, lead to the narrowed understanding of who is queer and, consequently what kind of space and programs are necessary and useful. Without nuanced theorizing, the reproduction of invisibilized dominant norms is guaranteed. I uphold that the analysis presented here provides palpable fodder for a critical shift in the theoretical and practice frameworks that inform the philosophy and practice of campus LGBT centers.

### **Critical Praxis & Conclusion**

The quest for justice for people with queer sexualities and genders is one that requires the pursuit of justice for all. This move toward a more conscious praxis will however require a radical restructuring of the discourse framing center theorizing and practice. In order to interrupt

and resist white homonormativity we must evolve our theoretical and practice frameworks and liberate them from their initial framing in identity politics and multiculturalist frameworks which emphasize individual and group representation. Developing theory and practice conceptualized through multiplicity, resistance, and reflexive action to counter interlocking systems of oppression at every level of culture, would transform LGBT center praxis and efficacy. Feminists of color have been calling for intersectional thinking for decades, and queer scholars have taken up the conceptualizations of interlocking systems of oppression and the destabilization of binaries and their production through discursive regimes. Yet, intersectional discourse and practice within campus center literature has not been the norm. Only recently has the field begun to embrace multiplicity and intersectional praxis. Whether it is activism, an educational program, or a social service, action directly reflects the way it is theorized, or praxis. To interrupt and resist heterosexism, white homonormativity must also be resisted and interrupted. This certainly requires rethinking and retheorizing scholarship in the field as well as rethinking the entire project of LGBT campus-based centers. To ensure that queer advocacy and resource spaces engage in the work of interrupting and resisting the numerous forms of oppression enmeshed with heterosexism, practitioners should be organizing and building centers upon intersectional liberatory praxis frameworks. This type of organizing and program development is not without its exemplars within the field, for example the NYU Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Student Center, UC Berkeley's Gender Equity Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison LGBT Campus Center, UCLA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Campus Center, and the University of Washington Q Center, among others (Campus Pride, 2014).

Practices and processes that could prove promising as our field reconsiders our theorization and overall project will likely arise from organizations already making efforts to engage this kind of liberatory praxis. In the US and globally there are numerous examples of culturally specific or multiracial and multi-issue queer organizations that provide socially



transformative models from which campus centers could take their lead. Examples include, The Audre Lorde Project (ALP), Southerners on New Ground (SONG), and The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), among others. Each of these organizations holds intersectionality or interlocking systems of oppression as a core tenet. Developed by queer, trans\*/trans, and genderqueer people of color, these coalitions organize across socio-political issues pertinent to people across a multitude of historically marginalized social locations. Emblematic of this philosophy, SONG includes the following in their vision statement: “We envision a multi-issue southern justice movement that unites us across class, age, race, ability, gender, immigration status, and sexuality; a movement in which LGBTQ people – poor and working class, immigrant, people of color, rural – take our rightful place as leaders shaping our region’s legacy and future” (SONG Vision). SRLP asserts a goal of participating “in the larger movement for racial, social, and economic justice that includes gender liberation and prioritizes the issues of those most affected by the systems of oppression under which we live” (Sylvia Rivera Law Project Our Goals). Both organizations make visible their theoretical and political commitments, not just through their visions and goals but through their efforts as well.

These organizations maintain active work-project follow-through in alignment with their goals. For instance, SRLP provides free legal services to trans\*/trans, intersex and genderqueer and gender nonconforming low-income people and people of color. Additionally, SRLP focuses its legal advocacy and community organizing around the institutional structures upholding systemic forms of dominant oppression; e.g., education, criminal justice system, employment, health, immigration, intersex issues, youth, gender segregated facilities, and identity documents. Similarly, ALP sustains active resistance and change organizing around systems including welfare, immigration, dominant gay rights groups, and trans\*/trans justice.

Re-theorization might prove challenging and will likely not come without its failures to disrupt and resist interlocking systems of oppression. I have certainly experienced failed attempts, but in the efforts I have made, I have also forged stronger relationships through

dialogue and mutual healing. This would represent a critical shift toward a more just and responsive model of LGBT campus center development and organizing. Queer advocacy and resource center praxis developed in response to many communities' overwhelming experiences with heterosexism and cissexism. I know that as a center practitioner, we must continue to evolve our thinking and praxis to better understand our multiple and varied relationships to systems of privilege, power, and oppression and the many ways in which they impact our work, whether it be through institutional pressures, striving for professionalization and legitimacy, or the practicalities of balancing the theoretical and actual tensions between the need for safe(r) liberatory spaces and the operationalizing of anti-oppression frameworks in queer resource centers. Critical reflection upon the ways in which queer spaces both resist interlocking systems of oppression and simultaneously (re)produce them, should continue. Challenges and failures are inevitable as communities and educators work to dismantle productions of oppression and reshape dominant U.S. cultural norms. However, heterosexism, cissexism, and monosexism function synergistically with other oppressions in a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000) in which all of us are implicated. As LGBT and queer scholars and practitioners, let us engage in a project of critical reflexivity and action, even as we inevitably reproduce some of the very structures we aim to dismantle. For our campus centers to best serve our constituents, we must re-theorize our strategies and existence. By doing so, we are part of the movement ever closer toward some semblance of cultural transformation.

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