PAVING THE WAY: ADVICE FROM THE CAREER JOURNEYS OF LGBTQ PROFESSIONALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to LGBTQ professionals past, present, and future who sacrifice their livelihoods by existing openly with unapologetic authenticity to advance the lives and success of LGBTQ people, their institutions and professional homes, and the field of higher education.

By sharing our stories of success, challenge, and pain, may we uncover hope, resilience, and liberation that allows future generations of LGBTQ professionals to pursue, continue, and advance their personal and professional livelihoods in higher education.
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ABSTRACT

PAVING THE WAY: ADVICE FROM THE CAREER JOURNEYS OF LGBTQ PROFESSIONALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Matthew Antonio Bosch
Diane E. Eynon

Despite strides toward acknowledging and uplifting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals on college campuses, the career journeys of LGBTQ professionals in higher education remain an understudied phenomenon (Smith, 2013; Robinson & Seyforth, 2018). While many campuses have increased LGBTQ inclusion efforts, public concern has ignited nationally over the firing of LGBTQ professionals, de-funding of LGBTQ centers, and anti-LGBTQ statements and policies enacted by the current presidential administration (Boehnke, 2016; Bauer-Wolf, 2017; Locker, 2017; Savage, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2017; BBC News, 2018; The White House, 2018). With LGBTQ millennials increasing in population at a faster rate than LGBTQ adults, future generations of LGBTQ professionals in the workforce need illuminated pathways for what to expect throughout their careers as they arrive, survive, thrive, & archive throughout the years to come (Gallup, 2017; Bosch, 2018). This research study stretched across 26 states and the District of Columbia to include qualitative interviews of 33 open and out LGBTQ professionals with five or more years of experience working in higher education. Using a hybrid of purposeful selection and snowball sampling through professional associations and social media, participants
shared which experiences and factors they perceive to have helped or hindered their career journeys in higher education. Participants also shared their perceptions on efforts that institutions can and have employed to recruit, support, and retain LGBTQ professionals. Participants’ descriptions of their experiences, advice, and career journeys will help pave the way for future generations of LGBTQ professionals to be prepared with what to anticipate or consider as they continue or advance in higher education.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Despite strides toward acknowledging and uplifting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals on college campuses, the career journeys of LGBTQ professionals in higher education remain an understudied phenomenon (Smith, 2013; Robinson & Seyforth, 2018). The term “professionals” is used in this publication to refer to non-faculty employees with a primary role as staff or administrator. With LGBTQ millennials increasing in population at a faster rate than LGBTQ adults, future generations of LGBTQ professionals in the workforce need illuminated pathways for what to expect throughout their careers as they arrive, survive, thrive, & archive throughout the years to come (Gallup, 2017; Bosch, 2018).

As of April 2018, over 1,000 colleges and universities include the phrases “sexual orientation” and/or “gender identity and gender expression” within their nondiscrimination clauses as protected classes (CampusPride, 2018). While this newly included language in nondiscrimination clauses suggests an explicit written commitment for university members identifying as LGBTQ, recent events call into question how supportive colleges and universities truly are in their actions to support their LGBTQ staff and administrators.

Public concern ignited following the firing of an LGBTQ administrator from Claremont Colleges in California amidst the administrator’s social media posts expressing disgust around incidents of police brutality and the growing white supremacy in the wake of Charlottesville, VA as well as growing anti-LGBTQ sentiments and policies following the presidential election of Donald Trump (Bauer-Wolf, 2017; Savage,
2017). The White House administration enacted both rescinding of protections for transgender students surrounding Title IX, a ban on transgender servicemembers in the military, as well as support for states who enact anti-LGBTQ religious freedom laws (U.S. Department of Education, 2017; BBC News, 2018; The White House, 2018).

Under the Trump administration, a leaked memo from the Department of Health and Human Services made national headlines with the possibility of erasing the existence of transgender identities. The memo sought to create legislation that would define gender as aligning with the legal sex on a person’s birth certificate rather than how that person lives their life, regardless of gender confirmation surgeries (Green, Benner, & Pear, 2018).

The leaked memo stokes fear across LGBTQ communities and contains ominous implications for transgender, genderfluid, and nonbinary students and employees across college campuses. Under such legislation, public universities could be advised or required to assign transgender and nonbinary students to residence halls that align with a student’s sex assigned at birth. Imagine a student’s fear in being placed in an all-male residence hall who uses she/her pronouns every day, identifies as a woman, and fully presents a feminine gender expression.

Transgender and nonbinary employees could see gender neutral and universal restrooms turn back into men’s and women’s restrooms under such legislation. States such as North Carolina have successfully passed bills like House Bill 2, known as the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act, which demand that transgender people use the bathroom of their sex assigned at birth in all public accommodations including the 17
campuses of the University of North Carolina system (North Carolina General Assembly, 2016).

Debunking the myth that barring transgender people from using public bathrooms increases safety, the Williams Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles’ School of Law published a report documenting that there was no evidence that supported a link between violence in public restrooms at the hands of transgender perpetrators (Moreau, 2018; Hasenbush, Flores, & Herman, 2018).

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville defunded their diversity programming and downsized four administrators, including the director of the university’s Pride Center. The downsizing occurred due to growing debates around gender pronoun usage, an increasingly visible LGBTQ student population, education around sex and sexualities, and institutional policies and practices that would make the university more inclusive around transgender students and employees (Boehnke, 2016).

This case is particularly poignant because of the scale. In addition to the chancellor of the university system, the state legislature and governor of Tennessee were all involved in approving House Bill 2248. Through this bill, nearly $500,000 was diverted to fund scholarships for the recruitment of students of color in engineering (Rozen, 2016). The diversion of these funds resulted in the dismantling and disappearance of university offices and diversity initiatives that could aid in retaining these students of color and LGBTQ students once they arrived to campus (Locker, 2017).

As a determinant for which groups should receive funding, Tennessee legislators remarked on diversity relating to people of color and a gender binary of men and women, but not inclusive of LGBTQ people. Tennessee State Sen. Joey Hensley remarked,
"Diversity is for black, white, Asian, Latino, male, female," Hensley said. "We do need a diversity of those things, but when we get into every small group getting some special treatment, no, I don’t think we should spend money on that” (Ohm, 2017). This statement contains assumptions about the perceived numerical smallness of LGBTQ people used as a justification for excluding them from diversity funding, followed by the perception that institutions who provide diversity funding are essentially providing special treatment.

Politicians in other states have joined along recently to express vehement disdain towards diversity and inclusion efforts. New Jersey congressional candidate, Seth Grossman, won the GOP nomination for his district, despite espousing the following during the congressional debates, “The whole idea of diversity is a bunch of crap and un-American” (Salant, 2018; Tatum, 2018). His thoughts were based in a traditional model of Americanhood, achieved by people who should be able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps to find success, while promoting conformity and sameness as American values rather than strength gained from diversity or difference.

Even some universities’ responses involving heterosexual administrators’ reactions towards LGBTQ topics have caused skepticism and fear among LGBTQ university members. In response to widespread flyers encouraging LGBT suicide at Cleveland State University, the president released messages condemning homophobia only after rescinding initial messages that invoked freedom of expression regarding the postings (Bauer-Wolf, 2017).

Colleges with a religious affiliation like North Park College have fired heterosexual administrators following the performing of marriage ceremonies for
LGBTQ couples (Bauer-Wolf, 2018). Actions like these shock and worry many LGBTQ professionals who fear that they can be fired from their professional position for engaging in non-college-related activities that support LGBTQ inclusion.

The map below provides an important visual of the employment discrimination situation for LGBTQ people across all 50 states and the District of Columbia (Movement Advancement Project, 2018). Fewer than half of all states (20 plus the District of Columbia) have enacted laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and this map shows the levels, or absence, of statewide protections for LGBTQ employees in the workplace:

These laws help or hurt LGBTQ employees in the public sector, including employees in governmental offices focused on education as well as employees in public universities. Since public universities are connected directly to state governments in a way that private universities are not, flexibility exists among private universities on including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories within their
nondiscrimination clauses even if these categories are not represented as statewide protections.

In the absence of federal laws protecting LGBTQ employees, campuses have decided to forgo waiting for governmental mandates before enacting pro-LGBTQ policies related to employment (Renn, 2017). Individual cities have also passed ordinances to protect LGBTQ employees; however, several states have passed statewide laws prohibiting individual cities from creating their own ordinances around nondiscrimination policies (Bellis, 2017).

Anti-LGBTQ policies across higher education institutions have led some national organizations to highlight these institutions. Nearly 150 colleges and universities are currently listed on The Shame List, created by Campus Pride, the leading LGBTQ organization for campus climate. Colleges on the list include faith-based institutions with policies requiring students and employee to sign statements of faith that uphold anti-LGBTQ views, as well as signing statements that prohibit LGBTQ self-identification and sexual behavior. Some also hold religious exemptions from Title IX that would typically protect members of LGBTQ communities (Campus Pride, 2019).

LGBTQ professionals recognize these recent instances and subsequently wonder if they should continue a career in higher education. LGBTQ professionals are unsure what to expect throughout their professional lives and whether or not advancing in higher education is worth the potential risk. Will they be supported personally and professionally? Institutional messages received in the recruitment and hiring processes may or may not match what their lived experiences might be as LGBTQ professionals.
The purpose of this study is to examine how the experiences of LGBTQ professionals influence their decisions to continue or advance in higher education. The four research questions for this dissertation study include:

- What do LGBTQ professionals perceive as helpful for continuing and advancing their careers in higher education?
- What do LGBTQ professionals perceive as challenges, obstacles, or hindrances encountered throughout their career journeys in higher education?
- What do LGBTQ professionals perceive as helpful steps that institutions can take to support the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ professionals?
- What do LGBTQ professionals advise other LGBTQ professionals to consider while continuing or advancing their career in higher education?

This study involved semi-structured interviews of 33 professionals across 26 states and the District of Columbia. These openly out LGBTQ professionals spanned 17 public and 16 private institutions. Individual participants ranged from 5 to nearly 30 years of experience, with an average of 14.5 years for the participant pool.

The study’s participants are out LGBTQ staff or administrators with 5+ years of experience who have held two or more positions in higher education. The findings from this study can potentially benefit four key populations: 1) emerging LGBTQ professionals, graduate students, and undergraduate students, in search of what to anticipate while considering a potential lifelong career in higher education; 2) current LGBTQ professionals considering whether to remain or advance in higher education, seeking pathways or strategies for career mobility within higher education through the
stories of the participants; 3) LGBTQ professionals from fields outside higher education in search of a career change. Learning from current LGBTQ professionals could potentially help them anticipate what to expect in the higher education sector; and 4) senior-level administrators who hold institutional responsibility for the recruitment, retention, and advancement of diverse professionals. Institutions have a great deal of knowledge to gain from the collective voices of LGBTQ staff and administrators, especially colleges and universities which may not already have an established LGBTQ employee resource group on campus.

As will be shown throughout the findings and analysis, many LGBTQ professionals never received advice related to engaging in a job search or advancing their careers as LGBTQ employees. Therefore, this topic acknowledges a still-emerging history that allows room in the literature for the inclusion and passing down of advice and guidance from seasoned out LGBTQ professionals to future generations of LGBTQ professionals. By understanding the successes, struggles, and strategies for maneuvering higher education, LGBTQ professionals and the institutions that employ them will be more fully prepared to meet the growing needs of an increasingly diverse workforce. By sustaining and advancing their career development, LGBTQ professionals will continue to utilize their talents, skills, and diverse experiences to advance institutions where their identities are validated, where their contributions are valued, and where they will ultimately become victorious in their professional careers.

Discovering how higher education career journeys of LGBTQ professionals stall, steady, or advance can spotlight moments of resilience from overcoming adversity. These suggestions around what has helped or hindered professionals throughout their
careers promote a demonstrated commitment to legacy-leaving that prepares LGBTQ professionals for their ongoing careers in higher education.
CHAPTER 2

Analysis of the Literature

While literature regarding LGBTQ professionals in higher education has focused on the past 3 decades, emerging in the 1990s, campuses have formally acknowledged the organizing presence of LGBTQ students at colleges since the late 1960s (Renn, 2010). Unlike today’s student organizations, the first LGBTQ college student organizations did not include terms like “gay,” “lesbian,” “LGBTQ,” or “queer” in their organizational names. A student group known as Freedom from Repression of Erotic Expression (F.R.E.E.) rose from the University of Minnesota while students at both Columbia University and Cornell University established chapters of The Student Homophile League (F.R.E.E., 1969; Beemyn, 2003).

Two and three decades later, as visibility of LGBTQ individuals grew, institutions began to expand beyond student organizations, creating institutional LGBTQ resource centers to allow dedicated spaces, funding, and resources for a growing number of students and employees to connect across an emerging array of sexual orientations. Created mostly in the 1990s and 2000s, these resource centers offered sexual health resources to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, while protecting students from anti-LGBTQ violence, and providing a counseling and community function for students, faculty, and staff feeling isolated based on their identity. These LGBTQ centers served as key retention mechanisms to avoid students dropping out of college due to family rejection, potential homelessness, or social isolation (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002).
During the turn of the millennium, LGBTQ professionals witnessed awareness and visibility exploding across college campuses in ways that affected them directly. Examples include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes within colleges’ nondiscrimination clauses for employment, the emergence of civil unions and domestic partnership benefits, the creation of LGBTQ employee resource groups, and intentional efforts around the inclusion, hiring, and support of transgender individuals (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002).

Whereas earlier foundational studies in the 1990s focus on coming out as a professional, gaps currently exist in the literature regarding the career journeys and lived experiences of fully out LGBTQ professionals in higher education. With visibility increasing across LGBTQ families raising children, LGBTQ celebrities, and having personal connections with people who are LGBTQ, a growing acceptance of attitudes towards LGBTQ people has developed (Taylor, 2013). Colleges are gladly taking advantage of the expanding population of LGBT students as a growth market, creating further acceptance as an extension of the overall purpose of higher education (Pratt, 2014).

A core proposition of higher education involves the development and cultivation of lifelong learners and informed global citizens and community members (Benson et al, 2017). Included within this proposition is care and concern for the common good, where societies reflect and uplift the many identities of the citizens within. Therefore, the elevated purpose of higher education includes the creation of communities that are just, democratic, and equitable, where people feel a sense of purpose, voice, and commitment.
towards making a difference in others, in society, and in the world beyond (Boyer, 1994; Coye, 1997).

Despite growing LGBTQ visibility and support along with this elevated purpose around equity and uplifting diverse experiences across higher education, LGBTQ professionals continue to face a type of lavender ceiling at various points across their career journeys, whereby further professional attainment for LGBTQ professionals seems limited or blocked (Smith, 2013; Bullard, 2013).

Exploration of these professionals’ lived experiences against a backdrop of growing institutional support can provide enlightenment to seasoned LGBTQ professionals who feel less affirmed in their identities, overtaxed in their professional responsibilities as a person with diverse identities, or pigeonholed in their current career. By culling strategies from LGBTQ professionals on overcoming career obstacles and the institutional best practices they feel best support LGBTQ professionals, future generations of LGBTQ professionals can anticipate what lies ahead, preparing themselves for a possible lifelong career in higher education.

**Discrimination and Microaggressions**

LGBTQ professionals within higher education have a history of experience around perceived workplace discrimination and barriers to advancing in higher education. An early foundational study in 1991 highlights the levels of frustration and discrimination expressed across student affairs professionals who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (Cullen and Smart, 1991). Increased discrimination and difficulties within the job search process have emerged for student affairs professionals in higher education, following disclosure of employees’ sexual orientation at work (Croteau & von Destinon, 1994).
majority of LGBTQ professional staff in a similar study emphasized the influence of a college’s affirming climate on their decision-making process regarding job attainment, retention, or decision to advance their career (Croteau & Lark, 1995).

Even in professional fields outside of higher education, LGBTQ professionals experience negative interactions and career barriers among their professional workplace, including the fear of harassment, violence, termination, or loss of other career opportunities (Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996). With men and women reporting similar levels of discrimination, LGBTQ professionals in STEM-related federal agencies report lower levels of job satisfaction, fewer LGBTQ-affirming practices, and more actively negative interactions with coworkers than their straight colleagues do (Cech & Pham, 2017). Contributing to the negative environment were LGBTQ jokes, experiencing social exclusion among peers in the workplace environment, and a lack of institutional policies and practices explicitly supporting LGBTQ partners, spouses, families, and clients.

Similarly, in a quantitative study conducted by several LGBTQ equality and human rights groups across nearly 3,000 LGBTQ employees, higher levels of perceived discrimination manifested in employees feeling fewer opportunities for advancement, negatives attitudes about the workplace, and overall job dissatisfaction (Bell et al., 2011). Psychological impacts from perceived anti-LGBTQ climate can led to a lack of professional productivity, damaging both the employee and employer.

In response to negative experiences in the workplace, professional associations including the American Bar Association have created strategic plans and toolkits focused on advancing the inclusive workplace environment of LGBTQ professionals (American
Focused attention on supporting LGBTQ physicians, staff, and medical students aligns with the formalized existence of LGBTQ advisory committees created in medical professional associations (American Medical Association, 2018).

LGBTQ-specific professional associations have emerged to prepare graduate students for entering lifelong careers in law and business (National LGBT Bar Association, 2017; Reaching Out MBA, 2018). Social services, military branches, police departments, emergency personnel services, and individual governmental departments have begun to implement plans for increasing LGBTQ inclusion among employees as well as the providing of services for LGBTQ clients (Baillie & Gedro, 2009).

Microaggressions are the smaller daily interactional paper cuts that can become a cumulative wound. In linking racism with heterosexism, researchers in a qualitative study found that participants expressed social discrimination both from being seen as too LGBTQ within a particular racial community or too ethnic to be accepted fully by a majority-white LGBTQ community (Balsam et al., 2011). A cumulative negative impact can result from a barrage of microinvalidations and microaggressions sustained over time (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). These microinvalidations can include the misuse of identity terms, gender pronouns, social exclusion from gatherings, or the removal of LGBTQ-related topics from workplace conversations. LGBTQ people of color are often left with the need to carve out distinct niches for themselves which can serve as both beneficial for their own mental health while being perceived as simultaneously self-segregating among university communities made up of majority-identity employees. These cumulative impacts can set a difficult scene for sustaining and advancing personal self-worth and professional advancement.
Acknowledging intersectionality across gender and sexuality, women identifying as LGBTQ face gender discrimination in the workplace as well as sexual orientation discrimination. For women, and especially lesbians of color, microaggressions appear as an everyday reality of invalidation and needing to prove oneself in multiple arenas at work (Sue, 2010). In discussions around corporate America where discussions of LGBTQ professionals center on the experiences of gay men, the workplace experiences of lesbian professionals appears underexamined as a seemingly invisible subset of employees whose experiences are catalogued and uplifted (Gedro, 2010; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996).

Considering the potential for lifelong financial implications, women’s pay levels are likely to be lower than pay levels of male colleagues. Combining pay inequities with the potential lavender ceiling, lesbian professionals blocked from rising professionally will face a larger disadvantage regarding salary (Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2007). More research will need to occur on the impacts of intersectional identities on career mobility among LGBTQ professionals in higher education.

**Lavender Ceilings**

Navigating the workplace as open and out employees, one particular way that LGBTQ professionals perceive discrimination in the workplace involves the concept of the lavender ceiling. In an article regarding the Walt Disney Company, lesbian employees of the global company claimed they could not professionally rise because of a potential lavender ceiling (Hamilton, 1993). The lavender ceiling refers to the tendency of many companies, organizations, and institutions to avoid promoting LGBTQ
professionals into levels of advanced or senior leadership, whether intentional or not (Anastas, 1998; Tindall & Waters, 2012).

The concept of glass ceilings as invisible barriers for women to rise professionally has been around since Marilyn Loden coined the phrase during a 1978 panel on women’s leadership (BBC News, 2017). Extending the concept of the glass ceiling to impact people who identify as LGBTQ, the concept of lavender ceiling includes the perceived barriers facing LGBTQ professionals in organizations whose biases and structures prevent them from promoting professionals with an LGBTQ identity to positions of increased responsibility, authority, or prestige (Swan, 1995; Buddel, 2011). Due to intersectionality across perceived transgression of gender norms as well as transgression of sexuality norms, the lavender ceiling in many professions may be more unbreakable than the glass ceiling (Unger, 2008).

Outside of higher education, many look to companies and the corporate realm to search for instances of LGBTQ leadership at top levels. To date, only three Fortune 500 companies are led by Chief Executive Officers who identify as LGBTQ: Tim Cook leads Apple, James Fitterling leads The Dow Chemical Company, and Beth Ford leads Land O’Lakes. Important to note, only 25 of the 500 companies are led by women, which further makes Beth Ford’s ascension as the sole lesbian CEO of a Fortune 500 company both a rarity and exciting opportunity to consider the potential changing futures of what the leadership mold looks like (Carpenter, 2018).

A handful of LGBTQ executives can be found in senior levels of leadership, known as the C-suite, outside of Fortune 500 companies including Martine Rothblatt of United Therapeutics, Jan Siegmund of ADP, Mark Addicks of General Mills, Joseph
Evangelisti at JP Morgan, Sally Susman at Pfizer, and Jonathan Mildenhall of AirBnB (Kidd, 2017). While representation in the C-suite may exist for a handful of LGBTQ executives, these companies are often limited among their leadership to a single LGBTQ executive. That person is typically someone who is white and cisgender, which has implications for LGBTQ people of color and people identifying as transgender, genderfluid, or nonbinary ascending into senior leadership ranks.

Discrimination towards LGBTQ professionals can manifest in both direct and indirect ways. The spectrum of these ways includes termination, stalling out in a dead-end position, fewer pay raises, delayed promotions, decreased responsibilities, or in a backlash against pro-diversity policies known as blowback (Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2007; Hill, 2009).

Within higher education, studies of LGBTQ senior administrators confirm these instances of discrimination, with participants sharing that they could not be fully open to the public about their sexuality for fear of professional consequences (Renn, 2003; Smith, 2013). Perceptions of career pigeonholing based on LGBTQ identity manifested from a study of more than 20 LGBTQ higher education professionals in California. Participants of color expressed feelings of being personally and professionally stretched across racial, gender, and sexual identities, contributing to feelings that the mixture of their identities somehow hindered their career mobility, despite university messaging that diversity is a core component of their organization’s mission and values (Smith, 2013).

Rising in the ranks of higher education, diversity among college presidents and senior leadership needs to reflect the diversity among employees, as well as students and stakeholders, who comprise the campus community (Eckel & Hartley, 2011; Kezar &
Eckel, 2008). Additional research may highlight if a perceived lack of LGBTQ professionals among the most senior ranks, including at the presidential level, contributes to the lavender ceiling, preventing LGBTQ professionals from reaching higher ambitions for their career journeys.

Finding a large number of LGBTQ professionals in college presidencies is difficult. As of 2007, only three gay presidents were open to the public, and all of them were men (Fain, 2007). As the groundswell expanded, an emerging group organized a meeting in 2010 with nine presidents and their partners attending the first meeting in Chicago to create two new groups: LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education and the Partners of Presidents. Though only nine presidents could attend, the group in 2010 had grown to nearly 25 presidents (LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education, 2018).

Recognizing a slighter advantage for white men to be out, the group hoped to be a beacon of support across identities, reaching out to encompass women presidents and presidents of color (Fain, 2010).

Even with a focused study on gay and lesbian presidents in higher education, some presidents expressed they still were not openly out to the public (Bullard, 2013). Boards of trustees hire presidents, and prejudice may grow stronger as professionals rise higher across levels of higher education administration (Jaschik, 2010). Despite organizations and colleges adopting pro-LGBTQ policies, gaps in the presence of LGBTQ professionals in senior leadership persist. Highlighting LGBTQ college presidents often requires a duality of credibility, acknowledging presidents as leaders who happen to be LGBTQ, in addition to acknowledging their pioneer status as an LGBTQ president. Denying this duality perpetually qualifies their presidency, thereby
dismissing or negating the full extent of leadership, professional experiences, and grit that bolster LGBTQ professionals towards achieving their college presidency (Masterson, 2011).

The telling of stories related to advancing into senior levels of leadership in higher education requires institutions to provide work environments and opportunities where LGBTQ professionals feel they can succeed. In order to have an opportunity to break through the lavender ceiling, LGBTQ professionals have to not feel overly burdened by the combined responsibilities across their paid professional positions and additional responsibilities they may be asked, expected, or required to complete because they possess LGBTQ identities.

**Cultural Taxation**

Cultural taxation refers to the summation of additional and often unwritten job expectations that diverse professionals undertake, which do not burden their peer colleagues with majority identities. Stemming from faculty of color, these additional requests, expectations, or assignments include serving on multiple committees as a voice of inclusion, taking on additional student mentees of color even if not in their academic field, and helping to educate white colleagues about improving diversity among their department, their curriculum, and with their students (Padilla, 1994).

As an increasingly visible phenomenon, cultural taxation was further acknowledged and validated by the American Council on Education. Their report on diversity across academics highlighted the growing levels of commitments and expectations that faculty of color encountered as a consequence of employment (ACE, 1997). Research studies extend these findings with faculty experiencing the need to over-
prove their academic qualifications while simultaneously being requested to manage their colleagues’ insensitive behavior with relation to diversity and inclusion (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012).

Even when bringing recognition and positive publicity to the university for their diversity and inclusion work, faculty expressed feeling less advancement professionally for engaging in such activities which were not directly linked to research but rather to their identities (Alexander-Snow & Johnson, 1998; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Martinez, Chang, and Welton, 2017). As faculty rise in the ranks, they are privy to a wider array of accessible resources than faculty who were more recently hired. This allows senior faculty to have more flexibility in their discretionary time due to the amassing of advantages over time, including political capital (Clark & Lewis, 1985; Porter & Umbach, 2001).

Cultural taxation doesn’t always result in time taken away from the most primary tasks at hand. For instance, a study of faculty of color found that while cultural taxation was occurring, the time spent doing non-research activities did not have significant impact on their primary research productivity (Johnson, Kuykendall, & Laird, 2005). Rather, faculty of color were spending even more hours doing university work across both their research activities and identity-based non-research activities, resulting in a workaholic situation where self-care, reflection, community involvement, and personal time with family took a back seat to university engagement.

Only very recently have researchers conducted stories to draw comparisons across the transferability of cultural taxation with LGBTQ professionals. A qualitative study found vast additional responsibilities that LGBTQ professionals in higher education were
expected to complete, including the reviving of LGBTQ student organizations and employee affinity groups, the mentoring of LGBTQ students, and serving as a diversity voice on campus committees (Kortegast & van der Toorn, 2018). LGBTQ professionals felt this seemingly endless list of responsibilities was unfortunately justified by employers due to the amorphous “other duties as assigned” expectation, listed on many job descriptions.

Therefore, if faculty of color and LGBTQ professionals might face cultural taxation, then research must be provided to explore this for LGBTQ people of color. The inability to dissociate race from gender, gender from sexuality, or sexuality from race can manifest in cultural taxation due to the combined interactions of oppressions across racism, sexism, and homophobia. The term intersectionality describes the ways in which oppressions intertwine, often creating a far more exacerbated impact on a person’s experience as a member of more than one marginalized identity (Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality is different from general diversity or multiplicity, in that Crenshaw’s model specifically addresses the impacts of racism, classism, homophobia and other prejudices as experienced with people across multiple minority identities. Intersectionality is not a double jeopardy concept but rather has an exponential impact on the lives of people with two or more minority identities (Greenman & Xie, 2008). Research is needed to provide a critical mass of literature regarding the exponential number of implications around cultural taxation for LGBTQ people of color.

While the concept of cultural taxation originated through the excavation of stories and experiences from faculty of color, room exists in the literature to continue validating and illuminating the existence and transferability of the cultural taxation concept among
LGBTQ professionals. Through this research study, LGBTQ professionals discussed their experiences with cultural taxation, given the limited number of visibly out faculty and staff equipped with the skills, life experiences, and willingness to engage students, faculty, and staff in LGBTQ inclusion efforts.

**Improving Climate by Addressing Systemic Inequities**

Institutional policies and practices have been shown to improve the quality of experience for LGBTQ university members (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy, 2009; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011; Quaye & Harper, 2014). The policies and practices can improve workplace climate for LGBTQ professionals by addressing systemic barriers. Hiring, supporting, and retaining LGBTQ professionals may be achieved through widespread changes that affect a great number of employees, including non-discrimination policies prohibiting LGBTQ discrimination, organization-wide education around LGBTQ topics and identities, and creation of LGBTQ employee groups to help professionals participate fully in their workplaces and organizations (McNaught, 1993). Additional suggestions from the participants in McNaught’s study included public statements of support around LGBTQ issues, while creating a supportive balance across the needs of individual LGBTQ professionals, the organization’s internal culture, and the needs of external stakeholders, clients, and community partners.

Disclosure of an employee’s sexual orientation relates closely with discrimination in the workplace, with impacts on changing the culture or climate of a workplace focused on the level of organizational policies (written) and practices (unwritten) that either explicitly included or inadvertently excluded gay and lesbian employees (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). However, being open about one’s LGBTQ identity is becoming more
common than in prior decades, aligning with increasing visibility and awareness of LGBTQ identities throughout society (Gallup, 2017; Taylor, 2013).

In the 2000s, broad-based institutional approaches heightened visibility by combining LGBTQ diversity efforts with university departments that whose missions are not specifically diversity-centered. Institutions embraced the advent of LGBTQ faculty and staff resource groups through collaborations with Human Resources, LGBTQ alumni networks with Alumni Affairs, and presence at LGBTQ-specific college fairs with Admissions departments (Campus Pride, 2018). Many public and private universities gathered faculty, staff, students, and alumni to walk in solidarity as out and proud LGBTQ university groups in local, regional, and national pride parades (Bruce, 2014).

**Rankings and Resources**

Among the university rankings race, indices developed to capture, measure, assess, and rank the breadth and depth of LGBTQ inclusion efforts across college campuses. Campus Pride, the national organization for advancing LGBTQ campus climate, releases an annual index and ranking across higher education institutions, related to their levels of LGBTQ inclusion. The Campus Pride Index annually ranks more than 300 colleges based on their programs, policies, and practices that set up LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff for optimal success at their colleges and universities (Campus Pride, 2018).

Institutions self-report their resources based on eight key categories across academic life, student life, health and wellness, among others. Areas directly affecting LGBTQ employees on the Campus Pride Index include access to benefits, health care
options, nondiscrimination clauses, the existence of employee resource groups, and dedicated training for employees around LGBTQ topics and identities.

Prospective students, families, and employees can access these indices online to discover possible LGBTQ health care options, dedicated institutional LGBTQ centers, access to students scholarships, listings of employee benefits, and a listing of LGBTQ-related groups to join.

The realm of health care benefits has expanded to include medically necessary treatments and surgeries for transgender students and employees. The phrase medically necessary includes ongoing access to hormones such as testosterone as well as financial support for surgeries that are important to many employees who are undergoing gender transition (Beemyn & Rankin, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016). While 108 colleges and universities provide hormones and/or gender-affirming surgeries for students, only 55 colleges and universities provide similar levels of medically necessary treatment for employees (Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 2018).

College Consensus is another organization that gathers information on institutional resources provided, eliciting ranked measurements of campuses in terms of LGBTQ inclusion and institutional commitment. Given high percentages of homeless LGBTQ youth and the prevalence of violence towards LGBTQ youth, colleges need to create places and spaces for students to feel safe in their queer bodies without fear of harassment or violence (College Consensus, 2019). This includes focused efforts to increase gender inclusive housing, mental health resources for LGBTQ students and employees, and the number of physical spaces and meeting groups that affirm their individual identities and collective communities.
Employee resource groups (ERGs) provide key spaces for university employees to build community, find mentorship, and cultivate support. Additionally, employee resource groups allow for staff and faculty to provide voice and investment in developing policies and practices that can improve the lives and workplaces of LGBTQ professionals (Great Place To Work and Pride at Work Canada, 2017).

Presence of LGBTQ ally trainings across college campuses have allowed faculty and staff to become active advocates for advancing LGBTQ inclusion efforts (Beemyn et al., 2005). Ally training programs create spaces for faculty and staff to learn about LGBTQ identities and discuss scenarios on the experiences of LGBTQ students inside and outside of the classroom (Poynter & Tubbs, 2008, Alvarex & Schneider, 2008). While these program contribute to building positive climate for LGBTQ students and employees, conflicting views arise in terms of the ability of ally training programs to spark long-term institutional change (Woodford et al., 2014).

By sharing stories of resilience, advancing career journeys, and breaking through lavender ceilings, participants in my research can shine light on how to maneuver stages of career development from arriving & surviving to thriving & archiving, leaving legacies to prepare the next generations of LGBTQ professionals to come.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

Research Questions & Study Design

Identity work involves both the excavation and weaving together of personal and professional stories to provide a fuller picture for how people across identities of difference describe their career journeys. Engaging in qualitative analysis provides participants the opportunity to explain their stories in detail while also highlighting nuances in the choices they have made throughout their higher education career journey. Whereas a quantitative analysis can highlight broader patterns across a large number of individual groups, qualitative analysis can enlighten us about each individual’s choices and the circumstances leading to these choices.

For this study, participants were asked to describe their career journeys as well as professional instances or resources that helped or hindered their careers in higher education. Throughout these descriptions, participants shared a variety of ideas for advancing resources, organizational structures, policies, and practices that can help institutions and their senior leadership advance goals for recruiting and retaining LGBTQ professionals. Participants also provided advice and useful strategies to help LGBTQ professionals anticipate what they might expect throughout their careers and how best to prepare themselves for continued success and advancement in higher education.

Qualitative analysis will help shed light on these four research questions:

- What do LGBTQ professionals perceive as helpful for continuing and advancing their careers in higher education?
• What do LGBTQ professionals perceive as challenges, obstacles, or hindrances encountered throughout their career journeys in higher education?

• What do LGBTQ professionals perceive as helpful steps that institutions can take to support the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ professionals?

• What do LGBTQ professionals advise other LGBTQ professionals to consider while continuing or advancing their career in higher education?

Across the past two decades, research studies exploring the careers of out LGBTQ professionals in higher education have utilized qualitative methods (Renn, 2003; Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2007; Bullard, 2013; Smith, 2013; Pryor, 2017). These studies have included excavation of lived experiences through a phenomenological approach to qualitative analysis.

Within a phenomenological analysis, participants’ stories serve as the telling of events and actions that have unfolded (Czarniawska, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). These events and actions help to inform the surrounding phenomenon being examined by the researcher. Phenomenological studies help researchers uncover commonalities or differences across concepts that may be experienced by a group of individuals, as opposed to an in-depth concentrated narrative analysis of just one or two individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Unearthing additional layers of the human experience often demands focused time where participants can fully describe their experiences, journeys, and how their own sense of openness around their identities may have hindered or bolstered their career journeys. In such cases, a qualitative study conducted through phenomenological inquiry
allows for a richer archaeological dig of the stories and experiences to be uncovered. Themes can emerge from participants’ narratives that can help others understand the complexities that, in this case, would influence their professional careers in a way that helps or hinders their advancement.

Social constructivism, also known as interpretivism, informed this study’s research design. Participants were asked to explore their career journeys as well as their identities. Participants expressed linkages between their identities and their professional paths. The telling of their stories required me, as a researcher, to interpret their linkages as authentically as possible. Becoming an interpreter of experience, this style of research inquiry demands deciphering subjective meanings and codes, and analyzing patterns to name and explore the complexities of participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Because the participants expressed identities of difference around sexual orientation or gender identity while also suggesting ways to improve the very systems that provide them paychecks, a transformative framework was also useful. This involves participatory action and the acknowledgment that people’s experiences cannot dissociate from their individual identities of difference nor from the collective institutions and societies that they navigate (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). By reflecting the hierarchies and power dynamics that exist across spheres of our society, such as higher education, the sharing of knowledge and life experiences contributes to a more resilient society (Mertens, 2003; Mertens, 2014).

Qualitative analysis allowed for opportunities where participants expressed the extent of institutional messages around LGBTQ inclusion received during the recruitment and hiring process. Participants acknowledged whether the continuation of these
institutional messages occurred while employed or if any discrepancies across the initial messages existed from pre-hiring through the lived experience during employment. The garnering of advice and strategies for overcoming potential challenges and for leveraging opportunities can aid future LGBTQ professionals as well as the institutions committed to recruiting, retaining, and advancing them.

**Participant Selection**

In order to be eligible for this study, participants met the following criteria:

1) Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer

2) Open and out about their LGBTQ identities at work

3) Currently employed by a college or university in a primarily staff or administrator role

4) Experienced at least 1 job change in higher education (have held at least 2 consecutive staff or administrator jobs at colleges and universities)

Because many people may perceive the “Q” to mean either “Queer” or “Questioning,” by spelling out LGBTQ for Criteria #1, I eliminated potential participants who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, along with questioning their openness or outness in Criteria #2. Highlighting the primarily staff or administrator role allowed participants to be anywhere along their career journeys, from entry-level staff to senior-level administrators. Faculty were not included in the participant pool, due to the differing career advancement protocols that included in the promotion and tenure process on the academic side of institutions.

Including the term “primarily” in Criteria #3 acknowledged the staff/faculty divide does not manifest itself in stereotypical silo fashion. At many colleges and
universities, many staff or administrators are able to hold official faculty rank and teach academic courses, despite the majority of their everyday work focusing on the staff or administrator side. To avoid the potential for administrators with faculty rank to feel excluded, I explicitly included the term “primarily” before “staff or administrator role” in Criteria #3. Academic administrators were included, as they often held “dean” or “assistant dean” titles with a primarily administrative role.

With the crux of this research focusing on career journeys, Criteria #4 signaled a call for LGBTQ professionals who have experienced at least one job change. This excluded professionals who are currently in their very first position in higher education.

**Data Collection**

This study involved semi-structured interviews of 33 professionals across 26 states and the District of Columbia. These openly out LGBTQ professionals spanned 17 public and 16 private institutions. Individual participants ranged from 5 to 28 years of experience, with an average of 14.5 years for the participant pool.

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews ranging in length from 50-to-90 minutes, to allow flexibility for appropriate follow-up questions based on participants’ responses. In recruiting participants, explicitly publicizing for 45-minute interviews allowed the opportunity to cast a wider net of participants, for whom the appearance of “60 to 90 minutes” may have sparked a visceral barrier from participating, due to higher education professionals’ packed schedules of student interactions, committee meetings, and other campus happenings.

Important to note, all interviews continued past the 45-minute mark, at the request of the interviewee in order for them to share more of their stories. Participants shared
their full experiences and stories without feeling cut off or time-bound to a particular time length. No interviews ended prior to the completion of questions in the interview protocol, which shows the investment and interest among these participants to self-guide the interviews through to completion.

Geographically, the participants covered 26 states as well as the District of Columbia. The eastern half of the United States was represented more than the western half. The Upper Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and South/Southeast regions were well represented, in addition to the West Coast. Two professionals participated from Colorado, Wisconsin, New York, and Massachusetts. Four professionals participated from California.
Racially and ethnically, 36% of the participants identifying as people of color. Among the participants of color, 5 identified as African-American, 4 as Asian-American, 3 as Multiracial, 2 as Latino, and 1 as Indigenous.

Regarding terms used to describe sexual orientation, 53% identified as gay, 24% identified as queer, 13% identified as bisexual or pansexual, 5% identified as lesbian, and 2% identified as asexual.

Regarding terms used to describe gender identity, 21% of the participants identified themselves with terms including transgender, genderfluid, nonbinary, or agender. These participants used they/them as genderless pronouns. An additional 9% identified as female, solely using she/her pronouns.

In connecting sexual orientation and gender identity terms, it is important to note that the term “gay” was used by people identifying their gender identity solely as male, while the sexual identity terms of “queer,” “bisexual,” and “pansexual” were used by people identifying across gender identities including female, male, transgender, and nonbinary.

Participants’ years of experience working in higher education ranged from 5 years to 28 years, with an average of 14.5 years. Eight of the participants had 20+ years of experience, 12 participants had 10-19 years of experience, and 13 had 5-9 years of experience.

Ten of the participants held senior-level administrative roles, many of which had titles including “vice president,” “dean,” or “senior director” within their job titles, while 16 held mid-level positions with “director” within their job titles, while an additional 7
participants held entry-level positions with “coordinator,” “assistant director,” or “residence director” in the job title.

These professionals spanned many functional areas across higher education, including student life, academic administration, advancement and alumni relations, residence life, study abroad and international centers, centers focused on race and ethnicity, centers focused on gender and sexualities, student activities, career services, graduate program administration, and administrative positions within the provost’s and president’s offices.

### Job Functional Areas of Participants:

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Regarding institutional types, participants represented 17 public institutions and 16 private institutions. Faith-based institutions are included within the group of private
institutions. Community colleges are included within the group of public institutions. Student enrollment at these institutions ranged very widely, from fewer than 1,000 students into the tens of thousands of students.

To recruit this group of study participants, I created a posting for circulation across professional networks and organizations, including two large generalist higher education organizations, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Another generalist higher education platform from which this research study gathered participants was LGBTQIA+ Professionals in Higher Education, which includes LGBTQ-identified professionals whose functional area is beyond student affairs (e.g. advancement, career services.)

The Consortium of LGBTQ Professionals in Higher Education also served as an important space to gain participants who were more active in LGBTQ inclusion work on campuses, often connected as affiliates or direct staff for LGBTQ centers on college campuses. Additional social media platforms that proved fruitful to gather participants included Facebook groups for Student Affairs Professionals, the Coalition for Sexuality and Gender Identities, and Queer and Trans People of Color in Higher Education.

Snowball sampling provided a limited number of additional opportunities to gather more individuals, as participants suggested other potential professionals to connect with this study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). While this technique proved useful for expanding the number of overall participants, I made certain to use it minimally in order to avoid a critical mass of participants who knew each other (and may have held similar
identities or experiences) which might overemphasize some experiences and identities while de-emphasizing others throughout the study.

As a result of snowball sampling, several participants shared the posting to their professional associations including NAFSA: International Association of Educators, the Rainbow Special Interest Group, and the Coalition for Men & Masculinities. Several members of my doctoral cohort also sent the posting to their colleagues, college employee email lists, and other professional association listserves to elicit further participants.

To diversify the participant-gathering process, I employed the concept of purposeful selection whereby I created groups of senior-level professionals to invite to participate who possessed a specific set of experiences or expertise in order to fill gaps (Light, 1990). Since higher education employs a greater number of entry-level professionals than senior administrators, and LGBTQ professionals tend to be more visible in entry-level positions, random selection created a sizable participant pool of younger or less seasoned LGBTQ professionals.

Therefore, purposeful selection helped to gather professionals in higher-level ranks that my initial pool lacked. I wanted to strike a balance of highlighting patterns across professionals with different characteristics while also highlighting individual differences or idiosyncracies that may arise given a different institutional or job context.

Prior to this study, many conversations with directors of LGBTQ centers across the U.S. have highlighted the much larger population of out LGBTQ professionals represented in entry-level positions rather than senior-level positions. The likelihood that entry-level and mid-level professionals would participate to a greater degree than senior-
level administrators warranted intentional outreach to senior administrators identifying as LGBTQ. Through purposeful selection, I identified gaps and reached out to senior administrators who were absent through the initial recruiting stages.

Another area where purposeful selection proved useful to this study involved locating a sizable number of LGBTQ professionals outside of traditional student affairs fields. Professionals in alumni relations, advancement/development and career services provided interesting data to compare and contrast alongside the perceived career experiences of LGBTQ professionals in student affairs fields such as residence life and student activities.

Purposeful selection helped to diversify the participant pool further in relation to geographic diversity. While the primary open calls resulted in a very diverse geographic swath of participants, the purposeful selection of senior-level administrators and participants connected to states not already represented ultimately contributed to a wider array of states being represented.

Data Analysis

For analyzing the data, interview transcription of recorded interviews and open coding guided much of the analysis. Through reviewing the interview transcripts, recurring phrases, sentiments, and themes exemplified patterns across participants’ experiences. Within the data, I interpreted points of importance through this style of open coding, a style which helps researchers determine patterns and categories that can be compared, contrasted, or highlighted as salient (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Maxwell, 2013).
Codes focusing on key concepts were initially drawn from concepts discovered through the literature review. To align with research question #1, codes included connections to helpful items, including outness, authenticity, supervisors, mentors, support networks, graduate school, and professional associations. Aligning with research question #2, codes related to challenges highlighted career advancement issues connected to lavender ceilings, mention of additional responsibilities linked to cultural taxation, aspects of multiple identities relating to intersectionality, or challenges manifested through microaggressions and discrimination. By finding similarities for LGBTQ participants, the transferability of these concepts sheds light to provide a fuller picture of the career journeys of LGBTQ professionals.

For research question #3, codes related to institutional resources included initiatives, policies, and practices that participants found helpful, as well as their interactions with universities related to website postings, online research, the job search process, and connections with senior leadership. For research question #4, codes related to both advice giving and advice receiving, as well as helpful strategies for navigating and advancing a career in higher education.

An important piece with this coding involves the exploration of etic and emic categories. Etic categories involve terminology that the researcher uses, such as “lavender ceiling” whereby emic categories involve terminology the participant openly uses, such as “dead-end job.” Researchers must acknowledge words and phrases that can connect to hypothetical or theorized concepts because participants may not recognize or use the same research concept language in describing their experiences (Smith & Shepard, 1998; Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Therefore, the interview questions located in
Appendix B tie firmly to the analysis in recognizing and addressing these distinctions across key concepts, codes, and points of salience among participants’ lived experiences.

Validity and Ethical Considerations

In addition to participants’ stories, I triangulated the data through institutional website research. Among each participant’s institution, I searched for information on the institution’s levels of LGBTQ inclusion such as visible non-discrimination policies, employee benefits, and access to groups for LGBTQ employees to join. Engaging in this type of online document review further corroborated what employees perceived as helpful LGBTQ resources that their institutions publicize as part of their inclusion efforts for LGBTQ employees and students.

Paired with individual websites from colleges and universities, the Campus Pride Index and College Consensus rankings provided important rubrics regarding which programs, policies, and practices each institution implemented or did not offer to members of its campus community. These indices provide additional data points related to the levels of LGBTQIA inclusion and action steps taken to create change beyond written statements of a commitment to diversity. The indices provide not only individual strategies but also a collective snapshot of progress, or lack thereof, related to the overall picture of a college’s LGBTQIA inclusion.

Given that the lived experiences of LGBTQ professionals in higher education rely heavily upon the contextual circumstances of the institutions in question, the study warranted further validity in a number of areas by implementing thick description. Thick description involves the extrapolation of a larger narrative that calls for descriptive
elements of physical movement, visceral emotionality, and the surrounding context of a particular quote (Denzin, 2001; Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

By expounding upon a thick description of participants’ experiences, a stronger sense of validity can result in ways that paraphrasing and truncated quotes might minimize the impact on the lived experiences of participants. To avoid a barrage of lengthy quotes and thick description, this technique is used throughout the findings section to emphasize points of salience. These validation strategies allow participants to express meaning-making throughout their experiences.

Conducting a pilot study prior to the dissertation, I witnessed the original interview protocol in action and subsequently made alterations. During the pilot study, I completed 20-question interviews in 15-30 minutes and missed opportunities to create a deeper interview with richer data. Increasing both the number of primary questions and follow-ups based on participants’ responses provided depth and richness about their lived experiences as LGBTQ professionals. To keep the door open for future contact, I completed each of the interviews by requesting participants’ approval for the possibility of re-contacting them in the future to clarify or gain further information. Each participant gave verbal approval, signifying their full understanding of the shared agreement and possible continued connection for the future of this research.

**Positionality of the Researcher**

As a researcher, I am interested in discovering both helpful and challenging experiences that LGBTQ professionals may encounter. This contributes to my more personal understanding of how areas like race, class, gender, sexuality, and geographic
backgrounds combine and collide as they illuminate different pathways for an LGBTQ higher education professional’s life, vocation, and career journeys.

Growing up, I personified the underdog. Parents never attending college, I grew up a queer Latino kid in a mixed-race, working-class household. A first-generation college student, I did not know of people who even attended or graduated college, much less have any knowledge about becoming a professional employed by higher education institutions.

I did not even know higher education was a professional field until my senior year of college when a supervisor and mentor mentioned this possibility, so I had aimlessly wandered among a hidden curriculum while peers had plenty of college knowledge to help navigate. I used education, emotion, and skills as resilience mechanisms for overcoming homelessness following rejection based on my identities.

Stories of resilience inspire me because I have been in places that felt like a dead-end or pigeonhole from which I might never gain freedom. For professionals who seem stuck, success stories exist out there that can help us get unstuck and gain new clarity for our professional calling.

In telling the stories of LGBTQ professionals who have succeeded, I place the megaphone on the often disenfranchised, proclaiming, “We beat the odds. Here are our stories, here’s what we faced (and may still face), and while this guidance may not work for every person, here’s what we did to succeed and advance.”

In paying it forward, I engage in an informative and soul-searching service to provide understanding, healing, and legacy-leaving of strategies and successes from one underdog to another.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

From the 33 interviews conducted, participants expressed how their careers were helped or hindered, steady or stagnant, and what they felt future generations of LGBTQ professionals and their institutions should be doing to continue, support, and advance their careers within higher education. In the findings that follow, participants first began by responding to questions around their levels of outness and authenticity in their personal and professional lives. The sections that follow will address each of the four research questions.

Regarding the first research question, LGBTQ professionals discussed what had contributed to the sustaining and advancement of their careers. Responses received from LGBTQ professionals showed seven major theme areas that benefitted their ability to continue and advance in higher education. These theme areas include: a) authenticity; b) privilege; c) supervisors; d) mentors; e) professional associations and conferences; f) helpful support networks across colleagues and community; and g) attending graduate school.

Authenticity

All LGBTQ professionals interviewed were already open and out about their LGBTQ identities while in their current positions. In fact, the overwhelming majority of professionals expressed that they had been out since entering their first full-time professional position in higher education. Throughout their career journeys, LGBTQ professionals expressed authenticity regarding their levels of openness and outness
around their LGBTQ identities as aiding their personal and professional journeys and driving some of their professional decision making processes.

“I'm a big fan of authenticity. The more you can be who you are, then more students and other people get to realize the real you. People can tell when you're faking it. People can tell when you're not being honest with that. If you get flack for that, maybe that's not the place for you and you've got to try to change that. That's within your power or your decision making process.”

In the above quote, Jamie, a mid-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, expressed being open about her identities from the outset of her professional career. In expressing a level of outness to students, colleagues, and superiors, LGBTQ professionals serve as role models while also using the responses as a bellwether for determining climate within their institution. Depending on the perceived climate or show of support, these factors influenced whether these professionals would stay or consider leaving their institution.

In describing levels of outness, participants shared congruence across outness in the workplace and outness in their daily lives. This allowed them to see their outness in personal and professional lives as linked and connected, rather than distinct or dissociated:

“I actually have made choices very specifically on my career that I knew would be safe and comfortable for me relatively to be out because I spent the first 18 years of my life pretty much keeping myself protected because I felt like I had to. I just couldn't imagine myself doing work where I had to continue to feeling that.”

In the above quote, Forest, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, seamlessly connects outness across his teenage years to outness throughout his professional life. In bringing their whole selves to work, some professionals expressed that disclosure of their LGBTQ identity in the workplace occurred in unexpected ways, due to a specific instance or incident on the job that
sparked their identities. A popular exercise among higher education staff, “Crossing the Line” is a large-group activity where identities and experiences are announced aloud as people stand in an imaginary line. If the identities or experiences apply, professional staff members may choose to cross the line to disclose that these identities and experiences apply to them. Examples may include: Cross the line if you have traveled to 3 or more countries, Cross the line if you identify as a first-generation college student, Cross the line if you identify as LGBTQIA, and Cross the line if you have been treated differently because of your gender identity or sexual orientation.

In the following instance, Leigh, a mid-level professional working at a Western public institution, explains how the “Crossing the Line” activity was the vehicle to openly express and claim their identity among coworkers:

“It was a Crossing the Line exercise during Residence Life Training. I was surrounded by all of these fabulous, wonderful queer people in my life, and it was the first time that I knew that it was okay. I definitely wasn't fully out, then I crossed the line, and I remember just breathing a sigh of relief, knowing that I was in a space where people didn't even bat an eye. They didn't question. They didn't wonder. They just accepted me. So, I have been out to the people that I love and value since that point.”

Professionals also highlighted being unapologetic about who they are at every stage, including in searchable formats such as within their resumes and curriculum vitae, or across social media platforms including LinkedIn and Facebook. Happiness and fulfillment resulted as important byproducts of being authentic and open, where LGBTQ professionals express comfort and relief in not feeling compelled to perform a double or triple life across their personal, professional, and social media lives.

An emerging pattern across LGBTQ professionals was that they never wanted to work at a place where they couldn’t be their out, open selves. They also expressed the importance of not adhering to a particular mold or style of queerness. Rather, in the
expression of queerness as a challenging of boundaries and a blurring of lines, professionals discovered leadership capabilities to model from seasoned LGBTQ professionals who didn’t always fit the mold. Such was the case with Jeff, an entry-level professional working at a Western private institution:

“Operationalizing what that means is someone who is able to lead with vulnerability and authenticity, and I know those are buzzwords, but I think when you realize that your queerness doesn't have to fit in a certain way to be successful in this field… I think that's great.”

By expressing the concept of queerness as deviating from practices or labels that are deemed societally traditional, that level of authenticity and validation in the workplace can contribute to cultivating empathy while achieving some of the overall goals of higher education. Professionals expressed these goals with terms like social justice, equity, inclusion, and the ability of institutions to be able to adapt to emerging demographic populations.

However, for some individuals, the question of whether or not to disclose didn’t simply come down to identifying as straight or queer, but rather which specific identity label to disclose within the queer continuum. For participants identifying as bisexual or pansexual, they expressed additional layers of nuance in the ways by which their identity pops up in the workplace.

Due to perceived relationships with people of another gender, bisexual participants shared perceptions of feeling closeted due to others’ perceptions. Their colleagues, whether straight or queer, struggled to remember the identities of these openly bisexual employees, relying instead of assumptions of identity based on the genders of their partners or how the employees aligned with gender norms.

“Bi has this status of kind of being invisible because it depends on who you’re partnered to. So, I think it's just easier to navigate. When I am having conversations about colleagues, maybe like,
while going to get drinks or even just like grabbing lunch, then somewhere along my sexual identity comes up. Then I will share that I do identify as bi, but overall when I use the term queer or share my queerness.”

Through the above quote, Jeff also discussed his perceived invisibility despite the usage of multiple identity labels including “bi” and “queer.” In these ways, a dual sense of ease exists in utilizing the umbrella term “queer” while not sharing the full extent of which identity within the queer spectrum they identify as, until a closer connection is made with coworkers.

LGBTQ professionals underscored the importance of maintaining their overall self-agency in deciding if and when to disclose their identities. In part, this was due to past negative encounters they had with their families. These included experiences around homelessness and family rejection, invalidation of partners and relationships, and a compounded sense of disadvantage and disappointment rising from sharing their LGBTQ identities with their families.

Therefore, within professional spaces, while participants didn’t hide who they were, they expressed a nearly everyday reality of deciding when and where to explicitly share their LGBTQ identities. As professionals rose in the ranks towards senior leadership, this everyday reality subsided as their LGBTQ identities became more a part of who they are, fully integrated and acknowledged, rather than the most salient portion of their identities from which they experienced microaggressions and exclusion.

Privilege

Participants highlighted privilege as another important benefit that aided their career journeys. The recognition of privileged identities, whether perceived or actual, not
only helped professionals in their current position, but also helped in advancing their careers further:

“I haven’t ever felt held back. I think in part because I am a cisgender male, a white male, I have a lot of privileged identities and I know that I probably get opportunities that others don’t get because of the identities that I hold their visible.”

“I have positional capital, right? I’ve been a director or senior director, reporting to a vice president for many years. I have a reputation to build off of, so I have some leverage with that. So there’s some privilege that comes with moving up professionally where I can feel more comfortable with that and I feel better protected than if I were a new professional.”

In the quotes above, Kevin and Jack, two senior-level professionals working at Midwestern private institutions, capture the importance of privilege not just influencing social identity and personal advantages but also influencing professional standing and advantages. The power of positional capital has allowed senior administrators more time to reconcile, synthesize, and integrate their LGBTQ identities. They also can take larger risks because they feel less at jeopardy of losing their positions, especially as their professional roles have increased in complexity and institutional influence.

Participants provided specificity regarding how they benefitted from their privileged identities through direct connections with colleagues and students who do not possess privileged identities. Allan, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, acknowledged how recognizing his own privilege alongside the identities and experiences of less privileged individuals has helped his career:

“I learned how to listen and understand more of the challenges of folks who didn't live in a world that I lived in, which is essentially a white privileged world, who didn’t walk around with the same privilege that I did. My marginalized identity isn't necessarily noticeable when I walk into a room. What is noticeable is that I’m a cisgender white male. So really learning from people, being mentored, listening to stories, that has helped me in my career.

Privilege was not just recognized as important to the careers of cisgender, white men. LGBTQ professionals of color and nonbinary participants expressed dissonance or
conflict across their privileged and non-privileged identities. In these instances, participants with non-privileged identities were able to acknowledge times when their geographic location, race, or perceived gender identity may have benefitted their identity formation, career journeys, and professional interactions. This was the case for Marvin, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, and for Leigh, a mid-level professional working at a Western public institution:

“As an international student coming to the states, I think I was privileged to be able to start a new life. Right from the get-go, I was like, “You know, like, I'm not home. I don't have anybody from home around me. I'm going to be out.”

“White men tend to be create spaces where I see privilege show up constantly. Maybe it's not even just my voice being seen at the table because there's times when people see me as a heterosexual woman, so straight white woman. So, there's a perception about me. Sometimes, I'll get a seat at the table, but I see other people that I really value that don't get that seat.”

Many professionals expressed the importance of moving beyond the mere recognition of privilege, transforming that awareness into action. Such action includes using one’s privilege to challenge or speak out, advocating for people of different identities, and serving as a bridge to help level the playing field with colleagues or students. Tim, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, expressed the power of reputational privilege that often comes with years of institutional history and positional capital:

“You're in those spaces for a reason, and you have access that others don't. So, that's a privilege you shouldn't waste, and I think about that. Whatever reputation I have at the institution allows me to, in a respectful way say certain things that other people can't say because they're worried about that they're an entry level employee or they're a student. I think I realized that even me saying something, being present somewhere, sends a message. So, I have that in the back of my head.”

Many professionals highlighted how their advancement to a higher-level staff or administrative position influenced how people perceive their level of power. These perceptions send strong signals and messages around which professionals are poised to
advance diversity and inclusion efforts. Even something as seemingly simple as physical presence within a meeting or attending a student event sends far-reaching signs of support, especially for groups who may have experienced marginalization, exclusion, or invisibility on their campuses. Professionals encouraged others, in considering their privilege, to take those considerations to the next step by walking the walk.

**Supervisors**

Another significant factor helping LGBTQ professionals continue and advance in their careers was the influence of great supervisors and mentors. However, participants expressed a range of experiences where sometimes supervisors and mentors overlapped their roles, while at other times, people relied on peers or professional associations to provide the mentorship they needed.

Beginning with the impact of supervisors on aiding and advancing the career journeys of LGBTQ professionals, participants shared the following:

“My supervisors have been really, really important in my professional journey.”

“What's really helped me is having supervisors that want to also help me grow but understand that my passion is still this work and will always be this work. But I also would like to be able to try other avenues and build my portfolio.”

“My supervisor is just a dream. She’s always telling me that I don’t need to do things, you know, kind of trying to protect my time. She’s always trying to protect me from burnout, and that is the complete opposite of my last job.”

“My director and I at the beginning of each school year, we talk about where do I want to grow next year and what can I do to grow in those areas. For example, I'm educating and training about sexual and gender identities. That's not part of my core portfolio. There are areas of work that I don't hold any responsibilities in right now, and I'm able to learn that through other venues on campus, like learning more about crisis management. I'm able to volunteer right now five hours a week if not more within the dean of students office as a critical case manager, for example.”

Participants appreciated supervisors’ abilities to aid in building their portfolio by providing increased professional opportunities in areas outside their primary job.
description. Professionals were able to volunteers a few hours each week with different university offices, to gain experience that would help them not feel pigeonholed in a diversity office setting. Supervisors also helped save LGBTQ professionals from burnout by explicitly checking in with their employees regarding their levels of self-care and over-commitment to late-night, weekend, and committee hours.

In addition to aiding them in the workplace, supervisors also assisted employees in navigating situations that could improve their outside lives and sense of personal and professional balance. Difficult situations where supervisors proved helpful included advice and guidance in juggling graduate school, professional career, or a potential job search process.

Very poignant examples emerged, regarding how supervisors provided care and compassion for LGBTQ employees during times of tragedy, including the death of family members and current events like the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando. Queen, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern public institution, and Marvin, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, expressed the following:

“I lost my mother during first year of my doctoral program, and it was really hard. I was already worried about balancing being a full time director and a full time doctoral student. Then, when this happened, I was like, “Shit, I can't do all this.” My supervisor was just like, “Hey, don't come back until you can,” and I was like, “Wow.” That was such… that was a response that I didn't expect.”

“When Pulse [nightclub shooting] happened, for example, I was able to take a mental health day and really be able to not just be by myself, but also check in on others who I believe may have been really deeply impacted. Therefore taking a half day off as a preventative helped because I wanted to be more productive that afternoon or the next day. As an employee, as a person, humanizing the process for me has been really helpful.”

Both Queen and Marvin expressed the importance of recognizing the psychological and professional impacts of tragedies. Family deaths and current events can deeply impact employees not just as professionals, but as people. Rather than
continuing with business as usual, these participants expressed a deep appreciation for being given time to do reflection or self-care away from the office. That time away allowed them to re-group while connecting with family and friends, to avoid what otherwise would have likely been a very unproductive day or week in the workplace.

Mentors

Even fiercely independent LGBTQ professionals who first balked at the idea of needing a mentor found that they were vital to their growth in the profession of higher education. Where the collective group of LGBTQ professionals differed was in how they each accessed mentors. Some professionals accessed mentors through their supervisors, some through their peers, some through professional associations, and some through outside friends and community connections.

In describing examples of powerful mentors, LGBTQ professionals expressed that mentors influenced them greatly by simply modeling how to be a higher education professional. In these ways, the traditional concept of mentoring where a senior-level person explicitly bestows advice to some plucky upstart through 1-on-1 interactions got turned on its head. For many, mentors led through their actions:

“He was just so remarkable in terms of his leadership capacity, his care for people, his intellect, his creativity and vision for the work. I wouldn't label him as a charismatic person, just a really caring, thoughtful, and deep thinker. I just gained so much from reporting to him about how people should be treated… about how to lead with care and ethics and integrity. He's probably had the biggest professional influence on my life.”

In the above example, Kevin, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, shared how watching his mentor in action provided insight into his own alignment of values across care, ethics, and integrity. Therefore, mentoring relationships need not always be transactional through the giving of advice or answering of questions.
Mentees can learn a lot from simply watching a mentor in action, navigating a campus environment or their own balance of personal and professional values.

Supervisors need not always become mentors for LGBTQ professionals. Multiple participants explicitly highlighted that supervisors can just be someone to professionally report to, without the expectation that they serve in some grander mentorship role around advancing your place in the profession.

Overburdened workaholic supervisors helped to show LGBTQ professionals exactly how not to mentor and what not to become. These supervisors provided insight on mentorship by doing the exact opposite, providing insight for how LGBTQ professionals did not want to live in their professional and personal lives. LGBTQ professionals learned important lessons regarding professional behaviors they wanted to avoid while advancing in their careers, as was the case for Robyn, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution:

“It taught me a lot about what I really want to be and when I want to do, what I see, and also some things that I really didn't want in terms of my position because she definitely was somebody who 100% worked all the time. That was not something that I wanted for myself or to mirror for others because I'm really big on helping people that want to enter the field. That also taught me how I didn't want to run myself ragged in the field.”

While many participants challenged the supervisor-as-default-mentor concept, they instead recommended the peer-as-mentor concept as beneficial for continuing and advancing their career in higher education. These peers were similar either in age or job functional area, which provided an ease of communication with like-minded individuals already starting from a place of awareness, knowledge, and comfort within the profession. Mentorship need not be hierarchical or traditional, based on years of seniority or age.
Participants shared that a lack of LGBTQ elders left them with peers or community members as the only option for mentors in navigating queer life and professional careers. Professionals found mentors and chosen family by engaging in community support, outside of university life:

“I felt like there's been an absence of mentorship from elders in my life… not a lot of people that have hooked in there to give me that. So, a lot of it has come more from peers. When I think about who I owe my learning and my survival to, very specific people come to mind and they're almost always people that I would also consider chosen family. I think we just find each other, right? We had to, whether that be in a classroom or whether that be at a rally or organizing in the community, a protest…”

In the above example, Ben, an entry-level professional from a Western public institution, expresses how mentor relationships can be informal and organic. Several participants supported this by sharing examples of their mentoring relationships where informal conversations included texts, impromptu phone calls, class assignments, or as a product of volunteerism.

Recognizing the expansion of mentorship beyond hierarchical notions of seniority or one-way spreading of knowledge, these participants shared that some of the best mentoring conversations have come spontaneously, sporadically, and through a sense of collective exchange rather than by individual request. In this way, there is no particularly active knowledge seeker or knowledge provider. Professionals engaging in informal mentoring relationships, termed as coalition building by some participants, can allow professionals to be both the knowledge seeker and knowledge provider without needing formal structures to do so.

Recognizing the lack of out LGBTQ colleagues or elders available to serve in potential mentorship roles, many professionals shared that their professional mentors did not need to share LGBTQ identities or even their same gender, race, or ethnicity. That
would be too much of a luxury in higher education. These levels of access rarely existed for these LGBTQ professionals, especially for LGBTQ professionals of color. One way to overcome this was to gain multiple mentors, some of whom may share a similar racial or ethnic identity, while others may share a similar sexual or gender identity. Another way to access mentors surfaced through professional associations and conferences.

**Professional Associations and Conferences**

Professional associations and conferences are key places where LGBTQ professionals located professional mentors as well as personal affirmation in their identities and everyday experiences. Professionals greatly recommended engaging in the somewhat awkward task of initiating contact with a stranger, as it brought success in locating a mentor, and sometimes multiple mentors. Xavier, a mid-level professional working at a Western private institution, shared how they found success by throwing caution to the wind and hoping for a compassionate response to their request for a mentor:

> “Explicitly asking someone, “Will you be my mentor?” I think that most people take that to be, like, they're touched. So even if the answer is no, they're not going to be like, “How dare you!” Most people are, if they have the capacity, they're willing to give you the space to think about what means to you, what it means to grow and build together.”

Given that varying levels of success can occur in reaching out and initiating contact with mentors, participants used their proximity through surrounding institutions and local community organizations to locate mentors. These ways were particularly useful for professionals who were lacking access to professional organizations and funding, as well as professionals whose inherent shyness caused them to recoil at the thought of prattling with potential mentors through extensive extroverted interactions.
Professionals named a host of LGBTQ-affirming professional associations where they located mentors, including the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). As higher education is firmly acquainted with acronyms, additional organizations highlighted as LGBTQ-affirming include NACADA (Advising), AACRAO (Registrar), NAFSA (Global Education), NODA (Orientation), and the National LGBTQ Task Force. Many of these organizations also have affinity networks for LGBTQ professionals, which can help expand networking opportunities while providing places for personal and community support.

Rather than simply attending the conference of a professional association, many LGBTQ professionals highlighted how acquiring volunteer or leadership roles in professional associations proved beneficial for their careers. These volunteer or leadership roles included being part of the conference planning team, tagging onto a faculty research project, presenting at a conference, serving as a greeter or volunteer, and also co-writing publications produced by professional associations. In these ways, professionals gained access to leadership opportunities outside of their institution while also gaining access to potential mentors.

In addition to in-person conferences and professional associations, many participants highlighted online resources and social media platforms as important for locating additional identity resources, mentorship opportunities, and peer connections. These included Facebook and LinkedIn groups, Ted Talks of higher education leaders, and the Consortium of LGBTQ Professionals in Higher Education, which publishes an
online clearinghouse of policies and educational materials to help institutions advance LGBTQ inclusion.

Professional associations were not just places for LGBTQ professionals to locate mentors. Participants explained how professional associations served as important places where they could see facets of themselves and their identities reflected through others in the association to help pave their way in higher education. Professional associations and conferences were some of the participants’ first a-ha moments, where they finally saw successful LGBTQ professionals who were out, proud, and making a difference for students and the field of higher education.

“One person I would say who really helped me, and not in a one-on-one interaction way or a sitting down mentoring me way, but seeing somebody who kind of looked like me in many ways. We were hosting a professional session here that our vice presidents and some other people were going to be a part of, and a man by the name of [national speaker] was on the panel. I saw someone, an African American male who was out in his role and able to successful at his national teleconference. So, that made me think, “Oh, I can do the same thing. I can be myself and be successful.”

Expressed above by Tim, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, the validation and reassurance that someone can be successful in higher education need not rise solely from colleagues or senior leadership within one’s own institution. Many participants shared similar experiences of feeling rejuvenated about the profession after seeing similar-identity individuals being successful while open and out, alleviating some of the malaise they were experiencing as somewhat isolated tokens within their home institutions.

Participants also expressed that professional associations can provide important safety nets, especially for LGBTQ professionals from less-affirming institutions or
smaller home communities. Sam, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution, expressed finding family and community among professional associations:

“I go back to ACPA. It’s really helped to have a gay family over the years, a queer family, but also, I think for professionals that don’t have one, ACPA can really provide a queer safety net. Especially for those folks that work in institutions or live in parts of the country that might not be friendly to LGBTQ issues. Their little town might not even have a community. Coming to ACPA, they have that community once a year.”

In the above example, Sam acknowledges the importance of the annual ACPA Convention in providing an important safety net that affirms personal identities by creating queer spaces and a professional family for connections. For LGBTQ professionals from conservative or rural areas lacking a critical mass of out LGBTQ professionals, higher education conferences and professional associations can serve as important reunions and networks to help rejuvenate LGBTQ professionals year after year, no matter where they may live or work.

**Helpful Support Networks of LGBTQ Colleagues**

Finding support networks among colleagues has proven to be helpful and valuable to a number of LGBTQ professionals. Many participants referred to this as “finding your tribe,” which often occurred through trial and error across colleagues within and outside the institution. Through lunches, social gatherings, and work projects, LGBTQ professionals drew closer to one another. This also allowed for LGBTQ professionals to serve as feedback loops for one another, a process some referred to as “calling in.”

Rather than “calling out” a colleague publicly who may have made a mistake, perhaps unintentionally invalidating someone’s identity or experience, LGBTQ professionals would take the extra step of pulling a friend aside to get to the heart of the matter in a way that compassionately challenged some of their actions. Through this
process, colleagues did not act just as co-workers sharing a physical office space. Rather, they became part of a chosen family, a family that can provide constructive feedback to one another in a loving way that acknowledges the need for care, support, and growth, without feeling attacked, defensive, or scrutinized:

“One of my colleagues who's now a really close friend… it's a close friendship and understanding that, like, “You are someone that I deeply deeply care about. But, I also know that if you like mess up and don't get your shit done professionally, like I'm going to have an honest conversation with you.” I think actually that's one of the best things that I've taken away from being a career in student affairs.”

In the above quote, Jeff, an entry-level professional working at a Western private institution, highlights how long-lasting the impact is. This colleague-as-friend support network has been one of the best things rising from his professional career in higher education. This level of honesty through calling in members of a chosen family allows for a safety net where LGBTQ professionals check in with one another regarding their level of care and success in their personal and professional lives.

Outside of work, a variety of outlets allowed LGBTQ professionals to unplug from careers in a field where personal and professional lives might feel naturally intertwined. Some professionals hosted game nights, some sang at karaoke, some participated in political rallies and social justice demonstrations. Finding these outlets served as particularly important for LGBTQ professionals whose positions held on-call duties or live-on requirements, such as in Student Affairs or Campus Life:

“There was a two weeks to a month span where I hadn't left campus because you don't have to when you live on. Your office is on campus, your residence hall is on campus, your dining facility is on campus. After that month, I realized that my mental health was not well. So, I started just everyday walking to the coffee shop that was off-campus and building a relationship with people who weren't 18 to 22. That was really great for my mental health, just like encountering somebody being a part of the community that I lived in. That's something I will say has kind of sustained me in these jobs, really trying to think of yourself as a part of the larger community, not just the campus community.”
Xavier, a mid-level professional working at a Western institution, emphasized above how the process of unplugging from campus and engaging with community ultimately enhances one’s mental health while creating professional sustainability for LGBTQ professionals whose lifelong careers will span multiple higher education institutions.

**Impacts of Graduate School**

Another aspect that has helped LGBTQ professionals to continue and advance in their careers is the impact of graduate school, whether at the master’s or doctoral level. For many, graduate school reminded and re-ignited their values and passions for continuing and advancing their careers in higher education:

“I was living within a higher education setting. All of a sudden, I had this burst of activity. In that time that I started thinking, okay, ‘If you're only on this planet once, and you only have one life to live, would you want to really be known for? If you want to make impact and have meaningfulness in life, then where would you go to think about getting some of the skills you want to go do?’ That’s when I was like, “Okay, I'm going to apply to graduate school.”

Peter, a senior-level professional working at a Southeastern public institution, explained his thought process whilst encountering a crossroads among his personal and professional life. In wanting to make a difference and create meaningfulness throughout his professional vocation, his decision-making process resulted in seeking graduate school in order to continue a career within senior leadership of higher education.

Some LGBTQ professionals shared how the thought of attending graduate school was not always an internal spark. Some family members who were also out and LGBTQ helped to encourage attendance in graduate school, catapulting professionals’ careers from a near-stop to full throttle. Participants shared how graduate school elevated their
careers as well as gave them a newfound appreciation to fortify both their personal identities and professional experiences with theory and data:

“Our identity is part of the curriculum. I think that's really where, when we write reflection papers, I'm applying self-authorship through my own story. I know that's not every graduate degree program. It was almost like therapy for me, learning about myself, but using theory and data in order to do that.”

“Certainly as a Ph.D. student, I'm now really seeing the power and value of research and knowledge creation at that level and seeing the impact. It can backed up your policies. You backup up your procedures with that stuff.”

Through these experiences of Bruce and Justin, both mid-level professionals at a Northeastern private and Eastern public institution, graduate school provided opportunities to write new chapters in their life stories. Engaging in novel academic experiences allowed them to wrestle with complex issues while providing practical applications to help them succeed and advance in their current roles within higher education.

Important to note, LGBTQ professionals shared the importance of being seen as more credible because of graduate school. Their opinions and institutional influence carried more gravitas as they perceived themselves being viewed as scholars in addition to practitioners. Graduate school also helped LGBTQ professionals to branch beyond diversity pigeonholing, becoming more in tuned with navigating the world of higher education admissions, budgeting, fundraising, human resources, and organizational psychology in ways that helped them break through a more limited perception as a professional in a diversity-only role.

Perceived Challenges Encountered in Careers

Regarding the second research question, participants shared what they perceived to be challenges encountered in their careers. LGBTQ professionals perceived the
following as challenges, obstacles, or hindrances throughout their career in higher education: a) pressures from integrating their personal and professional lives; b) written and verbal comments and threats; c) conservative and religious viewpoints; d) microaggressions in the workplace; e) lavender ceilings from a lack of professional advancement; f) cultural taxation through additional identity-related job responsibilities; g) a self-described disappointment around their level of involvement on campus; and h) challenges rising from intersectionality across multiple identities.

**Pressures from Integrating Personal and Professional Lives**

LGBTQ professionals shared feelings of pressure emerging from integrating their personal and professional lives. Participants expressed challenges in bringing their full selves, emotions, and personal identities into professional settings. While maintaining balance and integration are necessary, professionals shared how this has presented some challenges:

“I don't think about professional and personal life as very bifurcated. I live a very integrated life in a very integrated identity… another set of privileges that come with the ability to do that. So, I always think if your work life is a mess, your personal life will be a mess… or if your personal life is a train wreck, that will seep into work in some way. I realized that stuff was making for a really miserable 70 hour work week. It was affecting how I was sleeping, my friendships and so I just decided that I needed to step away from it.”

In the above quote, Jason, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, described how he wrestled unsuccessfully to compartmentalize his personal and professional lives. Over time, he expressed being able to build more defined boundaries around his time, allowing him to adapt in a way that supported his life both on-campus and off-campus. Many participants expressed balancing one’s personal and professional life as vital to being fully prepared to address the pending gravity of student concerns that LGBTQ professionals might encounter.
Whether an on-campus bias incident, a statewide anti-LGBTQ bill, or a national public tragedy, many LGBTQ professionals are the ones inherently sought out to respond to and console students, employees, alumni, and community members. This comes with a psychic cost, as many LGBTQ professionals shared how difficult it continues to be when the expectation during LGBTQ-related tragedies is to console others as a queer professional staff member while attempting to compartmentalize their own personal sense of feeling targeted, discriminated against, isolated, hurt, or angry when homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia strike.

**Written and Verbal Comments and Threats**

Participants expressed challenges manifesting in the form of written letters and verbal comments and threats. Written messaging often occurred indirectly for LGBTQ participants, rather than receiving directly written messages. Marcus, a senior-level professional working at a Western private institution, and Sam, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution, both shared examples of negative letters that their direct supervisors received:

“Three years ago, I was speaking as part of my job at [university in the West]. A few weeks later, my boss called and said, “Hey, we got a really weird letter. Somebody at the session didn’t appreciate you talking about going camping with your husband.” She was really concerned about the letter, but I thought it was kind of comical. It was a group of law enforcement officers, so that was very strange. We let the organizer know, but nothing ever came of it.”

“I did a lot of conduct cases. I was adjudicating a case, something minor. He ended up getting my disciplinary probation or a reflective essay. The next day, my boss comes over, “Hey, I got this letter from a student.” He got a two-page letter saying how dare a state university make him meet with an ingrate… a homosexual. It was totally homophobic. Did it leave a big, big scar? No, because I go back to the resilience thing. You have to really, truly hurt me to really make a huge effect on me.”

Multiple professionals highlighted conduct cases as a particular area where they experienced anti-LGBTQ behavior. Both Marcus and Sam ended up shaking off the
visceral shock of these written condemnations; however, these instances left indelible memories. Regardless of their resilience, professionals expressed that these negative written messages related to their identities are still a reality for many LGBTQ professionals.

Heightening the need for safety, many LGBTQ professionals encountered threats of physical violence from students, peers, and even visitors to campus. While some threats occurred in response to being found guilty in student conduct judicial processes, other instances unexpectedly surfaced in educational trainings or just walking across campus. Forest, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, and Ward, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern public institution, recounted multiple instances of physical violence and threats:

“"I was walking around, holding my partner’s hand, and someone threw a beverage on us and told us, “You're going to hell.” I was like, “I don't know what to do with this.” Then someone, no joke, started literally chasing us with a Bible and telling us that we were sinners and I was like, “Please leave us alone, like we don't know you, please just back off.”

“Working with students as a department director during a training, I came out as openly gay. A student’s reaction to me was pretty visceral. He made some pretty credible threats at that time, which were pretty upsetting to me. The way he said it, I had every bit of faith that he meant it, he might do me harm in that moment or come pretty close to it. Then all this stuff came with it, in terms of having a police escort and in doing all of those things.”

The threat of physical harm is a reality for many LGBTQ professionals, and several participants expressed receiving not just threats of violence but specifically death threats. Some instances involved physical shoving, throwing items, destruction of property, targeted yelling, and being approached physically with possible intent to do bodily harm. Police were involved in several instances, and multiple participants discussed the need for police escorts, bodyguards, and phone callback tracers.
Besides potential physical harm, participants expressed the hurtful and challenging impacts of verbal microaggressions made regarding their LGBTQ identities while being employed in higher education institutions. Participants received their fair share of microaggressive comments related to views around their “lifestyle,” “choice,” their physical bodies, and their professional attire. Numerous participants received hurtful negative comments tied specifically to their gender identity and gender expression. Professionals felt their own presence and humanity was questioned on campus, as represented below by Piper, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution:

“At Coming Out Day, I had people come up and say pretty horrific things about how it shouldn't be the university, then say whatever expletives, and we should go home… and then I had people complain to me with the nerve to say they have a trans TA [teaching assistant].”

Coming Out Day is a national occurrence in October to acknowledge LGBTQ people who are open about their identities in order to increase visibility while reducing stigma, fear, and hatred towards LGBTQ people. Many campuses host events that help to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of LGBTQ people, yet Piper expressed that disclosing their identities resulted in the opposite occurring. Instead of celebration and understanding, they were met with curse words and complaints on a nationally recognized day that was created to honor and uplift LGBTQ people.

Further microaggressive comments were made in relation to coworkers who made strange and awkward connections to LGBTQ identities. Professionals shared that their coworkers would try to relate to them with “I thought of you when I saw,” where the items of conversation were AIDS ribbons, LGBTQ catalogs, shows on TV, and nearly anything and everything rainbow, from clothing to stickers to flags to eyeglass frames.
Participants felt this type of connection further positioned them as LGBTQ stereotypes who were expected to like rainbows and attend pride parades. This level of superficial understanding caused many LGBTQ professionals to feel that they were reduced to these stereotypes in the workplace, describing their work environments in ways ranging from awkward to hostile. The superficiality was also met with less of an interest in connection about real life topics such as homelessness, violence, exclusion, and legal rights:

“I feel like I'm talking about life and death, and sometimes people are just… eating a sandwich. I’m trying to get people to understand the urgency of what we're talking about, that their lack of understanding or empathy has real consequences that are urgent. That would be the biggest barrier.”

In the above quote, Ben, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, underscores a real urgency in discussing topics impacting the lived experiences of transgender and nonbinary people. Expressions of support can become a life and death topic for many students and employees, not to be pushed aside or brushed off. Participants felt that this brushing off occurred not just from heterosexuals and straight allies, but from within LGBTQ-identified peers as well.

Bisexual, pansexual, and transgender professionals felt particularly erased or invisible in conversations and work environments that are supposed to be inclusive across the letters of LGBTQ. They acknowledged that all professionals, regardless of a shared or different identity within the LGBTQ umbrella, are still works in progress. Yet a monolithic sense of queerness becomes the default for many people both within and outside of queer communities. As everyone is on their own individual journey, it is not
surprising that people within a certain community can still do harm or make comments that are problematic to other LGBTQ professionals.

**Conservative and Religious Viewpoints**

Participants expressed challenges and threats to their own humanity when engaging with coworkers who conservative and religious or in explicit faith-based institutions. Because religion in particular has been a sore spot for many LGBTQ professionals, they acknowledged how even one single vocal viewpoint can change the atmosphere of a work environment from inclusive to uneasy. Jeff, an entry-level professional working at a Western private institution, shared how he has seen this manifest in the workplace:

“The challenges of just being an out person and potentially working, even in an area of an office, where there's one really strong conservative viewpoint, I think that has been interesting and challenging. Kind of always watching like what you say, even if it's totally work appropriate but might seem like too queer for the straights' tastes. I think there's that challenge in that.”

In addition to conservative and religious coworkers, preachers and visitors on campus who handed out bibles and religious literature were also among some of the everyday visceral ouch moments that LGBTQ professionals encountered. Some spewed anti-LGBTQ sentiment while trying to recruit students to join their churches or take religious literature.

Similarly, LGBTQ professionals recognized how national conservative and religious groups would hire students to serve on their social media teams in order to “report” any activity that was LGBTQ-affirming. These reported activities would show up in firestorm fashion through articles in Campus Reform and other conservative sites where petitions emerged to denounce and defund diversity centers and LGBTQ student
organizations. Professionals were shocked at how some of their typical programming each year, including an annual LGBTQIA student welcome during Orientation Week or the annual campus and community drag show would somehow spark such sudden virulent national response in any given year, while so many other institutions seemed to stay off the radar. It was perceived that this was more of an issue with larger schools, particularly public institutions whose legislatures maintain a closer eye on institutional activities.

Some participants faced firing and removal from their positions at religious institutions as well as difficult interactions with faculty related to LGBTQ identities. These interactions included same-sex partners and spouses not being included or recognized in employee spaces and the questioning of identity terms. These terms included “queer,” sometimes where a faculty member would tell a queer-identified person not to use that word to describe themselves. Other times, faculty questioned the validity of transgender people, challenging notions of biology, sex, and gender. These prevalence of these faculty interactions showcases how LGBTQ professionals can be impacted by comments and connections not just within their sphere on the administrative side but also across the academic side of the house.

**Microaggressions from Colleagues**

Participants shared challenges in their professional workplace resulting from microaggressions, sometimes referred to as microinsults or microinvalidations, which are everyday comments or actions that can cause people to feel targeted, excluded, marginalized, or less valued, often related to diverse social identities.
One area where microaggressions occurred in the workplace for LGBTQ professionals involved whether they were married or partnered with someone of the same gender. A number of participants encountered challenges living on campus with their same-gender partners involving access to mail, food, laundry, and health benefits. Some professionals decided to challenge the system by reminding people that this level of scrutiny did not seem to exist for straight couples in similar situations. Such was the case for Cate, a mid-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution:

“While [institution in the Midwest] had domestic partner benefits, one of those benefits did not include partners living in campus housing. My partner lives with me in campus housing, and they told me they would fire me and I said, “Okay, I'll wait,” and they didn't fire me. I decided to challenge them through their antidiscrimination judicial board process. I resigned from that position. They would say things like, “I'm not going to come into your apartment and count toothbrushes, but you need to stop saying that she lives there. Maybe we'll have to have her sign something or be part of the lease.” They didn't know how to handle it. So I said, “Well, but the previous person… she and her husband lived here…”

In a similar vein to the above instance, many participants also experienced subtleties around heterosexism, whereby straight relationships seemed to be given an advantage or elevated stance over same-gender relationships. Some coworkers would refuse to use any terms like “partner,” “spouse,” “wife,” or “husband” when referring to LGBTQ professionals’ significant others. Some coworkers would also change the gender-specific term, substituting with the genderless term “partner” when LGBTQ professionals described their significant others with gender-specific terms like “wife” or “husband.”

Some professionals also felt like every day was a coming out day, because things like wedding rings or conversations about family and weekend trips would likely result in the question, “Oh, what does your husband/wife do?” The assumed heterosexuality of
LGBTQ professionals made them wonder if they should tell lies and go along with it, just so they didn’t have to come out to these coworkers.

**Microaggressions from LGBTQ Supervisors and LGBTQ Colleagues**

Microaggressions also surfaced in surprising and unlikely ways from LGBTQ supervisors. LGBTQ professionals recalled hearing their LGBTQ supervisors using profane language, including slurs. Some LGBTQ professionals also felt they were a “pet project” for LGBTQ supervisors who expressed wanting to create them in their own image, sometimes including explicit mentions of attractiveness regarding physical features of their LGBTQ employees.

Professionals also described levels of internalized homophobia surfacing from their LGBTQ supervisors, creating an incongruence across people identifying as authentic and genuine while also feeding into stereotypes and sometimes being closeted on campus. Additionally, professionals experienced their LGBTQ supervisors offering to be the token or community voice, nearly sucking all the voices, opinions, and air in the room around any conversations related to LGBTQ identities. This need to jump immediately on such conversations and act as the sole community voice caused LGBTQ professionals to feel invalidated and silenced by their own similar-identity superiors, peers, and colleagues.

Some LGBTQ professionals felt a sense of awkwardness in the professional environment due to their LGBTQ supervisors remarking on their facial hair, their physical bodies, their professional attire, and specific posts or photos from social media. This left professionals feeling their supervisors were creepy. These professionals were unsure if they should report such surprising behavior, for fear that perhaps LGBTQ
professionals shouldn’t be getting other similar-identity individuals in trouble. A number of professionals did report their supervisors to Human Resources or to their supervisor’s supervisor as a way to initiate conversations and sanctions on further iterations of such behavior.

Remarking on people’s bodies made some professionals question their own professional merit, as if they were hired partially or wholly due to their physical appearance. Mark, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, expressed the awkwardness and disappointment he experienced from an LGBTQ supervisor whom he initially hoped might serve as a possible professional mentor:

“He made inappropriate comments about how I was dressing, how I had facial hair at the time… other inappropriate comments about a coworker in our office who eventually became my best friend. During that time, he called her a ‘fag hag.’ There were instances where he alluded to the fact that the reason I was hired was because I was out, and he also alluded to the fact that he creeped on Facebook prior to me starting during the interview process. There were other people, prior to me, that were also out and gay and had similar experiences, and I found out they left because of him. So, as a young professional in that moment, it made me really question why was I hired. It really did make me question why was I hired, was it because he knew that I was gay and he wanted like a pet project? You would've thought that my boss who was out would be my number one ally and kind of a mentor. It turned out he ended up being mean to me and a huge barrier.”

In addition to difficult instances in the professional environment with LGBTQ supervisors, multiple participants shared their disappointment and bewilderment around negative interactions with LGBTQ coworkers and colleagues. Professionals shared feelings of resentment from being outed by other LGBTQ colleagues they had confided in. Their level of self-agency was taken away, and some even indicated that the culprits were LGBTQ people in Human Resources who did not keep their identities secret.

Professionals also recognized that in offices where there were multiple LGBTQ individuals, there sometimes surfaced an inherent unspoken sense of, “Well, which one
of us is going to be asked to do the LGBTQ stuff?” This led to awkwardness and tension around the potential for the bulk of leadership opportunities (including involvement with search committees, policy teams, task forces, institutional initiatives, etc.) to be more likely assigned to one LGBTQ individual over another within the same department or office.

**Lavender Ceilings due to Lack of Professional Advancement**

One of the most openly discussed challenges mentioned by LGBTQ participants included their inability to advance professionally. Many participants felt their out LGBTQ identity had something specifically to do with them not advancing. Ward, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern public institution, discussed the trade-offs across personal and professional identities and how being authentically yourself involves a cost that could inhibit professional advancement:

“...I think that’s the fear that many of us over have to overcome. Does it limit us? Will people not choose us for leadership roles if we're out? I had to balance that against the fact that, personally, there was a real downside to being in the closet, that I wasn't being authentic. Could I be an authentic leader by not being true to who I was? Could I be a good advocate for students if I wasn't true to who I was? I had to reconcile that with my professional goals and philosophy.”

Numerous participants referred to this lack of professional advancement due to LGBTQ identity as the lavender ceiling, akin to the glass ceiling for women. Robyn, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution, shared how difficult it has been for her to break through the lavender ceiling to find advancement opportunities professionally throughout the field of Higher Education:

“...What I've experienced is the lavender ceiling is very real... particularly if you're trying to move up and out of [LGBTQ-focused] work. A lot of times, we can get very much pigeonholed, and I think that's true of any of us that do identity-based work, unfortunately. People have been really blatant about saying things like, “Well, you know, I think you have some good experience, but this applicant over here has a lot of experience in ResLife, which is way more of a generalist type of position.” I'm like, “What do you think I do? I work with faculty, the provost, the president. This is the work we do. We touch so many different areas, and it's very unique to identity-based work.”
LGBTQ participants of color mentioned that while there could be advancement for LGBTQ people of color, it would likely only be more in line with another diversity type of role. Therefore, a duplication of pigeonholing could take effect by not allowing LGBTQ professionals to rise beyond diversity-focused work.

While Robyn highlighted the pigeonholing that can occur while working within diversity centers, professionals across a multitude of other areas highlighted the lavender ceiling as a reality for them as well. Often, this was due to the fact that LGBTQ professionals are tasked with advancing LGBTQ inclusion in their functional areas as an expectation.

LGBTQ professionals mentioned that, even when it seems they do everything for an institution, they are still met with an inability to advance. Xavier, a mid-level professional working at a Western private institution, shared his disappointment in not being able to see the fruits from all his labor and achievements related to student success, diversity, and inclusion:

“What else could I do? I revamp their Title IX practices, build their diversity practices from the ground up. I did everything. I knew every single student and knew what pronouns they use and corrected those for other people. There were so many things that I did and I just didn't feel like I was able to make inroads.”

Even after being encouraged to apply for advanced positions from their supervisors and superiors, LGBTQ professionals still felt they faced a lavender ceiling. Participants referred to the use of “coded” language used to disqualify or lower the likelihood of LGBTQ professionals in the job search process.

This coded language included not being sure if others would agree with their “lifestyle” or perceiving their job as “too diversity-focused,” requesting candidates with
“broader experience.” This resulted in LGBTQ professionals feeling blocked or hindered from advancing, as encountered below by Jamie, a mid-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution:

“I had, at my last institution, [superiors] who really weren’t supportive and that was really detrimental. I think I probably missed some promotions, some opportunities. That was problematic. But when you’re underneath a supervisor and maybe a vice chancellor or a dean who’s really supportive, or if you naturally work in a culture that’s more supportive, your potential is really “Sky is the limit.” Your potential is what you want to make of it, and that’s really helpful because if that doesn’t exist, like I said, it can be super detrimental and you could find yourself not getting promoted. You can find yourself feeling like you need to move on or feeling like you’re being pushed out. So, that can be problematic.”

When met with a potential lavender ceiling, LGBTQ professionals mentioned questioning themselves, their abilities, their loyalty to the institution, and their future next steps. Some cited that the likelihood of being hired in a senior-level position, such as a Dean of Student Affairs or a Vice President of Advancement, would be difficult considering how few positions there are and how prevalent the lavender ceiling seemed to be. In one particularly poignant interview, Gabriel, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, expresses how things would be different if only he were straight:

“I do think that I would have a more successful career perhaps if I were straight. But, I would rather be out and not be as successful than pretend to be like… I just don't know how I could do that, just to get around people's biases.”

Gabriel expressed an unfortunate realization. To him, professional success was equated with being straight, implying that he could not have as successful a career due to his out LGBTQ identity. In being unable to be straight, he chose the path of authenticity and openness around his identity, feeling satisfied even if it means having a less successful career.
Similarly, LGBTQ participants who had not yet reached senior-level status commented on the perception that their LGBTQ identity, especially when coupled with age, signaled a lack of seriousness or professionalism to senior-level professionals. These participants felt that perceptions or assumptions around their identities and ages hindered their professional advancement, expressed below by both Lionel, a senior-level professional working at a Southern public institution, and Sam, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution:

“"I get the sense that sometimes others knowing that I am gay does potentially, and I hope I'm wrong, potentially forestall them seeing me in a leadership role. Because there may be this sense of not being strong enough, not being direct enough, not being able to be, for lack of better term, man enough. And I use that very, very lightly because there are women that are very strong and they're struggling in a similar way. But I've really noticed that, even though I present in the gender that I am, and I am male, that maybe my voice, it may be that I'm too nice. I hope I'm wrong. I wonder sometimes if that's not keeping me back in some ways.”

“"Coupled with being a gay man that looks still young, I still think people might see me someone in their early 30's, and I don't think that's fair to me. I think some people think the way that I do things is not met with a certain level of seriousness. I think you can be gay and serious, but I think it doesn't fit the traditional mold of a senior-level professional.”

Lionel and Sam drew connections between masculinity, age, straightness, and seriousness. In violating the norms, their experiences aligned to show that they are typically not taken seriously and therefore would not be seen as viable candidates to advance for senior staff positions. Lionel even expressed that perhaps he wasn’t man enough, calling into question his own dignity, identity, and personhood because his mannerisms and queerness would be seen as less worthy of professional advancement. The lavender ceiling continues to manifest as a reality for many LGBTQ professionals. LGBTQ professionals mentioned that they gained their own sense of awareness regarding the lavender ceiling from their experiences as students. Through the lens of their own undergraduate and graduate student experiences, LGBTQ professionals shared
times when they could spot tokenization or professionals being blocked from advancing in upper administrative levels. Even as students, they experienced the lavender ceiling in existence.

While many LGBTQ professionals shared very specific instances related to not being offered opportunities, numerous participants mentioned general feelings around being stuck in their professional careers. With nowhere to move up and with perceptions of a low likelihood for advancing to senior-level administrative positions, some LGBTQ professionals looked to switch institutions in order to find exciting new work, while others wondered if they should leave higher education altogether. However, many participants described how influencing students’ development as well as loyalty to their coworkers compelled them to stay and not take opportunities at other institutions.

Participants shared that experiences are not monolithic across LGBTQ professionals. A number of professionals shared how the lavender ceiling seems lower for women, transgender, and genderqueer professionals, as expressed by Kevin, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution:

“I know that there are colleagues who are not cisgender, who may be gender queer or who may be more of a feminine who don’t fit a stereotype of a strong male executive leader who probably get passed over for opportunities or not sought out for opportunities because people are uncomfortable or fearful that we're inviting something we may not be ready to handle. Frankly, gay men probably have it easier than women, certainly more than genderqueer or genderfluid individuals. I mean, I think their pathway is actually pretty difficult, and they probably feel very, very alone. So yes, I think it's absolutely needed for LGBT people, particularly for identities that are less understood.”

Kevin highlights an important notion, that when institutions lack a critical mass of LGBTQ employees, most people are left solely with stereotypes to create categories or judgments to guide their thinking, their perceptions, and their actions around people of different identities. Cisgender, masculine gay men were far more likely to rise in higher
education, while feminine and nonbinary qualities across the board were deemed by LGBTQ participants as less worthy for rising into senior-level leadership. This faulty characterization creates an unfair playing field for queer professionals who may be reduced down to their salient LGBTQ identities rather than embraced for their overall leadership competencies and professional experiences.

**Cultural Taxation through Additional Responsibilities**

LGBTQ participants expressed a variety of ways in which they were asked, expected, or required to complete additional tasks beyond the scope of their position, because of their LGBTQ identity. A few participants referred to this phenomenon of having additional work responsibilities due to LGBTQ identity as cultural taxation. One such participant who used this phrase was Xavier, a mid-level professional working at a Western private institution:

“When I wrote an office statement regarding the [leaked White House] trans memo, I'm thinking how institutions can be supportive of the kind of cultural taxation that queer and trans people do as student affairs professionals. I'm acknowledging the fact that we do additional work outside of our job descriptions, because of our identities, and allowing that to be a merit as opposed to something that's taking you away from your work. We access that by acknowledging the fact that different people have different... other duties as assigned, if there is one visible queer or trans person, or queer and trans person on a college campus. The conversations until 3:00 in the morning about gender identity, the facilitated conversation with the queer center, those things should count toward a person's professional portfolio. They shouldn't be thought of as separate or additional because part of the benefit of having them there is that students have that support.”

Professionals described three key ways in which this cultural taxation manifested. Additional responsibilities were either a) asked of them to undertake, b) expected as part of their position, or c) assigned/required.

First, being asked to serve on committees is a common occurrence expressed by LGBTQ professionals, especially committees that do not have anything to do with that professional’s primary job role. LGBTQ professionals found themselves being asked to
serve as a voice of diversity on faculty and administrative search committees, policy task forces and implementation teams, advisory groups, climate survey teams, and campus initiatives involving students and community members.

Participants recognized cultural taxation as a double-edged sword. They were not excited to have extra work to do, especially if being asked to serve because of their diversity rather than professional experience, while also wanting to participate in such work in order to help others avoid screw-ups. Participants expressed being asked not just to sit as a member of a larger team, but to serve as a primary lead for educational initiatives around LGBTQ inclusion. November, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, shared her experience of becoming a point person for education:

"Was asked by our outdoor education office, "We've got [an initiative in august] coming up, and our facilitators need to be trained on gender inclusion. I don't know that it was necessarily an expectation, but it was definitely taking advantage of, "Hey, you're an LGBT person and I know that you have done education on this, or I'm at least in assumption of, like you've done it before, so you'll be happy to do it again. It was very short notice, like, "Hey, we need resources, so we're going to go to you."

The prevalence of identity-based service also surfaced regarding policy inclusion work. Professionals recalled being asked to help create gender neutral restrooms and signage, research information on what peer institutions do for benefits, and revise student and employee handbooks for inclusive language.

While the above participants describe how they had been asked to take on additional responsibilities, many LGBTQ professionals shared that it was an outright expectation for them to do additional responsibilities outside the primary scope of their position because of their identities. Forest, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, and Jay, a senior-level professional working at a Western
private institution, both shared how cultural taxation was more of an expectation rather than a voluntary request:

“There is not necessarily like a ton of diversity in our professional staff here, I think because we're a rural place. I could tell that it was like, “Well, you're gay and you don't shut up, so you should probably do this.” But that's like me and another person working directly with the dean. Like it's not a housing thing. It's like for the entire division, including advising and recreation, so clearly that's not like a housing person’s job, right? But we don't have a multicultural center and I'm gay, so it's a perfect fit. Yeah, there's things that are absolutely like layers of expectations.”

“Occasionally they needed me to help in terms of diversity, speaking on a panel or teaching classes for prospective students that were coming in on a diversity day and it just really became a part of the fabric of who I was.”

In these cases, lack of a critical mass of LGBTQ administrators led to expectations that these professionals would take on additional responsibilities. While expectations existed, they were not specifically assigned or required. However, LGBTQ participants did share several times when additional responsibilities were assigned or required for them to complete because of their LGBTQ identity. In these cases, LGBTQ professionals were forced to do work above and beyond simply because of their identities, which often took time away from their usual daily jobs:

“My boss said, “Well listen, we don't have a domestic partner policy, but you want your husband on it, he's on everything. We just got to write some shit up and like, you have to do that.”

“It’s always addressed in the other duties as assigned piece of my job. I was tasked with updating the entire student handbook to include pronoun policy usage, update websites, all that stuff. So absolutely, it was not part of my job.”

In the first quote, Marcus, a senior-level professional working at a Western private institution, expressed how in order to get benefits, he had to write up policies to make it happen. On the other hand, Justin, a mid-level professional working at a public Eastern institution, felt duped by the famous “other duties as assigned” bulletpoint featured within most position descriptions.
LGBTQ professionals also expressed being assigned for tasks focusing around response to anti-LGBTQ behavior. They shared how the assignment of these tasks was a challenge, proving neither effective, nor a good use of an LGBTQ professional’s time. They served on judicial reviews and panels, creating a conflict of interest across advocate and panel judge for student conduct cases. LGBTQ professionals were tasked with student meetings with the intention of educating and rehabilitating students who committed bias-related incidents of a homophobic or transphobic nature.

Many were required to help develop and implement trainings for administrative offices or faculty departments who were found responsible for some sort of anti-LGBTQ behavior or complaints. These professionals referred to this as a punishment, not for the perpetrators but rather for the LGBTQ professionals tasked with delivering trainings to potentially hostile employees they were meeting for the first time.

**Involvement in the LGBTQ Life of the Campus**

While most participants remarked on how many task forces, committees, educational trainings, and LGBTQ initiatives they collaborated on due to additional responsibilities, a large number of participants remarked on their overall level of involvement in LGBTQ life of the campus as minimal, low, or disappointing.

Professionals with low or minimal involvement tended to fall into two groups. The first includes participants with professional positions outside of LGBTQ centers. The second group with minimal to low involvement includes professionals whose positions higher in the organizational structure, including academic administrators and professionals with Director, Dean, or Vice President in their job titles.
Linkages across these sentiments were shared by Connor, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution, Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, and Jason, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution:

“That's going to look different for everyone. I think about my own self now. I'm not involved, I'm not active, I'm not really an advocate for anything on this campus.”

“In terms of student involvement, I think it has reduced over time because of my levels of professional responsibility that increased over time.”

“I'm not engaged in the ways as much as I would like, as you can see, by the way I'm framing up my own lack of consistency and meeting expectations.”

Connor, Bruce, and Jason all expressed disappointment in not being able to be more active, engaged, and consistent around LGBTQ presence and advocacy. As participants moved up the organizational ladder, they recognized their waning levels of involvement in LGBTQ campus life. They expressed wanting to be more involved as an ongoing challenge and instead hoped to create change on a wider scale given their advanced levels of institutional responsibility.

Challenges Rising from Intersectionality of Identities

LGBTQ professionals added insight into how the intersectionality of identities across multiple categories including sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender identity, international status, age, single/partnered status, and parental status presented additional challenges throughout their professional careers.

LGBTQ professionals shared how the power of queerness acted as a segue to understanding race, socioeconomic status, and other diversity categories where people encountered exclusion, pain, microaggressions, hatred, or misunderstandings.
Participants also share how their racial identities showed up in ways that intersected with their professional careers. Some participants felt they brought multiple things to the table as a queer visible person of color, while some remarked on how their race and skin color weren’t nearly as salient as their American identity when interacting with international colleagues or embarking on higher education trips to other countries.

Participants across all gender identities shared how perceptions around gender have negatively influenced the lives and careers as LGBTQ professionals in higher education identifying as women. They noted the lack of women in leadership, whether straight or LGBTQ. They also noted internal misogyny and exclusion within LGBTQ communities. This manifested in invisibility of masculine-dressed women at high levels, the perception being that women must wear skirts and heels. The invisibility continued in senior ranks for transgender and nonbinary individuals who may not adhere to people’s perceptions of gender binary dress or norms. In describing their hope to one day advance in higher education, Piper, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, shared the following:

“On the days where we have to dress business casual, I tend to wear slacks and a men’s button up. I wear bow ties. My hair is shorter, so I present in a way that is not typically feminine. So, there are conversations around that, and how I, as someone who doesn’t fit what the person might be perceiving as correct gender roles, would be able to dress up. That’s typically like the ways it pops up in my work now.”

LGBTQ professionals also highlighted their relationship status as very impactful across their professional career. A few participants mentioned being single as presenting a challenge professionally, particularly in meetings or receptions involving senior leadership or alumni donors. Some felt they were perceived as serial daters because they brought different friends as their plus-one invited guest. Numerous LGBTQ
professionals felt their single status would harm their potential to advance, given the high prevalence of heterosexual senior-level administrators who are married or partnered. That created a pressure of fitting in, particularly fitting in like a straight person, which many LGBTQ professionals were not excited about.

LGBTQ professionals expanded beyond partners to talk more intently about their overall family status, relationships, and parental status also influenced their professional career and how their identity has evolved over time. Some professionals felt their relationships weren’t deemed as valid or legitimate as their heterosexual colleagues, even despite many years of being partnered. Parents who are two moms or two dads remarked on talking openly about their relationships and kids while connecting with other kids’ parents at school. Often straight parents responded with remarks like, “Oh, I think I already met ___’s mom, though…” to which the assumed heterosexuality doesn’t leave room for a child to have two moms. Socially, it did become awkward for some LGBTQ professionals who wanted explicit invitations and overt messaging that they were absolutely welcomed into their colleagues’ homes. Without these explicit invitations, some professionals forwent attending social gatherings, which they subsequently felt had negative influences on their careers, being deemed as isolated or not team players with the rest of their colleagues.

Benefits played an important role for LGBTQ professionals seeking to continue and advance their career. Over time, important decisions were encountered regarding the possibility of having kids, growing the family, or engaging in a job search process as a package deal. Spousal hires have helped couples to transition more easily into higher education environments. Family growth was acknowledged as problematic for some
LGBTQ professionals’ careers, as described below by Connor, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution:

“I certainly know that it’s there – addressing family growth and family unit. Some [institutions] got close, and some have some good things in place, but especially in the state institutions I've worked for, if I was exploring starting a family, that would be a problem. A lot of extra hoops to jump through for same sex couples, especially for men. That’s even true for male-and-female couples here, for the husband in that situation. He's not getting the same kind of support. I'd say the state institutions I’ve worked for probably have been worse even for mothers who have physically had children versus some of the private institutions. So it's a different setup because we are a state agency.”

For female participants, age was not as large a factor as parental status regarding their intersectional identities. However, for male participants, many expressed it as the single-most important aspect of their identities that has served as a double-edged sword regarding their professional advancement in the field of higher education. Initially some LGBTQ professionals experienced a superstar or supernova status, gaining immense success, title, and responsibilities while in their 20s supervising people decades older.

However that supernova status was also met with dismissiveness as highlighted below by Jason, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution:

“I was at least 10 to 15 years younger than the person had been seated in my chair before I got there. They're just kind of like, “Who's this young dude who just showed up.” There’s kind of a dismissiveness that exists early on. If I'm doing well, sometimes that gets dismantled. But age has played a far more complex role in my career than my sexual orientation in terms of organizational dynamics, management and leadership, um, and issues around credibility, trust and confidence.”

With the acknowledgment of rising quickly among professional ranks, participants shared how a dismissiveness and lack of credibility come with the mix of age and sexuality. Many participants who peaked early subsequently experienced stagnation for many subsequent years due to a lack of “street credit.” They perceived themselves hitting a lavender ceiling early, where senior-level administrators viewed them as less
prepared to advance any further, because of the intersections across their age and sexuality.

**Perceptions of Ways that Institutions Support LGBTQ Professionals**

Regarding the third research question, participants shared ideas, resources, and practices that they perceived to be helpful for institutions to implement, in order to improve ongoing recruitment, support, and retention of LGBTQ professionals. These ideas included a) an assessment of their current institutional climates, b) things that workplaces are doing right, c) specific resources that signal a commitment to LGBTQ inclusion, d) the importance of messaging during the job search process, and e) specific recommendations for senior leadership as purveyors of an institution’s mission, vision, and values. LGBTQ professionals also mentioned what keeps them at their institutions as an added way to signify potential areas where added resources and attention contribute to keep talented professionals feeling supported and valued at institutions.

**Assessing the Institutional Climate**

In assessing the value that institutions place on supporting LGBTQ professionals, a number of participants commented that their current institution has a more accepting and affirming climate. These positive remarks involved not feeling like people “had to fight for anything here,” a signal that peacefulness meant inclusion. Others remarked on how LGBTQ couples and employees were treated just as heterosexual couples and employees.

Participants also cited very campus-specific items as well. For instance, if the campus was a private liberal arts campus, or a campus with an affluent student population, they tended to get high marks from LGBTQ professionals regarding their
climate. Also, if the institution was located in the heart of a city with a thriving LGBTQ community, that was also seen as very positive, with the climate pervading from the larger city into the campus environment. However, it is important to note that while people viewed the larger city as a positive, they also recognized that the drawing away of LGBTQ people from campus into the large city often resulted in a lack of queer community on campus.

In describing a positive and accepting climate among their institutions, LGBTQ professionals also recognized that while the overall climate may be positive, the institution may not have as open and affirming a climate for all LGBTQ people. Disaggregating the letters, identities, and experiences within the LGBTQ acronym, participants shared the spectrum from celebration to invisibility regarding resources for particular subsets within LGBTQ communities. Eli, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern private institution, and Justin, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern public institution share their perceptions of how higher education is experienced differently for some groups more than others:

“I think it's generally a good place to work for LGBT people, but some people still have no idea what a trans person is, or that there’s a trans person on our campus. From my letter of the alphabet soup, overall it's a really good climate, but I think we've got some work to do.”

“I don't know if I could place the resources and climate for bisexual students or asexual students, two-spirit, and then the intersectionality of all this stuff.”

For LGBTQ professionals representing additional diversities and minority identities across race, gender identity, and refugee status, the institutional climate was reported as less sunny than the general positive climate for some participants. While the climate might be not as positive for subsets within the LGBTQ population, a number of LGBTQ participants described the overall LGBTQ climate for their current institution as
lacking, struggling, and in need of repair. These participants used phrases like “laissez-faire,” “nonchalant,” “code of silence,” and “bro culture” to signal an apathetic, chilly, or potentially toxic environment that does not bode well for LGBTQ community members.

When discussing something as amorphous as institutional climate, LGBTQ professionals pointed out that there are no monoliths when it comes to culture. The institutional culture may be better for some in LGBTQ communities than for others based on identity, geographic context, employee status, or generation.

**Workplace Right / Resources**

Participants recognized that higher education workplaces ventured out ahead of local, state, and federal governments. Higher education institutions provided recognition and benefits to LGBTQ employees without state or federal governmental approval. These benefits include access to health care, medical insurance, domestic partnership benefits, and recognition of same-sex partners as similar to legal spouses.

Some of the ways LGBTQ couples gained recognition on college campuses included hosting the same-sex weddings of alumni. Jack, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, discussed how his alma mater demonstrated their commitment to LGBTQ inclusion by providing excellent service while implementing a life-changing wedding:

> “I got married at the college I was employed at, and we're both alumni of the institution. The whole process of setting that up was celebrated and acknowledged, like what I perceive for any other couple wanting to rent out space. Normalizing that piece was incredibly huge for me in terms of having that experience while also recognizing that when our identity comes out, it's more of a conversation, and these people are receptive and not dismissive.”

The normalization of recognizing same-sex couples continued at many institutions through including the declaration of partner and spousal information on
forms. LGBTQ professionals expressed how the ease of declaring a same-sex spouse through alumni databases and university records all figures in to an evolving sense of LGBTQ inclusion.

Similarly, the job search process through human resources also plays a role in institutions helping LGBTQ professionals feel valued. Professionals shared how some of their job descriptions included statements about demonstrated effectiveness working with students of color and LGBTQ students, sending an explicit message that this expectation exists for roles other than in campus diversity centers.

Spousal hires and including children in the full compensation package during the hiring of LGBTQ professionals demonstrated further commitment to diversity. Explicit messaging about this during interviews also helped LGBTQ professionals feel that they didn’t have to go searching or get passed from one employee to another to another, in order to find the answers.

Some campuses included a neutral person as part of the on-campus interview, serving as a liaison whom you could submit questions to, and they would search for the answers and respond to applicants. Setting aside time to visit affinity spaces, as well as informal time with other LGBTQ professionals, provided additional information that helped professionals feel valued in the process.

Written messaging included from human resources helped LGBTQ professionals know which resources were available. This was particularly important for transgender and nonbinary participants who needed to know whether medically necessary access to hormones or surgeries would be covered or subsidized through an employee health insurance plan.
Similarly for transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary individuals, feeling supported in usage of gender pronouns was important to feel recognized and engage in a work life without fear of being misgendered. These professionals reported an appreciation around gender pronouns, as well as an appreciation while encountering professionals who apologized for not recognizing them, expressed by both Piper, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, and November, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution:

“Most everyone knows my pronouns. Most people are really good about it or working on it, so that conversation keeps happening. Sometimes it’s off-handed like, “Hey, I saw in your email signature your pronouns. Sorry for not using them before.”

“Most of my colleagues here, when they’ve been corrected on something, they actually make the effort to keep up with that correction and to keep doing things right. If you tell them, “Actually my pronouns are…” then most of the employees here don't make a big deal of that. It’s usually, “Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I didn't know,” but not like making a huge show of using the right pronouns. They just do it. So, the culture that is developed and encouraged here is nice.”

To aid in the creation of an inclusive culture, the creation of physical spaces for people to gather in community has helped to further recognition of LGBTQ professionals both to connect on a personal level and as part of their continuing career in higher education. Participants mentioned the creation of spaces as ways in which workplaces show that they value LGBTQ professionals. These range from LGBTQ centers on campuses to LGBTQ employee resource groups, to welcome events for new LGBTQ faculty and staff, to increasing the number of gender-inclusive spaces such as restrooms and residence hall spaces.

In addition to creating physical spaces as gathering places, several LGBTQ committees and task forces accomplish goals of helping LGBTQ employees feel valued and respected. While task forces and commissions focus on action towards making
campus more inclusive, LGBTQ participants highlighted the importance of universities creating employee resource groups as places to engage in more community-building or even social activities, rather than focusing strictly on actionable initiatives.

Institutions have created additional campus groups and entities which LGBTQ participants highlighted as great resources for them throughout their professional careers, including LGBTQ alumni groups and academic circles around gender and sexuality research, sometimes directly connected to a Women’s, Gender, and Sexualities Studies academic program.

Another helpful institutional resource that participants utilized during their employment was access to confidential counseling. In the recognition of minority stress, microaggressions, and cultural taxation, many LGBTQ professionals appreciated having access to counselors in order to help sift through the difficult weekly interactions they faced in the workplace, sometimes carrying over into their personal lives. Overall, the recognition that counseling staffs could adequately meet the needs of LGBTQ students and professionals was noted as an important resource and showcasing of institutional values towards identity, support, and health.

Another way to display ongoing commitments to supporting LGBTQ professionals, especially over time, included the delivery of educational and training sessions like Safe Zone and Ally Trainings for students, faculty, and staff. These are trainings where faculty, staff, and students can learn about LGBTQ identities, topics, and how to be a supportive advocate and ally for people of various sexualities and gender identities.
Participants described how LGBTQ inclusion through Safe Zone and Ally Trainings began to change the work culture and overall climate of a university, even if some less-affirming people may be present within the larger division. Some participants shared how these trainings were included as part of a 12-to-18-month employee onboarding process at their institutions, while other participants were glad to see these trainings mandated by specific departments include police and safety officers.

In addition to offering educational trainings, taking an overall view at policies, procedures, and practices served as an important assessment tool that LGBTQ employees utilize to determine if a work climate is truly affirming. Beyond general diversity statements, participants wanted to know if the actions and practices matched the verbal or written commitments.

LGBTQ professionals also perceived messages of inclusion through additional instances of visual marketing and branding. Seeing messages on campus invitations requesting the inclusion of partners and guests was an important signal of inclusion to LGBTQ professionals who may not have a legal spouse.

Iconography including rainbow flags or a version of the institutional logo with some rainbow colors also signaled a visual practice that matched an institution’s commitment towards LGBTQ people.

Safe Zone and Ally Training stickers plastered on faculty and staff offices added to feelings of inclusion and acceptance, as did explicit demographic questions on admissions, health, and housing forms requesting optional information on gender identity, gender pronouns, and sexual orientation.
Nametags with gender pronouns also provided recognition of an adapting environment that is inclusive of people who may identify as transgender or nonbinary. Some participants worked at institutions where gender pronouns appeared on their office door placards and in their electronic directories.

Similar to visual reminders, the promotion of verbal and written statements helped LGBTQ professionals perceive how institutions took a stand towards the promotion of LGBTQ inclusion. Presidents hosted LGBTQ events at their on-campus residence during times of celebration, while other presidents distributed messages of support during tragedies like the Pulse Nightclub shooting.

Beyond the 30,000-foot level of institutional inclusion, LGBTQ participants expressed that sometimes what workplaces are doing right includes the everyday regular interactions in their workplaces. Queen, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern public institution, shares how grateful she is when the burden of asking diversity-related questions is lifted from her shoulders because majority-identity colleagues instigate these questions or challenges around inclusion, which don’t always carry the same level of risk for people of majority identities:

“It feels great when colleagues with a majority identity or privileged identities ask the questions because there is a risk, the risks of being a person with historically underrepresented identities asking the questions. It’s nice to be in a space where I don't always have to do that or be that person.”

Participants also expressed the importance of gaining time away from the office for self-reflection, rejuvenation, and professional development. Comp time and paid time off were particularly useful for LGBTQ professionals who interacted with students late at night, often engaging in events or dialogues around sensitive subjects into late night
hours. Allowing these professionals to flex their time, so they won’t have to arrive in the office like a zombie at 8:00 the next morning, sent a clear message acknowledging that these professionals need not burn themselves out while burning the midnight oil.

Accessing funds in order to engage in professional development also helped to strengthen their skill sets and knowledge bases, so they may be given the fuel necessary to be better in their jobs with each passing day or month.

Overall, participants expressed a grateful appreciation of the existence of dedicated institutional resources and commitments to LGBTQ inclusion, even if the LGBTQ professionals themselves didn’t specifically ever utilize these resources. Regardless of their positional status or geographic location, professionals shared how the mere knowledge that certain benefits and resources exist on campus truly adds to supporting and retaining LGBTQ professionals. These sentiments were shared by Allan, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, Ben, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, and Tim, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution:

“Gender transition surgery is covered more. Things like that… while it wasn't a direct benefit to me, it was announced, it was celebrated, and those things matter.”

“There was an existing center, and even when I didn't frequent the center, didn't feel like I needed to. The fact that it existed felt like a resource, felt like institutional investment.”

“The [LGBTQ Affinity] group, just to be able to see other people work in other parts of the institution, having some strength in numbers, that’s been a useful resource. I think in some ways knowing that the [LGBTQ center] was here, or is here… knowing that those things exist, even if I don't use them.”

**Applying**

Regarding resources provided by institutions during the application process, LGBTQ professionals were asked if they received any messaging or information related
to their level of LGBTQIA inclusion. Most LGBTQ professionals interviewed did not receive any information directly from institutions related to their levels of inclusion. Rather, they felt they always had to initiate the conversation rather than receive information up front related to benefits and services for diverse populations. These sent signals where LGBTQ professionals perceive such institutions as less than affirming of LGBTQ identities. Even when asking, some LGBTQ professionals expressed the revolving door of referrals, being passed from one person to several others before obtaining a correct answer around benefits and resources for LGBTQ professionals.

While most participants responded to not receiving any information about LGBTQIA inclusion from institutions during the application process, several participants highlighted how they initiated the search for resources and information themselves. They reviewed nondiscrimination clauses, diversity plans, and websites. Social media, yelp reviews, and googling were important tools online for LGBTQ professionals who wanted to seek out information about institutional levels of inclusion, as experienced by Sam, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution:

“I googled to see if there's anything gay that comes up about these institutions. You know, did they have any problems with queer issues before… and then just make more of an informed decision.”

Participants also noted that while using Google and keywords, if the results showed more visibility and press coverage around bias incidents and negative remarks than around the celebration of LGBTQ events and identities, that would send them some signals about the potentially hostile climates of institutions they had considered applying to work in.
While most participants expressed that they received no explicit messages signaling LGBTQ inclusion throughout their employment application processes, a few LGBTQ participants did express positive steps institutions employed that signaled inclusion, particularly on nondiscrimination notices and application forms. These included language encouraging LGBTQ candidates to apply as well as questions on the employment application asking candidates for a diversity statement or philosophy.

LGBTQ participants remarked on how important the composition of the recruiting team throughout the job search process was. How the recruiting team looked was interpreted as a real-life portrayal of the institution’s LGBTQ inclusion or the absence thereof. LGBTQ professionals wanted to see themselves working at the institutions they were applying for, and that means interacting with other out LGBTQ professionals as part of the recruiting team and interview process.

LGBTQ participants also mentioned how responses within interviews further provided information on the campus climate, or lack thereof. Jay, a senior-level professional working at a Western private institution, mentioned an instance during his job search process involving his request to speak with another LGBTQ employee in order to get a sense of the culture and environment:

“In the interview process, I asked the dean who was trying to recruit me, “Is there another gay person or employee that I can talk to about what it is like as a gay person here,” and he got very quiet.”

**Suggestions for Institutions to Improve LGBTQ Inclusion Efforts**

LGBTQ participants shared ideas and suggestions for how institutions could show their support of LGBTQ professionals so they feel valued and hopefully retained in the workplace. Some LGBTQ participants began by describing a basic impetus or overall
assessment of the landscape surrounding LGBTQ inclusion. Allan, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, and Jeff, an entry-level professional working at a Western private institution, both described the dire importance of promoting any available resources as signals for inclusion:

“ Anything visible would have been helpful… a resource, a web page, a task force. You type in “LGBT” and [institution in the East]. You get virtually nothing, or several pages down, you’ll find the one umbrella student organization, but there's nothing at the moment.”

“ I haven't really heard anything about our Campus Pride Index. Providing that resource to the community will allow us to see where our gaps are in supporting students. Obviously, it's not like a perfect assessment but it's pretty standard for the field, for us to evaluate certain things on our campus to make sure that we're being inclusive.”

Assessments like the Campus Pride Index also signaled inclusion to prospective LGBTQ employees. In describing how institutions could do better with their hiring practices, participants wanted to see the hiring of LGBTQ people represented beyond diversity jobs. Many highlighted wanting to see more LGBTQ people in athletics, admissions, human resources, and across the faculty.

Participants also shared how pervasive something like implicit bias can be, whereby people making decisions that often result in hiring and retaining employees who look and operate similarly to the hiring manager. These are often situations where coded language such as using “the right fit” and “they would do well in this culture” as criteria would indicate some bias that relates to personal identity alignment more than just their professional experience. This style of criteria and implicit bias would limit the ability of diverse professionals to get hired.

LGBTQ professionals suggested the tracking of LGBTQ professionals in order to give further credibility to their existence and justification for resources across institutions of higher education. That critical mass can be useful when attempting to hire more
LGBTQ professionals who might fear they would be the pioneer or token for their department or division. A general lack of data on employee LGBTQ information seemed in misalignment to what many LGBTQ professionals perceived while employed at institutions where student information on gender identity and sexual orientation gets tracked and recorded for informational purposes.

Advancing bereavement leave for families of same-sex partners and domestic partners would greatly help LGBTQ professionals feel supported in a time of potential crisis or family upheaval due to a relative’s death. Participants also wanted the employee assistance program to be for their partners and same-sex spouses, in cases where heterosexual partners and spouses could access such resources.

Whether married or not, family expansion was another area where LGBTQ professionals perceived missed opportunities where institutions could do better to support their retention and career advancement. Participants shared their thought processes around what adoption, surrogacy, and family planning might look like within a higher education setting. Two such participants are Justin, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern public institution, and Reed, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution:

“I do think about family planning. Things are in place for maternity and paternity leave. I feel like I've seen from HR offices, workshops on maternity leave and mommy groups. I wonder what that could look like for surrogacy, adoption, and the extreme hurdles that LGBTQ folks have to go through to start a family.”

“Adoption is something new that I've started to look at, namely parental leave. If they have something like that, then arguably they also are supportive and open to a non-traditional family. So, that tells me the values of the institution. While I'm not going to take advantage of that benefit, at the same time it tells me that again, there's a conversation.”
In addition to expanding beyond traditional notions of family and the gender binary, LGBTQ professionals highlighted the topic of transgender inclusion as a key area where they perceive institutions in need of more institutional commitment and resourcing. With current events changing laws across individual states as well as the federal government in recent years, professionals shared their perceived difficulties in locating people with sufficient legal knowledge to help transgender and nonbinary employees in higher education. Piper, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, shared their thoughts in response to recent national stories and policies calling into question the validity of transgender identities and the safety of nonbinary people to be who they are:

“I'm nonbinary. It'd be great to have someone who would have really robust knowledge, so when faculty and staff run into laws like that, we have this resource to go to or get legal services.”

Transgender advocacy was one of many topics rising from the existence of an active faculty and staff network of LGBTQ professionals. These affinity and employee resource groups proved to be very helpful to LGBTQ participants in making important connections socially and professionally. Some participants shared that their networks started with a sizable population and momentum but soon became defunct due to failing leadership and no accountability to keep them running through Human Resources or senior leadership at their institutions.

Branching from the administrative side over to the academic side of the house, LGBTQ professionals shared suggestions for how institutions could better support inclusion of identities and diverse perspectives across faculty and academics. They perceived institutions as more affirming when LGBTQ topics were woven into the
academic curriculum. Jason, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, shared how shifting inclusion in the classroom contributes to shifting overall LGBTQ inclusion on campus:

“In terms of what are we asking students to create, design, read, study, I'd like to see that better reflect the diversity of scholars, artists, creators across our divisions… academic divisions. That shifts the climate because it changes the way in which people engage with these issues. It educates the community, but using the classroom as the way to do that, which I think is the more important way, quite frankly.”

Participants did mention that faculty were sometimes difficult to work with around inclusion, due to deeply held views around sexuality and diversity in general which might appear antithetical to where the institution is heading. In addition to mentioning faculty as a particular constituent group with work to do regarding LGBTQ inclusion and support, participants also selected specific departments or groups of workers in need of education and awareness. These departments and groups included physical plant and facilities staff, front line desk staff and office managers, fraternities, sororities, athletics, and health services.

By queering and reimagining the lines and boundaries of higher education institutions, LGBTQ professionals encouraged the broadening of an inclusive climate that allows for students and professionals with more gender-expansive identities to feel they can fully participate in campus life. A lack of transgender and nonbinary people, as well as a lack of queering traditional notions of gender and sexuality, all contributed to an institution appearing too polished and cookie-cutter. Jeff, an entry-level professional working at a Western private institution, expressed how facades and perfectionism needed to change in order for more people outside the traditional mold to feel included, valued, and retained as diverse professionals:
“This institution is very like polished, very much about the aesthetics. I think queerness can live in that type of environment, but I don't think you can thrive. Being polished means like fitting into a certain mold. When things tend to be polished or try to fit in a certain way, you really begin to have a warped view of what the world is. You begin to change the integrity of whatever you're trying to do… the people that you are employing… the people you’re educating. It doesn’t allow people to come as they are. If you come as you are, make sure it's a display. I think that's something that I would change.”

Participants discussed how problematic they viewed current Title IX policies, given that the requirement for reporting data on the percentage of student-athletes and the percentage of students receiving scholarships is driven by a gender binary that only accounts for male students and female students. Participants shared that it has been difficult to track, report, or further include transgender and nonbinary students if the gender binary is not queered to include more gender-expansive categories beyond male and female within Title IX policies.

Even within LGBTQ-identified circles, some professionals felt the gender binary was reinforced, presenting further challenges to their personal and professional lives. Participants expressed expanding resources to include services for LGBTQ homeless people, and doing more inward-facing LGBTQ work to challenge such notions around gender identities and emerging sexualities rather than catering to the education of straight allies.

**Senior Leadership**

LGBTQ professionals specifically pointed to senior leadership as an area of opportunity and growth regarding inclusion and retention of employees, not just LGBTQ employees but also employees of color. Many discussed the physical composition of senior leadership as an important signal or message to LGBTQ employees. Similar to the prior discussion around recruitment teams while applying for positions, LGBTQ
professionals perceived a certain mold of straight, cisgender, White men related to senior leadership which left few opportunities for LGBTQ professionals to envision their upward professional mobility.

LGBTQ professionals highlighted how inclusion around multiple types of diversity would allow them to see themselves. If they could see themselves and their identities represented, they could see themselves not just continuing at their institutions, but perhaps rising to senior leadership levels where they had not currently seen that diversity be lifted:

“It's exciting to think about, “What does the future look like,” where maybe there's gay presidents, there's trans provosts, there's queer women of color as chief diversity officers or as V.P. of facilities, and all that stuff. What does that look like? I have not seen that anywhere, and representation at the highest levels matters.”

In envisioning a future full of diversity represented across multiple tiers of an institution’s organizational chart, Justin, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern public institution, highlighted how representation matters at all levels in order to signal a commitment to diversity while cultivating diverse professionals to excel in future positions of leadership.

Senior-level administrators agreed that representation does help to signify a commitment, while also allowing the burden around diversity and inclusion topics to not be placed solely on the one or few senior-level administrators who identify as people of color or LGBTQ. LGBTQ professionals who reached senior levels of administrative leadership expressed being seen as collaborative bridge-builders more than other senior staff who held majority identities. At the same time, they also acknowledged a sense of cultural taxation on their own, being asked or expected to conduct additional
responsibilities simply because of their identities. These included extra nighttime sessions with cultural student organizations, attending events like lavender graduation, speaking at events involving diverse students. Their presence at such gatherings helped to make students see that they had representation among senior staff, while also distancing their level of connection from other majority-identity staff who were perceived as not being often asked or expected to do the same types of speaking engagements or nighttime cultural events.

Public Statements

Participants discussed the importance of senior leaders engaging in public actions, whether attending events, being present around LGBTQ communities, or making public statements. Useful statements included announcements around the inclusion of gender pronouns or additions of protected classes within nondiscrimination clauses. Any announcements regarding the creation of forums to gather feedback related to diversity and inclusion were perceived as useful in promoting a positive and inclusive environment.

Following the Pulse Nightclub shooting, LGBTQ professionals engaged their superiors in conversations around the importance of sending public statements. Allan, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, shared the conversation he had with superiors following the Pulse shooting:

“I think many administrators come up through systems and don't understand or quite grasp, particularly if they’re cisgender and white, the value of public statements… and the value of it coming from the cis and white folks. When I had a conversation with my boss about, “Is it really the president’s job to comment on every national tragedy?” No, it's probably not in the job description, but would it be a good thing? I would say so. She said maybe it's the dean of students’ job, and I had to stop her there and essentially say, “Why, because the dean of students is black, because he's a part of a marginalized community? Why is it his job then, because it’s not just the student community that’s having a bad day.”
Current events and national tragedies served as ouch moments for multiple participants who shared their disappointment around senior university leaders’ lack of communication and support of LGBTQ communities. Many felt they could not work that day or week, instead feeling a visceral need to be in community with other LGBTQ people outside of work, to check up on close friends and see how people were doing during these national tragedies. Further salt was placed in wounds when senior leaders distributed public statements about other mass shootings or instances of hatred that impacted marginalized communities that were not LGBTQ. Allan shared the ongoing fallout at his institution among LGBTQ professionals once public statements were distributed across his institution regarding the Las Vegas shooting:

“When that happened and there was no communication from the upper administration, it was devastating and painful. I don't think people in our top administration quite understood the magnitude of what at the time was the largest massacre in U.S. history and that it was specifically targeted towards Latinx and LGBTQ folks. I've spoken about that to colleagues in administration several times. I can't even remember how long it was, between Pulse in Orlando and Las Vegas. But when Las Vegas happened, there was a statement from the president, and so it just made it worse.”

LGBTQ participants shared feelings of empowerment and solidarity from public statements made by senior leaders, acknowledging their existence and re-affirming the values of the institution. During weeks where multiple large-scale current events occur, especially affecting marginalized communities, LGBTQ professionals shared how a re-articulation of institutional values around inclusion and affirmation can go a long way in showing LGBTQ students and employees that they matter.

Through public statements, senior leaders distributed important messages about seeing LGBTQ professionals for who they are and what they contribute, even if they
exist so far up the organizational chart that they don’t often physically see LGBTQ professionals on a daily basis. That good faith goes a long way.

**Training**

LGBTQ professionals not only desired training around equity and inclusion for senior leaders. They also mentioned that if senior leaders are receiving training in these areas, it should be promoted because this presents an opportunity to send a message that senior leaders are open to receiving ongoing education around inclusion.

LGBTQ professionals gave additional advice regarding senior leadership that has wider implications across human resources, chief diversity officers, or other senior staff. Many professionals recognized that the LGBTQ centers on their campuses seem to do endless amounts of outreach and LGBTQ inclusion work with very limited staffing. Professionals perceived this work which ranged from data collection practices to employee rights to implementing campuswide trainings as being worthy of someone in a Chief Diversity Officer or Director of Human Resources level, rather than someone in charge of a student-facing center focused on providing support for LGBTQ students.

An LGBTQ participant in a senior leadership role suggested increasing professional development opportunities that cater to LGBTQ senior leaders. Much of the conversation involving LGBTQ professionals at the senior leader level occurs informally through friends and colleagues, rather than through a symposium or network for LGBTQ senior administrators. While the national LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education group is currently defunct, participants expressed this absence as a potential opportunity and catalyst for sparking, developing, and strengthening current LGBTQ senior leaders while cultivating future LGBTQ senior leaders.
What Keeps LGBTQ Professionals at their Institutions

When asked what keeps LGBTQ professionals at their current institutions, some professionals felt the answer was simple. If they enjoyed the work, enjoyed their colleagues, and made a difference in students’ lives, then they were more than happy to continue their positions in higher education. Some remarked that they thought they would remain at their institutions for 2 or 3 years, which turned into 10-to-30 years. LGBTQ professionals perceived being given autonomy to develop their staff and office priorities as key to their ongoing retention over their many years of employment.

One of the most popular answers for what keeps LGBTQ professionals retained at institutions involved feeling supported by supervisors and superiors. Finding someone whose vision aligns with their own allowed many to stay in their roles, connected as part of a team committed to student success and institutional expansion. Through educating and transforming the lives of students, LGBTQ professionals and their supervisors teamed up to accomplish great things while fueling and motivating each other to continue and advance their professional careers.

LGBTQ professionals specifically mentioned the joy they get when students are immediately impacted through their interactions. For these professionals, seeing students succeed and feeling better about themselves, their multiple identities, and their future goals reminds LGBTQ professionals why they continue in the field. Reed, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, and November, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, shared how watching students develop over time has influenced their ability to continue their careers in higher education:
“I think what keeps me in it, at the moment, is that I know the work I do makes a real impact. Students usually end up feeling better about something when they leave my office or if we're working on something, and helping them succeed is really great.”

“Any time that I have a student tell me that something that I did or said impacted them positively, it really reminds me like, “Yes, that's why I'm here. That's why I want to be doing this.”

Compensation and benefits also served as important and realistic reasons for LGBTQ professionals to continue their careers in higher education, particularly as they relate to professionals in senior-level positions looking towards retirement or family compensation package that includes benefits for their spouse, partner, and children.

Whereas compensation and benefits proved more important for senior-level LGBTQ professionals, the ability to engage in graduate school served as very important for retaining LGBTQ professionals at mid-level positions. They appreciated financial support from their institutions while also being granted time away to conduct their studies in class. While juggling work, school, and a personal life presented challenges for LGBTQ professionals, they perceived the privilege of even being able to attend graduate school while working full-time as an incredible opportunity that supports and retains LGBTQ professionals.

Roles, Advice, and Strategies for Future Generations

Regarding the fourth research question, participants shared a great deal of guidance to help future generations of LGBTQ professionals know what to anticipate or consider while continuing or advancing their career in higher education. LGBTQ professionals perceived the following as advice they would give to future generations considering whether to continue or advance their careers in higher education: a) recognize the array of roles that LGBTQ professionals undertake throughout their careers, b) be authentic, c) locate professional networks through mentors and
associations, d) find your tribe, e) self-sacrifice is imminent, f) consider your comfort with control, g) mobilize when mistreatment arises, h) working at a college is different than attending college, i) be savvy in navigating systems and politics, j) expand your circle and professional portfolio, k) attend graduate school to advance your credentials, l) remember what not to do, and m) make your own choices to create your own journey.

The first key area of guidance, listed as subpart a above, involves the multiple professional roles that LGBTQ professionals take on in the higher education sphere. The second key area of guidance, encapsulating subparts b through m above, involves strategies for overcoming adversity and navigating higher education as well as specific advice on what to do (and what not to do) in multiple areas of your professional life.

**Multiple Roles of LGBTQ Professionals**

Participants discussed the evolution of their mindset from student activists to professional advocates. In trying to navigate political systems and complex structures, activism was often enacted by students and tenured faculty while staff and administrators were able to influence from within by serving as advocates for LGBTQ inclusion. Queen and Kyle, two mid-level professionals at Eastern private institutions, each discussed the important differences between the mindsets of being an undergraduate student activist and a professional staff advocate:

“Going from a student activist who I would describe as pretty radical and even some of my politics are still... well, I'm radical... I was very much like, “Interrupt the system. Disrupt it any way you can,” a very sort of direct action-oriented as an undergraduate student, protest, abolish campus security, all that fun stuff. Transitioning into administration, I’m then becoming part of a system, right? The system that I might have protested against when I was a student. It’s a transition that you have to be very conscious of.”

“One of the most important things I tell students as they're preparing for this role, being a student activist and being an administrative professional are two different things and no one tells you that. It's not about you anymore. It's not your journey anymore. Obviously, you were an important part
of it. Now it's all about the students. Students come first. You have to listen to them. Sometimes you can guide their understanding about things and help them advance, but it's not about you.”

Participants also discussed being a strategic advocate by using their positionality, rather than disrupting as an activist. In determining which choices need to be made about the level or fervor of their advocacy or activism, professionals were encouraged to self-reflect on how much emotional labor someone would be willing to put into their advocacy. Being enraged about every injustice would result in burnout, frustration, and feelings that might make you want to leave your job which ultimately affects your paycheck and livelihood. LGBTQ professionals also remarked on the powerful nature of positive incremental change resulting from the advocacy mindset, rather than the sweeping demands often wanted from student activism.

Participants shared times when their emotions had gotten the best of them and how they lost credibility among their colleagues in the room while trying to navigate and advocate and activist mindset. As a lesson learned, this tricky balancing act of advocate-not-activist was one example of a professional role where LGBTQ professionals advised others to be aware of as they continue and advance their careers.

LGBTQ professionals mentioned the importance of bringing people together to convene and collaborate for building community and sparking change. In many ways, they initiated and continued collaborations while thinking of new ways to convene for change and inclusion. These collaborations included employee resource groups, being connected to professional associations, connecting over Facebook groups, or taking off their departmental hats and instead promoting and attending divisional initiatives.
Participants shared how the relationships built from their roles as collaborators allowed them to advance their careers by switching positions to a different functional area within the same higher education institution. Working cross-functionally was a strategic reality for LGBTQ senior leaders who discussed their roles as conveners and collaborators. Kevin, a senior-level professional at a Midwestern private institution, gave a glimpse into treading carefully while conducting collaborations across senior administrators.

“I’ll work with another vice president to try to determine, “Are we on the same page here? If so, we’ve gotta kind of marshal the resources to get it happened.” A lot of politics when you’re trying to work through obstacles at a senior level because you show up in those spaces differently than other people do. So, you can often get in and throw your weight around, your title or rank at the institution, to get something done. But, you can leave a lot of people with resentment, which may not help in the long run. Even when you have significant power at an institution, it sometimes means you have to be even more careful about it.”

Kevin mentioned above how LGBTQ senior leaders should be careful throughout the various spaces they occupy across campus. Showing up in multiple spaces with students, faculty, staff, and administrators, LGBTQ professionals acted as conduits who juggled, translated, and exchanged information across many different constituent groups. LGBTQ participants shared their experiences bringing and translating the voices and experiences of LGBTQ university members across different spaces. Because jargon differs across academic, administrative, and student circles, often LGBTQ professionals become conduits who find themselves in the translator role so all sides feel heard and understood.

Participants also expressed that being a conduit does not always result in productive or positive change. Some participants were able to obtain the ear of a senior leader, sometimes even the university president, to discuss topics from gender-neutral
restrooms to benefits to transgender inclusion. Though change may not have occurred every single time, these participants brushed off a few failures and continued onward to serve in the role as conduits across students, faculty, and administration.

Similar to the restroom facilities and benefits examples above, LGBTQ professionals highlighted how their roles often expand to serve as a consultant and educator for other departments. Participants shared the vast array of consultation and education around LGBTQ inclusion that they provide to other departments. From benefits (Human Resources) to recruitment (Admissions) to alumni networks (Advancement) to classroom education (Faculty), LGBTQ professionals across all functional areas seemed to be called upon to serve in consultative and educational roles all across the larger campus.

LGBTQ professionals sometimes embraced this role, despite acknowledging the cultural taxation and extra effort to create and deliver such education. While some felt empowered to do such critical work, some professionals felt this work was far too superficial and simplified, as if asked to come in and praise offices for doing the minimum around using inclusive language and avoiding homophobic slurs. The concept of being a general good human, in this case using inclusive language, did not necessarily earn people a gold star or elevated ally status if they continued to feel challenged by the presence of out LGBTQ people on campus.

The role of consultant or educator became tiresome for many, and sometimes questions about LGBTQ identities turned into a full-on interrogative process whereby the LGBTQ professionals being interviewed had attention brought to how they live their personal lives. Therefore, striking a balance and being explicit about boundaries helped
LGBTQ professionals gain control over situations where they were asked or expected to consult or educate other campus areas.

It is also worth noting that most participants did not receive any additional compensation for educating the rest of campus. When compensation was provided, it was most often indicated as a gift card of minimal value. Not necessarily looking to do this for payment or compensation, many LGBTQ professionals expressed their role as a necessary contributor to the greater good for community and society.

Sometimes with the adage “If not me, then who,” LGBTQ participants picked up the torch and ran Olympic lengths to attempt a culture change in the name of widescale acceptance:

“I know that the worst thing about work is not feeling like you have utility and not feeling like you're contributing to something greater. At least that's true for me.”

“If nobody's ever saying anything and nobody's ever pushing back, it's just literally going to be the same for like gay people forever.”

Marcus, a senior-level professional working at a Western private institution, and Forest, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, both drew linkages across usefulness and action as ways to achieve meaning, purpose, and change for the greater good. Translating words into actions had profound effects, not just on changing others and the institution, but it also served to reify one’s internal sense of purpose, mission, and calling.

In contributing towards a greater good, many participants mentioned how their roles as contributors to the greater good around LGBTQ inclusion helped other university members avoid rejection, isolation, invisibility, invisibility, feeling unsafe, and even suicide prevention.
LGBTQ participants shared how their professional role, and sometimes just their sheer existence as an out professional in higher education, served as an example for others. Serving as an example and mentor to others not only meant achieving greater heights by breaking the lavender ceiling, but also paving the way for other LGBTQ professionals to follow, as expressed by Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution:

“It's really the reaching down, and I feel like we all have the opportunity to climb the ladder and then pull it up behind us once we've reached where we want to reach. But, finding those people who still have the ladder extended on which you can climb behind them, I think it’s a really important development experience for queer professionals, not just in higher education. You don't know what you don't know. If you don't see someone in the position that you aspire to someday, you'll think, “I would’ve thought that would be an impossibility.”

In being an example for others, successful LGBTQ professionals actively served to pull other LGBTQ professionals up to levels of success in the institution. Many participants shared how they served in mentorship roles, as an effort to help others climb the ladder or continue the circle. These efforts included involvement in “Next Gen” institutes and mentor programs where undergraduate students are cultivated for possible careers in higher education. While extending a hiring offer for professional positions, LGBTQ professionals explained how they led by example. For instance, some acknowledged other LGBTQ professionals’ significant others openly, treating the pair as a package deal and welcoming them both into the university community in similar ways they encountered during their own career journeys.

LGBTQ participants who had not yet reached senior-level status commented on the perception that their LGBTQ identity, especially when coupled with age, signals a lack of seriousness or professionalism to senior-level professionals. These participants felt that perceptions or assumptions around their identities hindered their professional
advancement, as mentioned below by Sam, a mid-level professional working at a
Southern public institution:

“If you look older or more age-appropriate, like what a 40-year-old should look like, you get street credit for that. The person that doesn’t display or express themselves in a lighthearted manner would get taken more seriously. That’s not fair to me, but hey, life’s not about being fair. I do think that’s sort of played out in my career trajectory. So that’s at the intersections of age, physicality, gender expression, sexuality, all of that together. It’s subconscious. I think people subconsciously make assumptions based on those things. Oftentimes, they’re not fair to the person that they’re making those assumptions about.”

While Sam shared how he encountered challenges rising from perceptions of their identities, several participants shared how they encountered great benefits from being treated as normal or in ways similar to straight colleagues. These instances often involved recognition of partners and inclusion in typical everyday conversations. Even body language was cited as important, that people did not shrug their shoulders, gasp, or flinch when colleagues mentioned a night at the gay bar or a weekend getaway with a partner of the same gender.

For a group that often experienced things happening specifically to them, LGBTQ professionals pointed out the unexpected realization of when things were so natural and normal, like inclusion in conversations, that they became hyperaware of times when nothing was being done to them. They embraced the stillness, peace, and normalcy that rose from a work environment where they weren’t questioned or met with microaggressions or questionable body language around typical watercooler talk.

These participants described how the normalization of their LGBTQ identities and the extent by which LGBTQ professionals are treated not as special or different, but rather similar to straight colleagues had influenced where they lived, and why they continued their careers in the field of higher education.
Over time, LGBTQ participants shared how the saliency of their LGBTQ identities shifted throughout their professional journeys. Many professionals with over a decade of experience made references to their LGBTQ identities being much less salient than when they were younger with fewer years of being out in the workplace.

Participants described the current sense of their LGBTQ identity as just part of who they are, not something they lead with or draw much attention to. As they have built up positional capital, as well as more years of comfort in their bodies and identities, more seasoned LGBTQ professionals felt much less worried about their outness than their entry-level and mid-level LGBTQ colleagues.

For these LGBTQ participants, they shared how they avoided telegraphing their LGBTQ identity, either in conversations, or through some of the typical iconography or experiences historically associated with LGBTQ identity like rainbow flags and pride parades.

Peter & Robyn, a senior-level and a mid-level professional both working at Southern public institutions, expressed how their individuality expands the notion of LGBTQ professionals who should no longer be assumed to be immersed in LGBTQ culture or stereotypes:

“There was no flag [in my office]. I think I've only been to gay pride once. It was just… I’d never done those activities. We just are individuals and being gay is a part of who we are, but it's not the identity that we associate as like “our identity.”

“As I've gotten older, I just don't overtly put it out there. It's just a part of who I am, and it comes up when it makes sense. I don't try to hide it or anything like that, but I've also just grown tired of having to constantly insert myself.”

In essence, by not abiding to traditional notions of queerness, Peter and Robyn have queered the lines of queerness beyond a narrow traditional definition of what being
LGBTQ was perceived to be. This meta-queering allowed for an expansion of LGBTQ people to be seen as more than rainbows, pride parades, and the sole or most salient part of their identities.

In addition to LGBTQ professionals above expressing their identities as part of who they are, not as super-salient, there were times when they spoke about how their mere existence as an out LGBTQ professional was perceived as a political act. Participants shared how it was difficult in professional settings to be perceived as political or having an agenda whenever professionals shared their personal or work experiences related to LGBTQ inclusion. Unable to divorce personal politics from social identities, many LGBTQ professionals found themselves being questioned as politically motivated both in person and in their writing.

Participants’ resumes listing pro-LGBTQ community service work, LGBTQ student organizations, and diversity center professional experience were deemed as too political by some resume reviewers. Others were told to not include any reference whatsoever to their LGBTQ identities within their cover letters, resumes, or other application materials, and certainly not during face-to-face during an interview. Participants ultimately decided to throw that advice in the trash, sometimes being met with unexpected surprise when hiring committees mentioned the advantage of diversity these prospective professionals would bring to the institution as openly LGBTQ.

LGBTQ professionals mentioned taking on roles as self-censors, holding back or constantly assessing their situation and contexts to determine whether or not to disclose their LGBTQ identities. Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern
private institution, attested to physiological changes that seemed to suddenly come over him when speaking with senior leadership at his institution:

“I code-switch based on my environments. If I'm in a senior leadership meeting, I don't do it on purpose, but I know it happens. My voice lowers, my arms aren't quite so animated.”

This code-switching or changing of behaviors to navigate different contexts for safety influenced how LGBTQ professionals maneuver their professional environments and their career journeys. In quelling potential signals that queer the norms of professional life, whether deepening their voice, using more conservative body language, or dressing in more explicitly gender-specific professional attire, LGBTQ professionals felt they would have a much better chance of being accepted and understood. This caused many to be in conflict while balancing their levels of authenticity with the role as self-censor.

Participants also acknowledged how their behaviors and decision-making process shift when encountering a completely new or unknown context. Self-censoring can occur not just in one’s own presence or appearance but also when injustices are spotted. Participants shared that in some examples, they knew that if they stopped the moment to correct someone’s incorrect language or took a moment to educate on why certain laws or policies were deemed anti-LGBTQ, they would lose the greater overall message around helping students and employees find success and services in the moment.

Participants also mentioned that the self-censoring of LGBTQ identities can help or harm the university, and knowing the correct timing for disclosing your personal identities is an important skill. Such was the case for Lionel, a senior-level professional working at a Southern public institution:
“Sometimes it’s more prevalent to go, “Oh, maybe this is not the crowd that we can really go into my personal life.” I’m here to represent the university and be the best person I can be in the job to make things move forward. So if the gayness helps, I’m going to push that forward. If it doesn’t, then you back off. Leadership is learning when and how and when not to persuade in those different ways.”

In gaining more years of leadership and professional experience, Lionel was able to gauge which community partnerships or constituent groups would respond more favorably around LGBTQ identities. Therefore, self-censoring was perceived as a strategy or advantage in some situations in order to advance larger institutional goals, while in some cases, disclosing one’s identity served as an advantage. Most mid-level and senior-level participants shared that, while they may have engaged in self-censoring as younger professionals, most were unapologetic about discussing their LGBTQ identities openly in the workplace.

LGBTQ participants mentioned that they encounter roles throughout their careers as soulbearers and painsharers. Often in situations where there can be a psychic cost from bearing their souls, LGBTQ professionals used their own experiences of rejection, isolation, exclusion, and violence as ways to put a face to the pain triggered by instances of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

In sharing their pain, they educated others around the negative experiences they faced while also encountering a potential re-triggering or re-visiting of past traumas. Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, highlighted how he not only experienced the original trauma but how the re-telling of such stories and experiences can inflict damage on students and colleagues who become privy to their experiences:

“My students really have a visceral, emotional experience to knowing that at this institution that they called home I had a really painful experience. Opening up about that experience in some way
spread out the pain and maybe diffused it, released some from me, but also inflicted some pain and trauma on those who heard this story.”

Some participants also highlighted times that straight people might take for granted, for instance in the curiosity of wanting LGBTQ participants to bear their souls or share their pain. These included how coming out is a daily experience for so many LGBTQ professionals. Participants pointed out that straight people can also have experiences that queer or blur the lines, and also that sometimes they need to be reminded that straight people are capable of transgressing norms too and that’s ok. This drew parallels across the experiences of straight people and queer people where they may identify differently yet engage in behaviors, dress, mannerisms, or experiences that many could deem as falling beyond traditional norms of gender-rigid or sexuality-rigid behavior.

A very common role across LGBTQ professionals included serving as a spokesperson or community voice for the larger LGBTQ community. Whereas participants mentioned the spokesperson role as an unexpected burden, a number of LGBTQ professionals proudly and actively took on the role. Some mentioned feeling either compelled or responsible for speaking up, given their identities and positionality, especially in institutions where a critical mass of LGBTQ professionals did not exist.

LGBTQ participants also expressed times where their presence felt tokenizing, being requested or assigned to be in spaces where they were the only person with a diverse identity in that space. This often took place on university service work, in the form of search committees, task forces, policy teams, and mentoring students. Queen, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern public institution, expressed how she felt
she was being “volun-told” to be involved with committees as a queer person of color, and how institutions should be thinking about diversity, representation, and inclusion differently:

“I served on everyone’s search committee. At first, I did it because I thought it was important to build those relationships. But then I was being volun-told to go onto different committees… search committees and otherwise. I certainly have felt as though people view me as a bit of a unicorn… “We don’t have enough people of color on this committee. We don’t have any queer people. Oh, we’ll just ask [me] because she’s both.” That has been really frustrating. I hate going into a committee space and being the only one. I can give you my perspective, and it’s not going to be representative of all queer people or all people of color. It’s going to be my perspective. So, if you truly want more diverse perspectives, you will actually diversify your committee and not just get this one person.”

Participants mentioned the dual nature of tokenism, where some felt it was unfair to represent a larger identity, while they expressed fear in the alternative of their identities being completely invisible in important committee work on campus. In doing so, they expressed burnout and fatigue, feeling compelled to be the sole LGBTQ representative or advocate in an institution looking to them to be their own personal Google, Siri, Alexa, or AskJeeves.

LGBTQ professionals found opportunities to turn their tokenization into important moments of action, education, and inclusion. Many expressed how they felt situations could have turned out far worse if they hadn’t taken on the token role, because at least with a seat at the table, there was a chance they could influence others and create useful change.

The alternative would be for policies to be enacted that had detrimental effects on LGBTQ members of the institution, whether students or employees. Ben, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, expressed a nuanced ability to turn tokenizing interview requests into teachable moments for students:
“We continue to get students that get assigned by their teachers to interview a real live queer or trans person. So, I get to talk a lot about why that’s problematic and ask them to write a paper on why it's problematic instead.”

For some LGBTQ professionals, the role of trailblazer or roadpaver for future LGBTQ professionals meant doing something that others would not. Participants gladly wore rainbow ribbons or gender pronouns openly. Some created LGBTQ initiatives to bring other LGBTQ employees together for community building and venting. Some tried more underground ways of connecting with faculty and staff who might have otherwise been afraid to be out and openly LGBTQ in a rural or religious environment.

Whenever they could, LGBTQ professionals talked about the importance of “paving the way” for future generations of LGBTQ people, and how these histories need to be passed down to help others feel connected and supported in their personal and professional lives. Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, expressed how his role as the first speaker for a joint graduation ceremony of diverse students positioned him as a trailblazer and roadpaver:

“At the Catholic institution where I was, it was too small of an institution to do a lavender graduation and a students of color graduation. They lumped everything in, so I was the first speaker for that ceremony and really had to say why this is important. Your role models and my role models might not be same. The people who paved the way for us to get here. We all have a different history, and our history is important to be honored.”

Professionals also shared the struggles with trying to create LGBTQ initiatives while juggling many other responsibilities. They wanted to be trailblazers on a regular basis, and while the results may not have been perfect, a smaller showing of LGBTQ initiatives is much better than showing nothing at all. Senior-level LGBTQ administrators particularly mentioned feeling that their hearts were yearning to create
more diversity and inclusion efforts, however the obligations of their daily and weekly schedules made those initiatives appear as #100 on their laundry list of to-do tasks.

Professionals expressed how other LGBTQ professionals were the trailblazers and roadpavers for their own professional journeys. Sometimes these LGBTQ trailblazers were supervisors, and sometimes they were peers closer in age or functional area whom they connected with through membership or leadership within higher education professional associations.

An important piece highlighted by LGBTQ professionals involved motivation around paving the way once obtaining a higher professional status, providing new paths and possibility models for success in higher education across future generations. Sharing their thoughts on being a pioneer or roadpaver were Jay, a mid-level professional working at a Western private institution, Tim, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, and Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution:

“I had nobody that I could look up to as a faculty or staff member. I saw it as part of my responsibility, part of my privilege to be able to be a pioneer and make it better for other people.”

“We serve as role models and then provide the opportunity to do the same for others that we would meet. The younger generation who would see us in some of that same way. We’re helping them pave the way there.”

“Think about the ladder. Are you going to be the person who climbed up it and then hold it up behind you? Or are you going to leave it down there, and maybe even put a hand down to pull someone up?”

Through these statements, Jay, Tim, and Bruce summed up the purpose for this dissertation study, to provide advice and guidance for LGBTQ professionals who are looking to employ helpful strategies, while anticipating potential roadblocks, in order to succeed and advance in higher education. Few participants in this study had any advice
being provided to them about being an LGBTQ professional in higher education, and if that advice surfaced, it almost always surfaced from a heterosexual professional and rarely ever was directed as advice about specifically being an LGBTQ professional.

This study serves as an addition to the literature by collecting findings of advice and strategies by LGBTQ professionals to future generations of LGBTQ professionals.

**Advice and Strategies for Continuing and Advancing in Higher Education**

While the first set of guidance focused on the various roles that LGBTQ professionals should expect to encounter and leverage throughout their career, the following second set of guidance emphasizes strategies for getting ahead in the professional game of higher education. Given that the participants didn’t receive much advice in navigating higher education as an LGBTQ professional, this sharing of advice and strategies serves as a legacy-leaving or paying it forward, whereby successful out LGBTQ professionals can pave the way for future generations of LGBTQ professionals to find success throughout higher education.

**Be Authentic**

The most common piece of advice from LGBTQ professionals to current and future generations of LGBTQ professionals who are looking to advance in their higher education careers was to be authentic, even if that meant recognizing that an institution may not be the best fit. Participants highlighted inherent exhaustion in not being their true selves at work, constantly assessing or self-censoring pieces of their everyday lives, identities, or speech patterns. When interacting with colleagues and students, participants mentioned the difference between being authentic, often paired with words like honest, complex, or messy, and being a performer of your identity where it has to show up a
certain way to fit other people’s expectations. That level of self-scrutiny can do damage to LGBTQ professionals who become distracted doing the work by focusing attention on self-adjusting. Professionals expressed how authenticity not only brings about personal fulfillment but also provide an example for others, whether LGBTQ students or colleagues, that out LGBTQ professionals can be themselves and still be successful.

Describing their own experiences with this self-scrutiny was November, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution:

“Definitely never tone yourself down because I think one of the biggest things that we can do for each other and for LGBTQ students is not tone yourself down. Show them like, “I'm as out as I want to be, and I'm successful, and I'm happy.”

November emphasized the importance of being open and true about your identity while being free from shame or concern about how others might perceive you. This authenticity got noticed by other professionals as well as students, allowing out LGBTQ professionals to serve as positive role models merely by living their truth and succeeding in their profession.

LGBTQ participants also explicitly recognized that it was not always easy to be authentic. The ability to be open and authentic can be context-dependent and therefore something to strive for, so their advice involved making conscious decisions about safety during the ongoing journey on when and where to be fully out.

A mentality of embracing authenticity “wherever possible” or when it feels “as safe as possible” to be out was encouraged, with the recognition that not everyone has the same levels of privilege to be out. Professionals of color, nonbinary individuals, and LGBTQ professionals at faith-based institutions were among the many groups referred to as having less privilege or ability to be fully out.
Locate Professional Networks through Mentors & Associations

Finding mentors was a very popular piece of advice from most of our LGBTQ professional participants. Even as early as during undergraduate or graduate school, participants shared the importance of getting an early jump on finding mentors who can guide you professionally. These included faculty advisors and administrative staff who could help make quick professional connections early in someone’s career. These were also LGBTQ professionals who helped encourage them to join professional associations and sometimes helped fund their travel or registration for conferences. In these ways, LGBTQ professionals appreciated being included in a professional pipeline.

The impacts of building professional networks through mentors and associations was described in great detail by multiple LGBTQ professionals. Beyond professional advice, these manifested also in personal ways through finding friends or allies to help when trouble strikes or to mull over an “Am I crazy?” moment regarding microaggressions on campus.

An important piece for future generations of LGBTQ professionals to know involved that they are never alone. There are myriad ways to access LGBTQ professionals who can help with both personal and professional advice. Sam, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution, discussed the importance of finding your people, whether through your home institution, professional associations, or online communities:

“Whether they be your supervisors, colleagues on your campus, or through ACPA, NASPA, NODA, Google, or whatever. There are folks that are out there, other queer folks that have been through the same thing. Confide in them, and use them as your sounding boards. Use them as your friends, your allies, your shoulder to cry on.”
Find Your Tribe / Community

In addition to finding people who can guide you professionally as mentors and network-expanders, LGBTQ professionals emphasized the importance of finding their own tribe or community either inside or outside of the workplace. Participants certainly recommended not waiting for a formal group to start up, such as an LGBTQ employee resource group, and not waiting for a formal invitation if groups already exist.

Rather, LGBTQ professionals encouraged future generations to be assertive with their needs and introduce themselves as well as their desires to get connected or gain advice. At varying stages, people need different things, and LGBTQ professionals offered the find-your-tribe option as a way to build community that you can always come back to, to discuss and ponder issues that emerge in your professional lives.

Finding people within local surrounding communities also allowed many LGBTQ professionals to experience a needed separation so that everyday chats with coworker friends did not always boomerang back to work-related topics. Many mentioned hosting game nights, attending karaoke, going to local rallies or protests, and getting involved with LGBTQ community events, athletic teams, and nightlife as ways to branch out your network. Many referred to this community expansion of their friend network as finding their tribe or finding their chosen family.

Some self-identified introverts among the LGBTQ participant pool shared how they sought community beyond the walls of their institution through online platforms. Connecting through Facebook groups, LinkedIn, webinars, and discussion boards around Ted Talks from higher education professionals were all mentioned as important methods of finding a tight-knit community for people who might not have had access to a critical
mass of LGBTQ coworkers or a thriving LGBTQ presence in their local communities. Some participants even met their life partners through online communities around education.

Participants highlighted how important their support networks were for getting validation and additional perspectives on how professional situations unfolded, so they would not overthink them inside of a vacuum. In discussing the power of finding your tribe both within and outside the institution, Jeff, an entry-level professional working at a Western private institution, expressed how validation and understanding could be found by dialoguing with members of his tribe or chosen family:

“Accessing friends and mentors is helpful, for just being like, “Am I losing it in this situation?” Use them as a sounding board like, “Is it me? I just need some help kind of understanding this.” I think that's one of the ways I was raised too, wanting to feel validated or understood or have my perspective widened.”

Self-Sacrifice is Imminent

Changing students’ lives through education was often perceived as a holistic endeavor, often requiring nighttime and weekend hours. Participants shared that sometimes they had to sacrifice personal time. However, in reframing higher education as their calling and passion, they were able to locate a sense of comfort and contentment despite the self-sacrifice:

“I have to think about me too. Not everything can be in self-sacrifice for the cause. This is my livelihood, and my livelihood shouldn't make me depressed every day. If it does, I got to really think about that. Maybe I adjust my focus, right? I might have an exit plan, but I adjust my focus so I can see the positive things.”

Cate, a mid-level professional working at a Midwestern public institution, discussed above how the balancing of professional career, personal livelihood, and overall emotional labor often sparks a trade-off that many educators face. To avoid
burnout and maintain a sustainable livelihood, LGBTQ professionals should not envision a perpetual contributing to the greater good of students at their own expense.

Participants also shared that if you are the type of person who wants the spotlight focused heavily on you as an advocate for the greater good, you might want to reflect more about your role in higher education because these feelings should lessen as your focus involves educating collective communities of students. Part of the self-sacrifice involves reflection, setting boundaries, thinking of the greater good, but also knowing what your non-negotiables are. If LGBTQ professionals are tied too closely to a 9-to-5 routine with no weekend hours, or if their expectations involve never being asked to do additional responsibilities related to LGBTQ inclusion, then that level of self-sacrifice might be too great for you to continue in higher education.

Participants also discussed the ability to let go of control as essential for LGBTQ professionals anticipating a career in higher education. If you are a professional desiring control of your environment at all times, participants shared that perhaps a career in higher education is not for you. While LGBTQ professionals were disappointed in not being able to change or enact new inclusive policies with ease and sweeping consensus, they mentioned that sometimes they won and sometimes they lost, yet they always continued to advocate for change.

Professionals shared the importance of being responsible for things they could control within their own spheres of influence and job responsibility. Self-care measures including flexibility of comp time for nighttime and weekend work, as well as requests for time away helped to ease some of the burdensome feelings of self-sacrifice inherent in positions held by LGBTQ professionals.
Mobilize When Mistreatment Arises

Most LGBTQ professionals mentioned that some form of mistreatment will be inevitable in the workplace, whether through written or verbal comments, social exclusion, microaggressions, or feeling blocked or hindered from opportunities for professional advancement. While participants shared that they reported behaviors and kept a documented paper trail sometimes, they also felt caught in the balance between reporting too much and feeling like they wanted to directly address the behaviors with the speaker due to what was called “intent vs. impact.”

Particularly for microaggressions or comments where the speaker might not realize the full hurt, exclusion, or invalidation from a comment made, the LGBTQ professional hearing that comment has the option to recognize that perhaps the intent of the message was not malicious. The LGBTQ professional then has the opportunity, and some participants referred to it as an unfortunate burden, to share directly with the speaker that while their comment wasn’t intended to harm, it did in fact do damage that created awkwardness, hurt feelings, or the beginnings of a potentially hostile work environment.

Connected to patterns of oppression, one participant highlighted that while LGBTQ professionals can be mistreated by colleagues, supervisors, and society, sometimes it is LGBTQ professionals who have experienced pain who actually become purveyors of that mistreatment toward others once they’ve risen to positions of power. Kevin, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, described his experience seeing people misuse their power once obtained:
“It's important for anybody with a marginalized identity to do your work about your identity and your feelings about it. If you don't do that work before you're given the opportunity to have significant privilege and power on a campus, that can work out in ways that are harmful to you & harmful to people around you. I see it all the time. I know people who have felt powerless or who have felt put aside… sometimes they want to settle scores when they end up in a position where they have resources at their disposal or the ability to deal with people's jobs and their professional lives and their raises and policy issues around students and personnel. Very important that you do the identity work that you need to do, so that you're centered about this when you get into a position of influence… so that you're using that identity knowledge about yourself to be helpful to people and not hurtful.”

Therefore, part of handling when mistreatment arose involved a quick self-inventory of what these situations and comments were stirring up inside of an LGBTQ professional. That also required an internal diagnostic review to double-check that their triggered emotions and past experiences of trauma weren’t fully fueling a potentially retaliatory explosion.

By LGBTQ professionals allowing themselves the grace and time to do self-identity work and move towards resolving some of the previous harms they have experienced, they avoided an abrupt turning of the tables to inflict damage once they rose to a higher power position.

**Do Your Homework When Applying for Jobs**

Commonalities surfaced across many participants in relation to what items an LGBTQ professional should consider while applying for jobs. In the following summative quote, Bruce, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, encapsulated many pieces of advice and important considerations regarding the job search process, all of which were replicated multiple times throughout the experiences of the other LGBTQ professionals:

“Look at their diversity statement, not only for students but also in their HR policies. Look at their healthcare. Do they allow partners to join healthcare? Are there statements that senior administrators have made? Look at their bias incidents on their websites, if they publish those. How active is their LGBTQ student group? Do they have a diversity center? Use the little search
Participants highlighted the importance of calling on friends or professional peers to assist in acquiring further information on institutions well before applying. Professional associations and conferences served as important mechanisms for connecting peers to ask these questions about the real experience of LGBTQ professionals in institutions they are looking to work for. Social media groups also played an important role in information-sharing across LGBTQ professionals.

Specifically related to the job interview, participants recommended that professionals engage in self-agency by asking very specific questions around how LGBTQ identities and culture manifest themselves and are supported within a particular functional area. They also recommended asking questions about the social environment and frequency of LGBTQ professionals hanging out, in order to not get too caught up in job-related questions. Many agreed that their personal and professional lives were intertwined, so what good would a job in an inclusive campus environment be, if it lacked a supportive or accepting community once LGBTQ professionals stepped off campus?

Multiple participants highlighted the importance of comparison shopping, but not just across Higher Ed institutions. Rather, they described comparison shopping across multiple professional fields to help inform their job search process and whether higher education was a stronger fit or professional alignment. Some considered jobs in corporations, finance, private foundations, and non-profit organizations but found that
their policies and work culture could not compete with the adaptability and inclusivity expressed and supported throughout the field of higher education.

**Working at a College is Different than Attending a College**

Aligning with the evolution of mindset from student activist into professional advocate, LGBTQ professionals were quick to mention that working at a college warrants a change of mindset, a change of skillset, and a change of expectations related to outcomes in the workplace.

Participants shared experiences with disappointed new professionals, some of whom spent time specifically in higher education graduate programs. These professionals expressed disappointment in thinking their careers would be just like when they were a student, hanging out in the student center, having a lot of interactions with students. What they discovered was a lot of email communication, administrative reports, a hierarchy of supervision, and expectations around their time management that they were not prepared for.

**Be Savvy in Navigating Systems and Politics**

LGBTQ professionals gave a lot of advice on navigating systems and political situations on campuses. Using diplomacy, being an open resource, and getting the right people in the room were three key strategies employed by our participants. These participants fully supported the idea of asking questions for clarification rather than directly calling someone out which would shut the dialogue and hurt their reputations.

A major asset for advancing their careers involved understanding the history and context of systems to determine what drives change. Knowing whom to get into the room and positioning yourself in a way to understand the broader structures and culture
allowed them to be more fully equipped while navigating systems, encountering politics, and advocating for change.

Jack, a senior-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, shared how his knowledge of the organizational structure and institutional context helped him reframe difficult situations he was encountering. This allowed him to reconsider his positionality, role, and ability to influence change within the institution in ways that would help LGBTQ professionals stay and advance:

“It’s really easy to default to, “Oh, this is really unfortunate why my institution has been doing this. They should change. It should be really easy.” But, there are so many boundaries and bureaucracies and culture that influence that decision and help influence that system. If you really want change, you have to understand how the organization is set up and how to play the game in order to make that change or understand the game well enough how to break the game so you can make things happen. You have to put yourself in a position to think beyond your own immediate sphere of influence and your own particular role to understand the broader organizational context that you're operating in.”

Participants debunked the myth of waiting until LGBTQ professionals reach a certain tier in order to advocate for change. Rather, they encouraged future generations to consider that there is power in any positionality. If professionals waited to act until the next tier of job, they may miss opportunities to serve as advocates and change agents. Recognizing their own positionality in the system was just as important as recognizing that there was power within every position in the system.

Expand your Circle and Professional Portfolio

LGBTQ participants mentioned that in order to expand your circle, it might mean traveling away from a comfort zone or a home base. That helped participants to create professional journeys that have served them well throughout the long term. Sam, a mid-level professional working at a Southern public institution, and Mark, an entry-level professional working at a Midwestern private institution, suggested taking a leap of faith
towards new frontiers, while making sure to not burn bridges in a close-knit professional community:

“There are lots of queer-affirming and queer-friendly institutions out there. You've just got to find the right one. You might have to make that step and leave an institution where you feel comfortable. That might mean leaving that part of the country that you're from, but that's part of your journey. You will end up where you're supposed to end up. Sometimes you don't know where the end is going to lead you, but I think that's sort of the beauty of the journey.”

“I think you have to really be smart about the decisions you make young in your career because if you want to go into higher ed, we all think it's a large community, and it's not. It's a very small, tight-knit community and everybody knows somebody who knows, right? You know…”

Participants also shared that while there are over 3,000 colleges, the profession of higher education is a tight-knit community where people know each other. That can help you get ahead and get connected, based on who you know. Participants encouraged LGBTQ professionals to be smart about their decisions even as a younger professional, so as not to become known for burning bridges or disrupting systems in ways where that negative word follows them throughout higher education communities and professional associations.

The expansion of circles and networks came with a sense that higher education naturally connects people across cities, states, and countries. Knowing which professional pieces to engage in and which credentials to go for was an important key for maximizing LGBTQ professionals’ employment potential. Participants urged future generations to consider avoiding service opportunities or busywork with little return on investment, which some participants referred to as “invisible service.” These were things that signaled cultural taxation, such as serving on too many committees or policy teams as a diversity token, taking time away from your primary roles and responsibilities. By discovering which pieces can help expand your portfolio and catapult you to another
position, LGBTQ professionals felt they were able to avoid an overabundance of “other duties as assigned” because they had the self-agency and ability to decide which things to involve themselves in.

LGBTQ professionals suggested gaining credentials in terms of advanced certificates, competencies, skill sets, or coursework. In a field where technological and educational practices are ever-changing, higher education warrants employees to consider advancing their professional development and skill sets to respond to current and future trends. Eli, a mid-level professional working at an Eastern private institution, shared the importance of obtaining advanced credentials to position yourself for the next step, even if you do not need that exact credential in the moment of your current position:

“It's better to have something that you don't need, than to need something you don't have. So, if you don't necessarily need it for that job requirement, then you are coming in with value added and potentially it can be a difference maker when the other candidate has everything else that matches. But, perhaps you've got this other skill set or competency or certification or collaborative experience that showcases your ability to take that jump to the next level.”

Along with credentials, connecting cross-functionally was advised in order to be collaborative and visible as important to roles beyond your immediate department. This helped senior leaders throughout the institution to see LGBTQ professionals beyond a diversity-focused role. Participants attended meetings with the institution’s budget and finance committee, with the police and safety officers, or with strategic planning groups. By allowing themselves to be seen in public forums, they remained in the minds of senior leaders who might be looking to cultivate future interested leaders. These public forums positioned LGBTQ participants as capable of professional possibilities beyond the realm of diversity.
Remember What Not To Do

In addition to all the advice that LGBTQ professionals gave about specific actions to undertake, they also provided a substantial amount of advice about specific actions to avoid. These included not sweating the small stuff and not being afraid to be authentic about LGBTQ identities. Participants encouraged future generations to not succumb to ideas that they can only do a certain type of work because there are different ways to sell themselves and tell their stories.

If things did go downhill, and an exit was on the horizon, LGBTQ professionals advised departing employees to speak up and say something about any injustices or discrimination they may have faced. Otherwise, it may be a disservice for future LGBTQ professionals following your lead who may fall into the same traps that could have been fixed if the departing employee brought up the issues that influenced their decision to leave.

Participants encouraged future generations to be ok with saying no to initiatives or projects asked, expected, or assigned/required simply because of their LGBTQ identities. Professionals allowed themselves to be more than just their individual identities, not feeling compelled to take on every task because, “If not them, then who?” By saying no, LGBTQ professionals acknowledged the importance of self-care by gathering some rest and rejuvenation, while rediscovering their own voice and self-agency in what they take on within the workplace. Gabriel, a mid-level professional working at a Northeastern private institution, expressed it simply:

“You don't have to be the card-carrying queer staff member that is checking all the boxes.”
In the name of institutional investment in diversity work, LGBTQ professionals discussed how they expressed reliance on diverse professionals as not sustainable for any institution. Rather, these professionals would turn over, or rather churn over and over, and no institution wants to be known as a place that poaches professionals or works them to the bone.

Overall, the tone of the advice from LGBTQ professionals was similar to a style of cheerleading. These are LGBTQ professionals who want future generations to thrive, not just survive, and they know that positive changes can be made in the field especially if we’re ok with saying something.

The above advice suggests that LGBTQ professionals should be ok with saying no and not always being the example, especially for educating others and representing multiple identities in professional spaces.

**Make Your Own Choices to Create Your Own Journey**

LGBTQ participants urged future generations to make their own paths or choices in order to craft their own journeys. In the spirit of queerness as a blurring of the lines, LGBTQ professionals should not feel compelled to fit into a certain mold, abide by a certain timeline, or do exactly as their mentors have done. Many LGBTQ professionals did not feel a need to advance into a Dean, Vice President, or President role as a signifier of success:

“It's not a race toward being the top or most successful or whatever. If you find yourself getting pulled into that, that can be detrimental to the process of exploring and figuring out what you truly want and who you really are. I know there's all this pressure, but there's all kinds of paths towards success and happiness. Free yourself from those feelings of, “If you're not moving up, then you're not doing well.”
In the above quote, Forest, an entry-level professional working at a Western public institution, shared how pressures exist around professional advancement. The comparison shopping that occurred across positions and institutional types was a reality for many. When coupled with lavender ceilings, many LGBTQ professionals felt truly stuck while receiving pressure that they should be excelling further, doing more, and moving up. Participants instead shared that success should be redefined by each LGBTQ professional on their own terms. It is up to you to determine your own path, journey, and level of success.

**Go to Graduate School**

Of the tangible professional advice received by LGBTQ participants throughout their journeys, one of the most common pieces reported by participants involved graduate school. For LGBTQ professionals who often entered a career in higher education with a Masters degree, advanced education often resulted in the quest for a doctoral degree.

Participants specifically mentioned that having the doctorate added credibility, especially for LGBTQ professionals who were sometimes perceived as less serious or less positioned for advancement. Doctoral degrees helped to reduce the perception that LGBTQ professionals should stay within a diversity realm professionally and not move up for wider responsibility among senior leadership.

Jay, a mid-level professional working at a Western private institution, shared advice received from a mentor regarding the quest for a terminal degree. Jay underscored that exact advice he received as particularly important for future generations of LGBTQ professionals seeking to continue and advance in higher education:
“He had a remarkable career in higher ed and never had a doctorate. He said, “The currency of the realm [of higher education] is your credentials.” When I wrote my dissertation, I dedicated it to him. It’s important going full throttle into administration, into leadership, or to teach. He was probably the best long-term advocate for me, and that was the advice he gave me… “Get the doctorate. Get the credential.”

As expressed above, not only was the doctorate useful in advancing throughout the organizational chart, but also the advanced degree helped open doorways for other leadership opportunities across the institution. These opportunities included increased faculty connections, chairing of institutional committees, serving as adjunct faculty by teaching undergraduate and graduate students, and gaining leadership roles on the senior boards of higher education professional associations. Such opportunities further expanded the overall portfolio of LGBTQ professionals, allowing them to continue and advance in higher education.

Advice Received

After giving their advice for future generations of LGBTQ professionals, the participants were asked if they had received any advice as LGBTQ professionals throughout their career journey.

Most participants responded that they hadn’t received any advice related to their LGBTQ identities. Some shared that they received general advice that any employee would get, and some shared that there was a lack of LGBTQ professionals available to provide any such advice.

A number of LGBTQ professionals also mentioned that if they received advice, that advice was either not helpful or not followed. Such advice included toning down their queerness in terms of voice, mannerisms, speech patterns, and attire. Other advice received by LGBTQ professionals included large assumptions around how people would
judge and not accept bisexual professionals. Further advice received included assumptions around racial communities, for instance that people of color would look down on queer people of color, so any mentions of LGBTQ work should be removed from resumes and cover letters.

Participants responded that they were completely shocked by this overly honest feedback which portrayed higher education supervisors across LGBTQ and communities of color as deeply judgmental towards various expressions of queer identities. Most of this advice was completely discarded by these LGBTQ professionals, who said that their supervisors actually hired them in part because of their experience across multiple levels of diversity.

Advice received that was not related to LGBTQ identities included jumping on committees early and engaging in activities that broaden your experience and professional network. Ward, a senior-level professional working at a Northeastern public institution, shared the following:

“I had good mentors early in my career who said, “If you want to continue to grow in the field, do stuff that you don't know.” I had been in housing, so I got mentors on the academic side who supported me in getting experience with academic affairs, curriculum, advising... I got a really broad view of the campus. Advice from a president, “Keep taking jobs where you can show that you can stretch yourself.” That was probably part of the reason that the president liked me as a candidate. She knew that I could be thrown into a situation and be able to lead in that situation, grow, but also not put the institution or our students at risk.”

Broadening one’s portfolio by stretching beyond your own professional functional area was a particular piece of advice that multiple participants emphasized as useful suggestions to re-share with future generations of LGBTQ professionals, urging to expand themselves. This study serves as an opportunity for LGBTQ professionals to
provide such useful advice and strategies to help future generations continue and advance in higher education.
CHAPTER 5

Analysis

Analyzing the findings allowed for an excavation within individual participants’ responses to uncover important linkages and connections across the collective participant pool. Connections across the research literature will also allow for concepts rising from previous studies to be either confirmed or disconfirmed from the findings of this study.

For the first research question, LGBTQ participants shared many themes that were helpful for continuing and advancing their professional careers in higher education. Themes that emerged include authenticity, privilege, supervisors, mentors, helpful support networks across colleagues and community, professional associations and conferences, and graduate school.

Authenticity

Authenticity was described as a key component of continuing and advancing in higher education. By allowing themselves to show up as their authentic open and out selves, LGBTQ participants were able to avoid living double lives and fearing for their livelihoods if they were found out. The research of the 1990s and 2000s focused substantially on whether or not higher education professionals could be out in the workplace and still live their most open lives (Cullen & Smart, 1991; Croteau & von Destinon, 1994; Lark, 1995; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996). However, this current dissertation study acknowledges that outness is far less of a question heading into the 2020s.

Rather, many LGBTQ professionals are now living openly and authentically, coming out of the closet and making their identities visible well before getting hired,
spotlighting their identities throughout the job search process in their resumes or disclosing during interviews. LGBTQ professionals are coming in fully prepared to ask questions about partner and spousal benefits, tuition remission for same-sex partners and dependents, and what it is truly like to be an open LGBTQ employee both at the institution and within a specific department or division.

A notable piece of being out is a sense of tacit role modeling. LGBTQ professionals expressed that by being authentically out professionals in higher education, their continued existence signals to students and employees of all genders and sexualities that you can be successful and out in a professional career. This is striking because the Human Rights Campaign completed a survey of LGBTQ employees across the United States in various fields, indicating that 46% of LGBTQ employees are not out at work (Jackman, 2018).

LGBTQ participants shared that if their jobs were ever in danger, they still would not go back into the closet. Some shared that they did not care about transgressing norms or possessing stereotypical behavior and mannerisms. They would continue to be unapologetic and authentic throughout their careers, both in writing and in person. LGBTQ identities therefore serve as performative acts in the professional sphere and that performance factor can be an important catalyst for openly owning and claiming your authentic self (Butler, 1990).

The experiences of LGBTQ professionals in this study confirm recent research studies acknowledging how perceptions around professional clothing and attire, hairstyles, tone of voice, hand gestures, and other mannerisms signal an expansion of traditional norms to coworkers, superiors, and the institutions that serve LGBTQ
professionals (Moore, 2017; Stryker, 2017). While salient for LGBQ professionals, this is also particularly salient for transgender and nonbinary professionals whose openness and authenticity around gender identity and expression may be perceived in direct conflict with institutional culture, policies, and practices around binary notions of professional dress (Pitcher, 2016; Pitcher, 2017).

Authenticity was also key to generating the utmost happiness and fulfillment, which then linked to successfully continuing their professional careers in higher education. Participants expressed how authenticity expanded their leadership, that their queerness was not restricted to a specific mold in order to find success. Use of the term ‘queer’ denoted a blurring or expansion of gender and sexuality norms, as well as a stretching beyond traditional boxes, backgrounds, and binaries.

Queer as an identity term has become both a marker of blurring the binary in relation to gender (not adhering to strict guidelines of masculinity or femininity) as well as a marker of resistance regarding sexual identity and behavior (De Lauretis, 1991; Pinar, 1998). Some participants use the term queer as a more inclusive term meaning non-heterosexual rather than abiding by terms like lesbian or gay which are perceived as having more defined rigidity around gender and sexual norms. Among policies and practices, the act of queering implies an expansion beyond rigid lines, boundaries, or binaries.

Authenticity was emphasized as an ever-occurring process, not a destination. Especially for LGBTQ professionals who were not perceived as LGBTQ, coming out felt like an ongoing question with each new committee, collaboration, or institution they entered. Even within LGBTQ colleagues and communities, professionals identifying as
bisexual, transgender, and genderqueer needed to continue coming out to other queer-identified folks to signal that they did not have the same assumed needs as gay and lesbian professionals.

Emphasizing process over destination, authenticity was also acknowledged by participants as a process of becoming (Obama, 2018). Levels of outness resulting in a truer lived experience of their authentic selves looked different for LGBTQ professionals 5, 10, 15, or 20 years prior to who they are continuing to become now. Some of this development or evolution across their identities depended on current events, including the advent of marriage equality and tragedies involving Pulse nightclub, as well as when institutions implemented policies ahead of state and federal laws to advance transgender inclusion, partner benefits and healthcare, and nondiscrimination clauses’ inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as protected classes. Just as individual professionals are ‘becoming,’ so too are institutions in the process of ‘becoming’ more authentic.

Individual authenticity also contributes to collective empathy around LGBTQ inclusion as well as social justice across areas of race, class, faith, national origin, and socioeconomic status. Being out among LGBTQ identity builds bridges across recognition the linked struggles and intersectionality of identities within communities of color, religious communities, and other communities searching for equity and inclusion. However, for LGBTQ people of color, being authentic across multiple identities offered a double-edged sword of cultural taxation through additional responsibilities attached to multiple levels of diversity while also allowing more potential opportunities to develop or enact change.
Privilege

Privilege was inclusive of both social privilege and professional privilege. The former focuses on majority social identities across demographic categories including race, gender, national origin, faith, and family status. Professional privileges related to supervisory or administrative levels of leadership within the institution as well as positional capital.

Participants were also quick to point out how professional advancement seemed to favor people with multiple levels of majority privilege including cisgender, gay, white men. That was further confirmed by the participant pool’s composition where the majority of senior leaders were cisgender, gay, white men, along with a few cisgender gay men of color. This aligns with what other professional fields are experiencing as well, such as in the corporate realm with the rise in leadership of Tim Cook, James Fitterling, and many other cisgender, gay, white men advancing among the C-suite and CEO roles (Carpenter, 2018).

Turning privilege into action surfaced as a clear next step for our participants with majority identities. Being aware of one’s privilege warrants taking action in order to make things better for people without privilege. That includes the recognition that whenever people of a minority identity enter a space, majority-identity people inherently gain a more diverse perspective and get educated by the existence of these very people.

LGBTQ professionals spoke of often having to educate their straight professional colleagues, while also recognizing that they have gained knowledge from interactions with queer people of color and queer people of diverse faiths. These findings were congruent with previous literature on the experiences of faculty of color experiencing
cultural taxation as well as transgender academics experiencing these additional responsibilities (Johnson, Kuykendall, & Laird, 2005; Pitcher, 2016).

Participants shared that their privilege allowed them to engage in actions such as speaking up to advocate for further representation across queer, gender, and racial identities, while also using positional capital to navigate systems and create change. Much of this action also included navigating levels of professional pushback or challenge towards senior administrators, based on the assumption that their positional capital would get them further into a dialogue, as opposed to fear of being reprimanded or fired.

There was also recognition that not all privileges are equal. Some professionals saw their whiteness and maleness as trumping their queerness, especially if also perceived as more masculine in their gender expression. Some professionals shared how cisgender, white, gay men also had better advancement in some institutions that cisgender, black, straight women.

Supervisors

For many professionals, their direct supervisors served as the primary motivators for keeping them at their institutions. Supervisors served multiple roles that helped LGBTQ professionals continue and advance, including expanding their professional portfolios, helping them juggle career and graduate school, aiding in their job search process by sharing knowledge of the field, and providing personal care and compassion including time off during difficult times.

Expanding professionals’ portfolios further positioned them for a launch pad of success. Wherever LGBTQ professionals felt pigeonholed in their current careers, often their current supervisors served to give them opportunities that expanded beyond
diversity-related work. These opportunities could help them break through the lavender ceiling, especially since LGBTQ professionals emphasized their disappointment around not being seen as enough of a generalist in higher education work. Part of breaking through the lavender ceiling involved getting a supervisor or superior to first recognize that it exists, while providing opportunities for you to possibly break through it (Smith, 2013).

Having a supervisor to talk through the juggling of work, life, and school also helped LGBTQ professionals feel less siloed and less isolated. With few out LGBTQ professionals across institutions, they placed pressure on themselves. Supervisors served as pressure relievers with more years of experience and authority, who could see LGBTQ professionals’ desires to advance as investing in the institution’s continued diversity and growth. By being open to support the schooling and personal lives of professionals, supervisors aided in the vital retention of LGBTQ professionals.

LGBTQ professionals did not see their personal and professional lives as separate or dissociated. These lives are intertwined, so when one area weakens, so does the other. When their personal and academic lives are strengthened, so too are their professional lives supported and strengthened. This aligns with research acknowledging how queer employees bring and mesh their personal and social identities with their professional identities in the workplace (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009; O’Ryan & McFarland, 2010.)

Both from supervisors and senior leadership, messaging around current events and rearticulating institutional values continues to be vital for keeping LGBTQ professionals feel safe and secure in their professional livelihoods. That also means time for self-care and reflection when difficult events arise including national tragedies or
family illnesses. Though it may seem a paradox, supervisors allowing LGBTQ professionals some physical space away from the workplace actually draw them closer to the institution, more firmly attached to the very workplace that adapts, or rather, queers the existing rigid boundaries around leave, comp time, and business as usual.

**Mentors**

Locating mentors created pathways to success through many of the same ways highlighted in the supervisors section around work-life integration. One differing way that mentors assisted participants with work-life integration was around asking questions regarding scenarios that an LGBTQ professional might feel uncomfortable discussing with direct supervisors. These scenarios included ethics around drinking with students, presence at local bars, dating and relationships, and discussing university actions on social media. Professionals also appreciated expressing their career aspirations with mentors outside of the institution, to gain new perspectives on institutions and the field of higher education while avoiding perceptions that they want to immediately leave.

Mentors also helped with allowing LGBTQ professionals to see other areas of diversity and privilege. In this same vein, mentors need not share the same identities as their mentees, allowing for authentic discussions to occur across differences in social identities and levels of professional status. While some supervisors served as lifelong mentors for LGBTQ professionals, the mentor-mentee relationship need not result from a direct supervisor.

Several scenarios debunked the hierarchical notion of mentor as supervisor-or-superior. Bad supervisors helped LGBTQ professionals by role modeling negative behaviors in the workplace that these professionals learned they did not want to embody...
throughout their careers. These behaviors included a near ubiquitous presence on campus, taking no free time for their personal lives, exuding an aura of being run ragged, compartmentalizing their personal struggles when tragedies strike, and then expecting these same behaviors from the LGBTQ professionals they supervised.

Peers also served as important mentors, continuing to buck the traditional idea that mentors need to have seniority or more years of experience. In a more informal mentoring relationship, peers become important in the sharing of both experiences across institution types, as well as in the sharing of queer histories.

For some LGBTQ professionals, the peer-as-mentor relationship results from a lack of queer elders, especially in communities that are small towns and more rural. In these cases, volunteering and community organizing outside the institution provided an important way to unplug from the campus environment and grow their support networks. Connecting with LGBTQ colleagues within and across institutions results in a queering of the family, referred to as one’s “chosen family” (Gartrell et al., 1996; Oswald, 2002; Patterson, 2013). These are the people that LGBTQ professionals would most regularly go to, sharing their personal lives, career aspirations, successes, and struggles.

These informal mentoring relationships across peers and chosen family can manifest through community justice demonstrations, graduate school coursework and assignments, LGBTQ faculty and staff network gatherings, or in professional associations and conferences. Therefore, accessing mentors also need not rise from the traditional path of asking a boss to be a mentor. Mentors can be accessed more organically and less informally.
Professional Associations and Conferences

Many professionals felt comfort in explicitly asking people to mentor them, while others were able to locate possible mentors through networks and conferences connected to professional associations. These associations spanned a variety of acronyms including ACPA, NASPA, NODA, NACADA, AACRAO, NCORE, SJTI, NACE, and NAFSA, as well as the National LGBTQ Task Force and the Consortium of LGBT Professionals in Higher Education.

For professionals who felt less comfortable with explicit find-and-seek tactics for mentor relationships, many found it helpful to begin making connections through volunteering in these professional associations as a first step. Some also elevated their commitment by taking on a leadership role somewhere within the professional association, which helped to branch out the number of communications while opening future professional doors.

In addition to serving as a platform to locate mentors, professional associations and conferences also serve to affirm personal identities, cultivate a community, and create chosen families among networks. Particularly for younger professionals from religious and conservative communities, the chance to be sent by institutions to a professional association’s conference can prove validating for their personal and professional well-being.

Therefore, similar to the prior mention of giving personal space to bring closer professional attachment, this is another example where actually sending LGBTQ professionals to a conference might create physical distance that inherently draws their loyalty more closely to their own institution.
Whether inside their own institution, across institutions, or through professional associations, LGBTQ professionals shared how they built helpful support networks of colleagues. This was often referred to as “finding your tribe” by participants. This concept of finding your tribe provides closer kinship, more aligning with the phrase “chosen family” where colleagues and peers are elevated to a near familial relationship (Kabiri, 2016; Heleo Editors, 2018).

These support networks provide validation of their authenticity and outness, along with powerful connections across a critical mass of peers. This has helped LGBTQ professionals to feel like they are not the only one, in their department, division, institution, or even in the larger field of higher education. Many out LGBTQ professionals felt this powerful combination was vital to them continuing and advancing in higher education.

**Graduate School**

One aspect that proved to be extremely useful in LGBTQ professionals’ advancement in higher education was enrolling in graduate school. Whether at the masters or doctoral level, engaging in deeply reflective readings and academic content helped to provide a research side through theories and data that supplemented their everyday work as practitioners.

Graduate school provided much-needed answers for LGBTQ professionals stuck at an impasse, questioning whether or not to stay in higher education. Some felt blocked or hindered without a doctorate, while some simply questioned if higher education was still the place where they could find impact and meaningfulness in their work. Every participant that questioned this continued with their graduate work to completion, with
many emphasizing graduate school as a primary motivator for staying at their institution. Institutional support of graduate work, whether through financial support or allowing time away, was critical for keeping LGBTQ professionals retained at institutions for multiple years while developing their skill sets further.

Particularly for LGBTQ professionals, graduate school elevated their own perceptions of being seen as credible and taken more seriously for professional advancement. Amidst a growing sense of feeling pigeonholed at times, obtaining a doctoral degree helped LGBTQ professionals to advance a few rungs, at least in the minds of their peers and superiors.

With this shift from “practitioner” to “scholar-practitioner,” professionals recognized a shift in how their ideas and suggestions gained further credibility than before. Being seen as steeped in research, data, and officially backed by the academy, their ideas now seemed less like personal agenda items targeting specific changes related to LGBTQ identities and more like wider-scale strategies for building collaborative partnerships across key campus departments in order to advance overall institutional diversity and inclusion goals.

Regarding the second research question, LGBTQ professionals perceived many challenges, obstacles, and hindrances encountered throughout their career journeys in higher education. Themes that emerged included pressures from work-life integration, anti-LGBTQ comments, threats of physical violence, microaggressions from within and outside LGBTQ coworkers, cultural taxation, the lavender ceiling, and impacts from the intersectionality of their multiple identities.
Pressures from work-life integration included the intertwining of personal and professional identities. While LGBTQ participants mentioned many challenges that happened to them, these pressures often took the initial manifestation of occurring within themselves. Unable to dissociate LGBTQ identities from their professional statuses, professionals expressed difficulties in balancing a proper personal life including time for partners, family, friends, health, and social outlets while also allowing time to accomplish their work within a schedule that won’t leave them facing burnout.

Coupling students’ weeknight and weekend schedules with the challenges encountered from many LGBTQ professionals assuming roles in mentoring LGBTQ students, advising LGBTQ student organizations, or being part of committees as a representative and advocate for LGBTQ communities, the concept of burnout and being overworked came up multiple times.

Professionals went as far to say that they were so busy, they struggled to have time to even look for jobs and felt hindered to pursue further professional development or career aspirations because of their intense levels of being overworked. A disorganized professional life bleeds into a disorganized personal life, and vice versa. Since these identities cannot be bifurcated, LGBTQ professionals struggled to find cycles of work where they felt both personal and professional balance.

These feelings became more intensified due to anti-LGBTQ viewpoints raised from politically conservative or religious coworkers in the workplace. Multiple LGBTQ professionals encountered times when they were told their LGBTQ identity was political, merely by existing. Therefore simply existing as an openly out LGBTQ professional is perceived as a political act, the acknowledgment of which presented itself a challenge for
LGBTQ professionals trying to balance their personal identities and presence with those in the workplace (Dworkin & Yi, 2003).

**Microaggressions and Threats of Violence**

Anti-LGBTQ remarks were received both through written and verbal formats, encountered by many LGBTQ professionals. In a research study released by the Human Rights Campaign, 53% of LGBTQ employees reported hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks and jokes at least once in a while within their workplace (Fidas, 2018; Siegel, 2018; Turner, 2018). While dissertation participants did not report a prevalence of anti-LGBTQ jokes within the higher education workplace, they did share microaggressions related to terms like “lifestyle,” the refusal to acknowledge same-sex partners or gender pronouns.

Others took a more pointed and threatening role as disruptive during conduct cases, student trainings, and through visitors and preachers on campus. Threats and instances of physical violence were a reality for numerous LGBTQ professionals, some of whom required a police escort around campus. Beverages were thrown onto people, slurs were yelled out of vehicles passing by, and people were told to their faces that their existence was less than human and therefore worthy of violence.

While these represented more overt forms of violence, more covert forms of microaggressions also surfaced for many of our LGBTQ professionals. These more covert forms included comments about violating gender stereotypes from colleagues and senior administrators, as well as one-on-one interactions where straight coworkers and supervisors related AIDS ribbons, rainbow clothing items, and male-centered underwear catalogs as cringeworthy “I thought of you when I saw these” moments.
Additionally, LGBTQ professionals felt excluded in interactions where their partners or spouses were rendered invisible. Some expressed issues around live-on partners through residence life, coworkers refusing to use the terms ‘partner’ or ‘husband/wife,’ and faculty and staff not being ready for the introduction of an LGBTQ couple.

Challenging these microaggressions proved burdensome for participants but also useful in advancing relationships across colleagues. In the taking of risks to challenge microaggressions, people identifying as LGBTQ can help authority figures understand and re-examine issues in their organizations and spheres that they can rectify (Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2013; Lubsen, 2018).

Microaggressions continued as LGBTQ professionals felt dismissed by straight colleagues after sharing urgency about potential life-and-death situations involving slurs, violence, and threats. Among religious institutions, LGBTQ professionals encountered removal and firing from their workplace as well as being forced to sign statements of faith which invalidated LGBTQ identities and relationships.

The microaggressions continued even within LGBTQ communities, as bisexual, transgender, and genderqueer professionals discussed being dismissed, invalidated, rendered invisible, or completely reduced down to topics relating to their bi and trans identities. Some LGBTQ supervisors were perceived as taking on LGBTQ supervisors as pet projects, using inappropriate language such as ‘fag hag,’ making comments about professionals’ physical features, and showcasing instances of internalized homophobia.

These instances made professionals consider leaving higher education.

Professionals also expressed surprising challenges rising from LGBTQ coworkers and
colleagues. Some participants had their LGBTQ identities outed by coworkers, while also becoming the talk of the office.

Based on these stories and experiences, microaggressions from LGBTQ people towards LGBTQ people within their own communities could present itself as a future research topic, as literature focused much more heavily on microaggressions from straight people to LGBTQ people. Given that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities exist within the same acronym, it is important to note that there is no monolithic experience.

Therefore, it is not surprising that a monosexual lesbian woman or gay man might engage in microaggressions towards a bisexual person. Similarly, cisgender people who are LGB can also harbor microaggressions towards transgender and nonbinary people on the basis of differing gender identities. In fact, people have suggested that because sexual orientation is different from (but often conflated with) gender identity, as well as gay rights including different goals and outcomes than trans rights, that the term transgender should be removed from LGBT to avoid further conflation (Curry, 2014; Glover, 2015; Alston, 2016). However, it is also important to recognize that the identities representing LGBTQ are brought together not because they are so similar but because they face discrimination similarly based on perceived transgression of gender and sexuality norms (Iovannone, 2018).

**Cultural Taxation**

Professionals expressed a variety of additional responsibilities, outside of their primary job duties, which they were either asked, expected, or assigned/required to
complete because of their LGBTQ identity. These additional responsibilities fell into three primary categories:

- Responsibilities that were being voluntarily asked to complete by coworkers, supervisors, and superiors
- Responsibilities that LGBTQ professionals were expected to complete as additional service beyond their primary position
- Responsibilities that LGBTQ professionals were assigned or required to complete by supervisors and superiors, even though they fell outside of their primary job description.

**Asked**

LGBTQ professionals were asked by colleagues, supervisors, and superiors to complete additional responsibilities. These included serving on committees and task forces, which ranged from ad hoc short-term commitments to year-long and multi-year commitments. Besides on-campus commitments, some responsibilities included building and strengthening connections between the institution and off-campus LGBTQ community organizations.

Sometimes professionals were asked not just to sit as a member, but to directly create new initiatives or lead existing ones, thereby serving as a trailblazer and new face for campus initiatives and inclusion.

Professionals also were asked to be part of the metaphorical cleanup crew for an institution’s missteps or wrongdoings. As groundswells and unrest rose across campus, whether regarding student demonstrations, employee benefits, policy revisions, or general
exclusion of transgender individuals, LGBTQ professionals were asked to step in and right the wrongs the institution was perceived as implementing.

LGBTQ professionals were often asked to serve as everyone’s educator, often on a moment’s notice. These professionals were asked to educate search committees who needed training around hiring or implicit bias as well as high-volume student leader groups who needed training around LGBTQ awareness and allyship. Often these educators felt compelled to do so, even though they were voluntarily asked. Therefore, in order to quell the mantra of “If I don’t do it, who will?” they led such trainings, were subsequently viewed as experts, and then asked continuously throughout the academic year to host more pop-up trainings. Educating around LGBTQ identities and allyship actually sparked a cycle of even further cultural taxation, with increased requests mounting for professionals to conduct education, even if providing LGBTQ education and workshops fell outside of their purview.

Policy revision was also a common thread connected to cultural taxation, as LGBTQ professionals were asked to review and update faculty, staff, and student handbooks for inclusive language. Many were asked to sit in on policy meetings around advancing nondiscrimination policies, revising human resources policies, creating gender neutral restrooms, implementing LGBTQ task force recommendations, and researching benefits from other institutions such as parental leave and trans-realted healthcare.

One poignant piece around responsibilities that were voluntarily asked of LGBTQ professionals to complete focused on the ability and confidence of these professionals to say no, challenge authority, and offer other alternatives. When asked, rather than expected or assigned, some professionals felt enough confidence to say they could not sit
on every committee or review policies. Some participants offered other people on campus who were out and LGBTQ as options, especially with the recognition that white LGBTQ people were typically asked to step in and represent the larger LGBTQ community before LGBTQ people of color were asked to do so. Other professionals simply offered that the job of enacting LGBTQ inclusive practices within a campus office or department (for instance, human resources) should then be handled by a professional staff member or leader within human resources rather than a non-HR professional who happens to identify as LGBTQ.

**Expected**

Being expected to complete additional responsibilities due to possessing an LGBTQ identity was referred to both as cultural taxation and also as “identity-based service.”

Participants felt that their advocacy was a precursor for expectations around implementing LGBTQ initiatives. Even when asked for feedback, LGBTQ professionals who stepped up to comment around possible institutional changes were often met with attitudes of, “You thought of it, so we expect you to help implement this,” as opposed to attitudes of, “Thank you for your feedback. Our department will take the feedback under advisement and do some research.” That left some LGBTQ participants unsure if they should speak up, for fear of getting saddled with expectations to complete additional responsibilities they might not have full time or energy to give towards.

Representing LGBTQ communities was a common expectation, whether through serving on diversity panels or campus committees. This places LGBTQ professionals in an unfortunate position as spokesperson for their communities, as well as the person left
with the burden on answering why they were selected for the committee while other
LGBTQ professionals were not.

While being expected to serve on a committee seems like providing more
inclusion and opportunities for leadership and collaboration, this expectation can result in
tokenization that results in isolation and a segmentation across identities within an
institution’s community of LGBTQ professionals.

LGBTQ professionals felt expected from their own LGBTQ colleagues to attend
LGBTQ events such as student welcome receptions, faculty and staff networking events,
and Lavender Graduation ceremonies.

**Assigned/Required**

In an emerging age of social media awareness, bias incident protocols, and Title
IX enforcement around sexual harassment, sexual assault, and awareness around
transgender people, LGBTQ professionals have been assigned to meet with students
around conduct cases. In institutions with few out LGBTQ professionals, this becomes a
particular challenge for students who may be looking to confide in someone who shares
their LGBTQ identities.

Assigning a professional to be on a panel for an LGBTQ bias incident seems like
it may skew the decision-making process and shut down any chances for education or
restorative justice. Assigning a professional to be on a panel for and LGBTQ Title IX
case may have a chilling effect, whereby students will no longer go to these few out
LGBTQ professionals if they know they are mandatory reporters or people who could
easily be on the panel that makes a determination.
The most common responsibility to stretch across all three areas of being asked, being expected, and being assigned/required to do additional responsibilities included educating others about LGBTQ awareness and identities. As an assigned/required task, professionals mentioned conducting trainings with faculty and staff who clearly were not interested in learning more.

Additionally, some LGBTQ professionals were brought in to educate faculty who specifically had done wrong in some way, made off-handed comments in class, or had displayed negative or potentially discriminatory behaviors. Assigning or requiring LGBTQ professionals to educate as a corrective measure again places them in an unfortunate position of being seen as less of an educator and more as a disciplinarian or finger shaker, to not do bad ever again.

Participants felt a lot of the training, work, and emotional labor of increasing LGBTQ inclusion on campus is left to LGBTQ professionals to speak up, to educate, to collaborate, and to change, regardless of whether or not they possess the positional capital, seniority, or professional standing at the institution to initiate and sustain inclusion efforts. By being culturally taxed, LGBTQ professionals look to their straight colleagues to help with the labor involved towards inclusion: to ask the tough questions in meetings, to invite multiple diverse perspectives beyond a single token, and to enact effective change efforts without waiting for an LGBTQ professional to muster up the courage to recommend areas of change to supervisors and superiors without feelings of criticism, defensiveness, or inviting potential retaliation.
Lavender Ceilings

Participants shared their lack of professional advancement and how it was tied to their LGBTQ identity. In referring to this phenomenon as the lavender ceiling, LGBTQ professionals from the study further corroborated research, which has continued to illuminate this concept facing LGBTQ employees across multiple professional fields including higher education (Hamilton, 1993; Anastas, 1998; Unger, 2008; Tindall & Waters, 2012; Bullard, 2013; Smith, 2013).

The unapologetic nature of being fully authentic as an open and out LGBTQ professional creates an unfortunate trade-off regarding professional advancement. While some cisgender gay men were able to rise into senior leadership, for LGBTQ participants with other identities, they expressed disappointment that their authenticity might come at the cost of professional advancement. Some even felt that they would have achieved more and quicker professional success if they had been straight or engaged in covering their identities.

Covering involves avoiding the disclosure of identities or constructing false narratives as a mechanism for navigating an environment where sharing your authentic identities might negatively affect one’s employment or workplace (Yoshino, 2007). Concealing authentic identities takes a nearly foolproof memory to keep stories aligned, adding tremendous pressure and undue stresses on employees (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2003). The consequences of covering one’s identities can also result in decreased productivity in the workplace (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007).
LGBTQ participants expressing sorrow, frustration, or even questioning that they would have had more and faster professional success if they had engaged in covering their identities is a disheartening and disappointing reality. Some LGBTQ professionals felt that even when overburdened with additional responsibilities due to cultural taxation, they still had not amassed enough professional capital or currency to help them advance to the next professional tier.

Rather, cultural taxation may have actually worked against some LGBTQ professionals by further reinforcing their status with LGBTQ-centric work. In the minds of senior leaders looking to advance professionals into realms of responsibility that stretch beyond specific LGBTQ-related or diversity-related work, seeing a professional engaged heavily in such work might reify notions that either diversity work is their calling or that is simply where they belong professionally.

Even when encouraged to apply for career advancement, participants felt blocked in the job search process, amidst questions of not being generalist enough within their professional portfolios. This led to LGBTQ professionals questioning themselves and attempting to find other avenues. For some, those avenues including leaving the institution altogether in order to find professional mobility at another institution.

LGBTQ professionals also felt they were perceived as less serious and therefore not prepared for senior-level leadership. Compounding perceptions around a lack of seriousness were challenging geographic contexts (e.g. rural, small town, politically conservative community) and perceptions around youthfulness of age as an indicator of better serving in a student-facing or entry-level position.
Participants mentioned that, even as students, they recognized the lavender ceiling concept. While they may not have known the nomenclature, they could rarely look to senior leadership to find people who shared their LGBTQ identities. This holds serious implications for the field of higher education, if LGBTQ students are receiving messages that it will be nearly impossible to see yourself advancing into senior leadership within higher education.

LGBTQ professionals also acknowledged the existence of a similar concept to a glass ceiling or lavender ceiling related to queer women as well as transgender and nonbinary professionals. The compounding intersectionality across gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation makes senior leadership feel even farther away. For queer and trans women of color or of a non-Christian religion, that reality seems even more distant.

Conservative and religious environments continue to be a challenge, as LGBTQ professionals’ humanity is called into question when asked to sign statements of faith or abstinence from homosexual activity. Additionally, religious and conservative views from coworkers were enough to create a chill in the professional environment.

**Intersectionality across Identities**

As mentioned throughout this paper, participants’ responses clearly confirmed the research that professionals with multiple levels of difference had a far more difficult time continuing and advancing in higher education due to the piling on of racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia (Crenshaw, 1989). Gay men of color did see advancement, evidenced by the number of senior leaders serving in this participant pool. However, professionals identifying as lesbian and bisexual women as
well as professionals identifying as transgender and nonbinary did not experience the same levels of advancement. This seeks to confirm that additional forces surrounding the multiple –isms and –phobias are at play for these LGBTQ professionals.

An interesting gender dichotomy occurred in relation to both parental status and age. LGBTQ women responded that parental status was a salient identity to them, especially raising kids with a same-gender partner. However, LGBTQ men felt age was one of the most salient identities to them, citing a perceived lack of seriousness. Related to partnerships, men were more likely to point out that being single was perceived as a potential deterrent to their advancement and how they are perceived by coworkers and superiors. Not having a consistent plus-one guest led to thoughts around being a serial dater, which further fed into assumptions of the aforementioned perceived lack of seriousness of gay male professionals.

However, there were instances related to age of a superstar or supernova status across women, men, transgender, and genderqueer professionals. There were cases involving participants across all genders who had risen very early in higher-level positions as 25-year-old directors, working in the office of the President or Provost before 30, and earning “dean” in their job titles before the age of 35. That is quite interesting, considering the perceived lavender ceiling.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that a number of these professionals subsequently stayed in those somewhat elevated positions without much mobility for many years, once landing the role. Therefore, their mobility was still perceived as suppressed in comparison to straight colleagues who continued advancing in their professional roles and titles every few years.
Regarding the third research question, analyzing the findings from participants’ responses about their perceptions of support, or lack thereof, from their institutions helps to clarify where and how institutional resources of funding, support, and energy could be put to further support LGBTQ professionals. While institutions are made up of individuals, they can take on their own culture and climate related to LGBTQ inclusion and the level of acceptance and celebration they may want to exude openly. These have implications for the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ professionals.

Analyzing four key themes, I will examine ways that LGBTQ professionals assess and perceive their institution’s current climate, their perceptions on what their workplaces have done right, their specific suggestions for institutions to do better, and the influence of senior leadership on shifting climate as a mechanism for allowing LGBTQ professionals to continue or advance within their careers.

**Current Climate**

Participants from smaller liberal arts institutions had far more positive experiences around LGBTQ climate than large public universities near metropolitan cities that have a substantial LGBTQ population. This disconfirms traditional thinking that just being in workplaces around a larger population of LGBTQ individuals inherently allows for more inclusion – rather, recruitment is just one part of the equation, in addition to retention, advancement, and culture (Out and Equal, 2018).

Professionals mentioned that many LGBTQ employees and students left campus to engage in the surrounding inclusive community, which often left LGBTQ participants feeling more invisible, absent, isolated, and less openly affirming on their large campuses. A false sense of security occurred on larger and urban campuses as a result.
Liberal arts colleges tended to run far more inclusive, according to participants. This was due to the tight-knit nature of building community where everyone seems to know each other. There is no doubt that concentrated wealth and affluence assisted liberal arts colleges in enacting LGBTQIA inclusion, often before states and federal laws were enacted (Durso et al., 2017).

Unlike liberal arts colleges, LGBTQ professionals felt larger public universities faced heightened scrutiny from legislators who held anti-LGBTQ positions around espoused values of diversity at state systems, keeping in line with previous mentions of diversity center defunding in Tennessee and support of the anti-transgender House Bill 2 in North Carolina (Boehnke, 2016; Locker, 2016; Rozen, 2016; North Carolina General Assembly, 2016).

Private institutions did not experience this to the same extent, allowing them to focus inward and gain knowledge from multiple constituent groups who often interact with one another. This allows private institutions to provide resources towards supporting a growing diverse population of employees and students, while also presenting spaces to reexamine and rearticulate values that more accurately reflect emerging trends and demographics.

While advancements around LGBTQ inclusion across the U.S. may have resulted in marriage equality, benefits, adoption rights, and access to health care, one might assume that institutions in general would be seen as LGBTQ-inclusive. The needle has shifted for some institutions but not all.

Professionals perceived their institutions to be all over the board, regarding inclusion. Some were viewed as very accepting, while others had more of a tepid,
neutral, or non-existence around anything LGBTQ-related. Less affirming institutions were viewed as possessing a bro culture, rigid gender norms, strong religious connections, or recognition of lesbians and gays without any dedicated resources for them or acknowledgment of bisexual, transgender, and queer people.

Professionals also expressed that they felt resources were provided far more easily for LGBTQ students than faculty and staff, citing the creation of spaces to gather, encouragement to rise in leadership, and access to trans-related health care as examples.

**Workplaces Right / Resources**

Institutions of higher education have had the ability to enact benefits and inclusion efforts around diversity and inclusion before policies or laws are approved by individual states or the collective U.S. federal government. Allowing domestic partnership benefits and the ability for same-sex couples to be recognized on campuses occurred at multiple institutions prior to U.S. federal recognition of same-sex couples (Durso, et al. 2017). This allowed for couples to have health insurance. LGBTQ professionals expressed this was important for them to be retained on campus, not just for health insurance, but also for the symbolic gesture of their workplaces to right something that these professionals felt was wronged by states or the federal government.

Institutions hold a lot of memories and nostalgia for LGBTQ alumni who may remember college as a time when they discovered their LGBTQ identities and perhaps felt unable to be fully out (Vaccaro, 2012; Garvey & Drezner, 2013). LGBTQ professionals mentioned how impactful returning to campus years later in order to get married was. Some also appreciated the fluidity and ease associated with having their
partners and spouses recognized electronically in alumni tracking systems. A dual sense of acknowledgment and celebration occurred for these professionals.

The job search process played a pivotal role for LGBTQ professionals, since they needed to assess if this could be an institutional environment where their out identity is acknowledged and celebrated, while being provided resources and opportunities to succeed and advance in ways where their identities didn’t seem like a detriment.

LGBTQ professionals mentioned what they felt were basic resources around LGBTQ inclusion. Having sexual orientation and gender identity as explicit protected categories on institutional nondiscrimination policies signaled to prospective LGBTQ employees that there is an espoused commitment and protection of their identities. In essence, they would not be fired just for being LGBTQ. That level of safety and protection is vital for so many employees in higher education.

Aside from diversity statements, many looked to see if the institution had a recognized diversity plan that explicitly included LGBTQ inclusion. This would also signal an ongoing series of efforts, as opposed to a checkbox mentality of “one and done,” like including categories in the nondiscrimination statement.

The existence of an LGBTQ center on campus was a very large signal of dedicated resources and institutional commitment to support students, faculty, and staff. Professionals acknowledged that these centers need to have multiple full-time staff connected to the center, in order to respond to the array of concerns, initiatives, and requests that the campus needs to address regarding LGBTQ inclusion (Campus Pride, 2018). Professionals took further steps while applying to look at campus maps, check out
the location, look at photos online, and even check Yelp reviews of the LGBTQ center to get a take of its effectiveness and level of support and resourcing by the institution.

Beyond a center, professionals looked for other gender-expansive and LGBTQ-inclusive spaces, including LGBTQ student organizations, LGBTQ living learning communities, gender-open residence halls, and readily accessible restrooms across campus deemed as universal or all-gender (Vaccaro, 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2018).

Open events also served as important places to locate a critical mass of LGBTQ professionals, as well as allies, who might be dedicated towards inclusion. These events included LGBTQ new student welcomes, lavender graduation ceremonies, and gathering university members to walk in local pride parades. These events allowed open opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to see LGBTQ faculty and staff who existed beyond diversity-related positions across the institution.

Faculty, staff, and alumni networks or affinity groups, also referred to as employee resource groups, served as additional spaces where LGBTQ inclusion could occur within LGBTQ communities. These groups would connect alumni from afar, as well as faculty and staff across functional areas to build social connections, share knowledge about the local community, discuss their families openly, seek professional development opportunities, and brainstorm ways to implement LGBTQ inclusion on campus.

Beyond student spaces and faculty/staff networks, professionals looked very positively on institutions having an LGBTQ Studies or Women’s, Gender, and Sexualities Studies (WGSS) academic department on campus. This allowed a place for
faculty to connect about their lives and their research, while allowing opportunities to cultivate students to minor or major in LGBTQ or WGSS.

Professionals remarked on the importance of infusing queer identities and topics into the broader college curriculum. Departments that focus on WGSS or LGBTQ Studies provide an important space to create research circles that bridge academic interests across faculty of all disciplines who may be looking to include LGBTQ information and research in their courses, even if it is an ancillary focus of the course rather than a primary focus.

LGBTQ task forces and advisory committees also served as signals of inclusion for professionals looking to continue or advance in higher education. Many felt these were explicit places to gain leadership, while also getting connected with senior leaders, due to the level of collaboration and recommendations that these groups would produce.

Regarding practices, many professionals noticed important changes to forms that asked for more gender-expansive categories than just male and female, as well as categories to signal LGBTQ identities among demographic listings. Whether on housing forms, health services forms, human resources, or the admissions application, having options to self-indicate additional gender categories and LGBTQ identities showcased a level of acknowledgment and inclusion around queering the formerly binary notions of gender and sexuality.

Forms also listing gender pronoun options were important, especially for transgender and nonbinary professionals, who feared being misgendered and subsequently taking on the role of eternal educator for each interaction with a student, colleague, or administrator who misgendered them. Best practices that some
professionals highlighted included having gender pronouns listed on departmental nametags, as well as on their office doors.

The re-naming of forms and events was important for LGBTQ professionals to see an acknowledged expansion of gender and family recognition across the institution. Events like a mother/daughter brunch at women’s colleges or a parents’ weekend switched to become family weekend or family-and-friends weekend. Forms requesting parents’ contact info have gone through an evolution at many institutions from “Mother’s emergency info” and “Father’s emergency info,” then to “Parent Contact 1” and “Parent Contact 2,” then to “Emergency Contacts,” sometimes providing an additional box for “Relationship to you.”

Professionals also wanted to see more queering of the lines in traditionally gender-normed activities on campus. These included fraternity and sorority life, athletics, and representations around couples and families in photos and recognition. Some fraternities and sororities have begun to accept transgender members, though it will take time to change a culture that fully accepts and celebrates the diversity that comes with including transgender siblings into a fraternity or sorority chapter (Tran, 2012).

Allyship education programs, such as safe zone or ally trainings, allowed LGBTQ professionals to feel that there was at least a critical mass of allies willing to advocate for change. These trainings often resulted in certificates of completion and important iconography, including rainbow pins and buttons, safe zone pink triangle stickers, gender pronoun ribbons, or other recognizable symbols of LGBTQ inclusion (Poynter & Tubbs, 2008; Bosch & Pursley, 2019).
Seeing LGBTQ-affirming symbols around campus, as well as on websites, proved to be another signal for LGBTQ inclusion that helped professionals get recruited and retained to work in higher education. During pride week events on campus, LGBTQ professionals remarked at the prevalence of rainbow flags being distributed, as well as the creation of a rainbow logo for the institution as indicators of an institutional acknowledgment and celebration of their identities.

Participants also shared that a commitment to LGBTQ inclusion, or a lack thereof, can be discovered through typing in keywords related to LGBTQ identities and seeing what pops up on the institution’s website or local press. If the articles that pop up focus on bias incidents, or if there are very few articles that celebrate LGBTQ identities, that tells you something about the institution’s commitment. Nobody is tasked with cultivating a history of queer excellence. Therefore, institutions should consider who is writing articles on campus about LGBTQ students, employees, events, initiatives, task forces, committees, and faculty scholarship on gender and sexuality topics.

Lack of sufficient data was perceived as a severe deterrent from being resourced more fully and understanding the experiences of LGBTQ professionals on campus. Many institutions did not track LGBTQ data for students or employees, while some tracked for students but not employees. Professionals were unsure if they even had a critical mass of LGBTQ professionals at their institutions, leaving them to feel isolated, tokenized, and ready to consider alternate options for employment.

This is pivotal, because whereas research in the 1990s often focused on whether or not professionals should come out, many LGBTQ professionals are entering their jobs fully out heading into the 2020s. They want to be tracked, they want to be recorded, and
they want to be asked what they need or want. Many of them are willing to put in the work to make it happen, even if it means being culturally taxed as part of the price of staying employed. Without sufficient data, decisions will continue to be made which only recognize LGBTQ professionals in an anecdotal sense, rather than a tracked and recorded diverse group of employees.

Additional resources included the providing of professional development funds for LGBTQ employees to attend conferences related to their professional responsibilities or personal identities, as well as having supervisors allow comp time for long nights and weekend hours to help avoid burnout. Providing time away from campus during national tragedies or family illnesses helped build a closer sense of trust and loyalty among participants.

Even if the above resources are not used much by individual LGBTQ professionals, just knowing they are present is helpful and contributes to a positive, inclusive climate that advances the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ professionals.

**Hiring Process**

Institutions can and have done some excellent things throughout the hiring process in order to make LGBTQ professionals feel excited about applying to work there. When asked if they received any type of messaging that indicated LGBTQ inclusion throughout the application process, most participants said no. Most participants mentioned that they had to seek out information on their own, via websites, social media, word-of-mouth, professional associations, or talking to peers and colleagues currently or previously employed at the institution. Ways exist for institutions to signal to LGBTQ professionals at each step of the hiring process that they matter and the institution
dedicates resources in acknowledgment of this increasingly visible and diverse group of employees.

On job postings, even if not for a diversity-related job, consider adding a bulletpoint about demonstrated effectiveness working with LGBTQ students or communities of color. This will help applicants recognize that inclusion is a commitment, that employees will encounter diverse groups, and that there are transferable skills being requested which relate to working effectively with diverse communities.

At the bottom of job postings, there are often groups listed who are encouraged to apply, including people of color and women. Adding LGBTQ to this list of groups who are encouraged to apply sends a very inclusive and explicit message around LGBTQ recruitment and inclusivity. As part of the application form, requesting a diversity statement, philosophy, or general responses to questions that focus primarily on diversity also emphasizes a commitment to inclusion.

The physical composition of employee recruitment and interview teams should be diverse, whether tabling or meeting with candidates at placement conferences, professional associations, or during on-campus interviews. These groups should include LGBTQ representation, as well as having the majority-identity employees cross-trained on resources offered that cater to LGBTQ populations. Symbolism is important when meeting with interview teams, whether that includes a visible ally sticker, a rainbow pin or flag, and inclusion of gender pronouns on nametags or during introductions. When prospective employees see themselves represented on recruitment teams, they envision themselves advancing from prospective employee to hired employee.
This added representation on recruitment and interview teams also allows an important opportunity for employees to ask about the current climate of both the institution and the local surrounding community where they are likely to live. Some professionals really appreciated being assigned a neutral liaison during the hiring process, so that professionals could ask any questions they had regarding diversity, inclusion, and levels of acceptance. These neutral liaisons would gather information and either email or phone the information to applicants in advance of the on-campus interviews.

Training these teams on implicit bias is also important. Avoiding terms like “fit” allows for less of a traditional professional mold for applicants to fit into. This is helpful for expanding the view of what professionalism means, or avoiding biases for how an applicant may or may not fare in a certain department on campus. Tracking applicant pools at every stage helps hiring teams recognize when the advancing pool of applicants shares similar demographic identities to them.

Perceptions concerning an employee’s ability to stay or advance should also be taken into account as potential implicit bias. By assuming that LGBTQ professionals may be one of few, or perhaps perceived as a token, interview teams might feel it better to not advance or hire LGBTQ professionals in such departments.

Some institutions also held opportunities for open affinity space, a free time during the on-campus interview. During this hour, prospective applicants could either meet with a group of employees across a particular identity group or use the time to go visit the LGBTQ center on campus.

Publicizing health benefits was deemed particularly important for our LGBTQ professionals with partners, spouses, and children. When LGBTQ professionals apply, it
is as if their entire family applies, especially if the job requires upheaving their lives to move. Having the benefits explicitly written via websites, a recruitment packet, and also reinforced in interviews signals to applicants that they need not search or dig to find readily accessible information that highlights inclusivity.

Partner and spousal hires are one way to acknowledgment LGBTQ professionals as a package deal, by providing their partners or spouses ways into the community. Some of these ways involve paid positions for these spouses in areas of the university, while others higher up involve compensation, perhaps because of hosting duties, event planning, or event travel as the spouse of a Vice President or President.

Professionals identifying as transgender and nonbinary also benefit greatly from institutions recognizing their need for medically necessary health care. These levels of health care include hormone therapy, access to counseling sessions, and gender affirmation surgeries (Beemyn, 2005; Catalano, 2015).

Other benefits to be promoted include expansion beyond the traditional family. Information should be provided to applicants related to surrogacy, adoption, parental leave, bereavement leave, tuition remission, and access to the employee assistance program. These six key areas have historically been restricted to employees but not extended to their partners, or provided to legal spouses but not extended to unmarried partners, or sometimes perceived as gendered benefits that institutions have emphasized towards women employees.

LGBTQ families look different, and with the queering of the family to include same-sex spouses, blended families across divorce and remarrying, multiple partners, as well as adoption or when members of a partner’s family dies, so too must institutions’
policies reflect their employees’ reality, which will become the new normal for higher education over time.

Benefits like these are often included in a packet of information that applicants can receive upon advancing to another stage, such as an on-campus, semifinalist, or finalist interview. Professionals gave high marks for inclusivity when receiving a packet of information that included nearby cultural events and festivals, local ethnic restaurants, and neighborhood stores and markets where they could purchase ethnic foods and groceries, as well as salons and barbershops for ethnic hair care.

For some, these packets were including in multiple languages. Providing options for resources, including websites, to be translated into multiple languages signaled to LGBTQ professionals that the air of inclusivity was palpable, even though the translation of documents had nothing to do with LGBTQ identities. Rather, in the spirit of queerness as blurring the lines and expanding the boundaries, LGBTQ professionals recognize that an openness to provide resources beyond language-specific boxes provides a litmus test for how they would likely feel about providing resources beyond gender-specific or sexuality-specific boxes.

National assessments are helpful for LGBTQ professionals in a job search, and not just for higher education. Professionals shared that they reviewed Campus Pride Index within higher education, but also the Human Rights Campaign’s Equality Index for professional fields beyond higher education. Comparison shopping is a normal part of determining if professionals should continue or advance in their field. By analyzing the levels of benefits and resources provided across professional fields, as well as equity scorecards through indices like the Campus Pride Index, College Consensus, and the
Human Rights Campaign’s Equality Index, professionals felt better prepared in their decisions to remain employed in higher education.

**Senior Leadership**

Often seen as the faces of the institution, people in senior leadership can do a lot to both attract and retain LGBTQ professionals.

One important piece involved showing up in LGBTQ spaces, which signals to LGBTQ employees that someone in upper administration is listening, watching, and attempting to understand and advocate for issues impacting diverse communities. A small amount of time can go a very long way. Some senior leaders held lunches with LGBTQ employees to hear their thoughts, which was received very positively as a welcoming, inclusive gesture.

Senior leaders both engaging and promoting their own attendance in diversity trainings was viewed highly as well. Professionals rarely get the chance to know if senior leaders are undergoing diversity and inclusion trainings, however the promotion of such trainings can also go a long way to create goodwill. It would help if these trainings were specifically led by people of color and LGBTQ people, as opposed to members of majority identities teaching about minority identities. This ongoing commitment to senior leaders receiving diversity education could be posted via social media, included as a soundbyte during annual verbal speeches, or included in written messages that regularly go to the community regarding current events, bias incidents, or the rearticulation of institutional values.

Public statements have power. Professionals recognize both when senior leaders send messages regarding current events and bias incidents as well as when they do not. It
can be a tricky balance, however many professionals were disappointed by the radio silence experienced from administrators following the Pulse Nightclub shooting. Additionally, some people felt their institutions were afraid to send out messaging following the Supreme Court decision on marriage equality, whereas LGBTQ professionals were hoping and praying for an acknowledgment from their workplaces.

For senior leaders who identify as LGBTQ, professionals expressed how they felt sometimes isolated, far removed from LGBTQ life of the campus, and their overall lack of involvement. Senior-level participants confirmed these perceptions, overwhelmingly describing their involvement in the LGBTQ life of the campus as minimal, low, and far less than they’d like it to be.

Younger professionals feared that some LGBTQ senior leaders might have climbed the institutional ladder to achieve success in the ivory towers of higher education, but then pulled up the ladder behind them. LGBTQ senior leaders shared their own recognition to be a bridge for future generations to rise into their levels of success. However, it was difficult for younger professionals to see them in this light, due to their lack of overall involvement in LGBTQ campus life.

LGBTQ senior leaders also shared the importance of recognizing your own levels of power within the institution, especially for people who may have encountered hurt, pain, or rejection from previous employers. Some professionals recalled times when they questioned if their powers were not always used for good, as they considered how to punish perpetrators of bias incidents, how to bar homophobes from visiting campus, how to upheave the senior cabinet, or how to dismantle the institution at large.
Many people had to keep these thoughts in check, while struggling to balance a history of individual pain with a future of institutional progress. Senior leaders expressed that they could do a better job to create spaces where people of LGBTQ identities could talk about the struggles of navigating politics, maneuvering systems, reconciling past pain, and catalyzing new change when they do ultimately rise into positions of power.

Regarding the fourth research question, LGBTQ professionals described a near laundry list of roles that future generation of queer professionals are likely to encounter throughout their careers. The sheer volume of roles mentioned exhibited an overwhelming sense to be everything at all times, even when diversity and inclusion are not directly tied to your professional position.

Professionals shared the many roles, not to overwhelm future generations, but rather to prepare them. In being able to anticipate these roles, LGBTQ professionals can develop strategies to manage expectations while also beginning the difficult internal work of deep reflection on one’s identity, one’s terms, and one’s non-negotiables in both the personal and professional realms.

This allows future generations to avoid being caught off-guard by requests or demands in the moment from colleagues, supervisors, or superiors. Having the guidance also prepares future generations for enacting their own professional practices and demeanor from a younger age, which could help propel them earlier into mid-level or senior leadership positions, thereby breaking through the lavender ceiling.

Advancing from a student to becoming a professional, a shift in mindset occurs from activism to advocacy. Advocacy was emphasized as vitally important in building coalitions, collaborations, and helping to navigate systems where conversation and
change can occur. As a student, many LGBTQ professionals discussed their levels of
activism, including protests, marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, etc. University
administrators and departments do not openly protest or speak out against another’s
policies.

Whereas disruption through activism can have profound effects towards
emphasizing and creating change for students on the outside of the institutional structure,
many professionals utilize advocacy as a strategic tool or creating change from within the
institutional structure. Recognizing how LGBTQ professionals move towards becoming
advocates instead of activists has helped these professionals collaborate, continue, and
advance in higher education.

Advancing in the institutional structure, LGBTQ professionals mentioned their
roles as collaborators and conveners across departments. By shifting from departmental
representatives to divisional citizens and institutional ambassadors, they let go of their
insular focus in order to get broader messages across to the rest of the institution. Further
financial and human resources were accessed through collaborations around diversity and
LGBTQ inclusion efforts, especially if the collaboration included senior leadership or an
LGBTQ task force.

Similarly, for LGBTQ professionals reaching out to similar-identity individuals,
many had to shift their focus from being solely about their own institution, in order to
branch out and connect with professionals across the region, state, or country. This
allowed them to see new doors of opportunity, new possibilities for future work, and new
practices to include in their current work.
Paralleling a position as translator, LGBTQ professionals acted as conduits between multiple constituent groups in order to provide the pulse or voice of another group. This also meant code-switching language for different audiences, because faculty may not have full knowledge of student affairs administrator language, and students may not understand the bureaucracy involved with the perceived glacial pace of some senior administrators to change systems and policies. Professionals also often served as consultants and educators for other departments who requested trainings around LGBTQ awareness and inclusion or reviews of documents for inclusive language.

Existence as an out LGBTQ professional often is enough to signal role modeling, even without action. Many professionals mentioned that just seeing somebody out, or a critical mass of somebodies, meant that there were colleagues and superiors to look up to, and also that advancement was not out of the question based on identity. LGBTQ professionals felt a strong sense of duty for continuing the circle by serving in mentorship roles for others, even just answering questions of prospective applicants via email or social media.

Professionals also felt their seriousness or professionalism was called into question due to their LGBTQ identity. Some posited that as a reason for possibly not advancing in their careers nearly as quickly as their straight colleagues. Due to intersections across age, physicality, and gender expression, some felt they would perpetually be seen as too young, too emotional, or too much of a disruptor to gain higher ground in the organizational structure.

Implicit bias can play an important role here, as for any senior cabinet position, there is inherently a sense around who will “fit” which is a dangerous criterion to use if
looking for diversity. Someone’s gender expression, flamboyance with mannerisms, or having an unmarried same-sex partner instead of a legally recognized spouse may all be perceived as not fitting into the traditional mold. In hopes to queer this structure, LGBTQ professionals reflected on their disappointment around how their identities have compounded in ways that may have hindered their ability to move forward, or at the very least, to move forward as quickly as their colleagues have.

Among more senior leaders, being LGBTQ was often cited as part of who they are, not a super-salient identity as it may have been in the past. Generationally, this shift is occurring among LGBTQ professionals. As professionals rise in age and professional status, their LGBTQ identities are just another part of layer of who they are, not a daily consideration as with former workplaces as entry-level professionals. Part of the reason for this may also include that there is less student involvement as you rise in the structure, so LGBTQ students are less likely to seek out a senior-level LGBTQ administrator for mentorship or guidance than perhaps an entry-level employee with daily student-facing responsibilities.

LGBTQ professionals also highlighted wanting to be seen as normal. This includes their partners being recognized, having sexual orientation included in a listing of diversity categories, and people not having objections to discussions around LGBTQ topics. Many wanted to be treated just as their straight colleagues have been treated, not with some super special spotlight, but rather with a form of tacit acknowledgment across many types of conversations and events. Some professionals just existed without needing to be the person readily identifiable with rainbow flags, safe zone stickers, and photos of their spouse everywhere.
At various points, LGBTQ professionals recognized their existence not as normal, but rather as political. Sometimes they were told their existence or views were too political if they were LGBTQ-affirming. Professionals did not feel the need to dissociate their personal identities from political ideologies because their existence shouldn’t be politicized, tokenized, or used for others’ gain.

Popularized by the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, we are seeing professionals heading into the 2020s recognizing a rebirth of the phrase “the personal is political” (Hanisch, 1969; Oliver, 2008). When discussing LGBTQ topics, rights, and equity, there will always be politics because of real consequences that human beings can face as a result of campus discussions and policies. It is also worth noting that the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s coincided with the rise of LGBTQ awakenings including San Francisco’s Compton’s Cafeteria riots, the NYC Stonewall Inn Riots of 1969, as well as many universities’ first chartering of LGBTQ student organizations.

For transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary colleagues, their physical existence on our campuses is often deemed an act of resistance to the status quo, related to the queering of traditionally rigid gender boxes and norms for men and women. The perceived political neutrality of individuals and institutions will continue to diminish as society will view advancements in diversity and inclusion efforts as a liberalizing of higher education and society at large. For many employees, it is a matter of safety and violence, a matter of life and death.

Sustaining institutional change often involves the revision of policies and practices, which many LGBTQ professionals are asked, expected, or assigned/required to participate in crafting and re-wording. From transgender inclusion, to housing policies,
to health center practices, to researching employee benefits, LGBTQ professionals are often at the helm of revising policies towards inclusion. This makes advancing LGBTQ professionals into senior leadership positions even more important, as they are often the ones tasked, or rather culturally taxed, to advance such policies and practices for the betterment of the institution as a whole.

Along the way, LGBTQ professionals have also seen their outness backfire, whether with students and colleagues, resulting in a self-censoring of their identities. Depending on the particular contexts, professionals may not reveal their LGBTQ identity, a process known as covering (Yoshino, 2007). Some professionals even recognize that their physical demeanor changes, in terms of voice changes, less flamboyant mannerisms, and language choices. There is constant self-surveillance that occurs around how to dress, what is perceived as professionalism, and how to code switch across environments with senior leadership, boards of trustees, and students.

A psychic cost exists for many LGBTQ professionals who often feel compelled to share their own pain with others, often reliving difficult memories from the past in order to educate others through real-life examples. Coming out is a very regular occurrence for many LGBTQ professionals, who feel as if they must bear their souls on a daily or weekly basis. Often sharing these identities with students or coworkers sparks even more questions, resulting in an open book policy on personal experiences that many LGBTQ professionals didn’t sign up to share as part of their professional jobs.

Becoming spokespeople or voices of the community is a commonality expressed by LGBTQ professionals that future generations will certainly anticipate. Even for events beyond the campus, such as marriage equality, transgender inclusion, and
instances involving hate crimes, often LGBTQ people end up in spaces expected to speak
or educate on behalf of the larger community.

This is not always seen as a negative thing. Rather, some professionals gladly
took this role on, some referring to it as their duty, so that they could be the ones to
complicate the narratives or include LGBTQ voices in topics that otherwise might not get
a spotlight or acknowledgment. Some felt more compelled to become spokespeople the
higher up in the organizational structure, as they had more positional capital to enact
change than entry-level professionals.

Not quite as public as speaking out openly on behalf of a community, many
LGBTQ professionals still encountered a role of being placed as tokens of LGBTQ
representation on committees and initiatives. Similarly to being spokespeople, some
lesser vocal professionals who felt tokenized still appreciated having a spot over not
having one.

However, there was large recognition that these spots were often decided
arbitrarily, based on a checkbox mentality of identities, rather than on professional
experiences that could be brought to the table to enact change. Many tried to build their
perceived tokenism from simple representation, to becoming spokespeople, to building
coalitions, to ultimately transforming the institution through collaborative action.

A final role mentioned by many involved the uniqueness of LGBTQ professionals
as trailblazers or roadpavers. Nearly every professional remembered a specific instance
as a pioneer, the first to do or create something related to LGBTQ inclusion that hadn’t
previously been implemented or accomplished. Creating events, speaking out publicly,
instituting practices around gender pronouns, and displaying pro-LGBTQ iconography
like rainbow pins and ally training stickers were discussed as examples. These professionals served as the pioneer, the trailblazer, the roadpaver for others to follow.

In the absence of queerness, professionals often felt compelled to do this. Some acknowledged their own self-disappointment around not doing more to help LGBTQ life on campus, even when they were responsible for much of the trailblazing. Carrying the torch forward seemed difficult to do for many who had already overextended themselves to pave the way for others.

Regarding advancement, professionals wanted to be and see LGBTQ professionals who would guide and mentor future generations into positions that expand their portfolios and advance their careers.

**Advice and Strategies**

In addition to recognizing the varied roles that LGBTQ professionals should anticipate, a list of “Top 12 considerations” sprung from the data for future generations of LGBTQ professionals to ponder while continuing or advancing their careers in higher education. Given that so few participants mentioned receiving any career advice, let alone advice specifically for LGBTQ professionals, these considerations represent an important piece of legacy-leaving from one generation to future generations.

Entering a place where you are already numerically a minority, sometimes feelings of isolation can creep in. This isolation influences professionals’ productivity and sometimes they second-guess whether or not to continue or advance in the field of higher education. By having a virtual group of mentors through this dissertation study, LGBTQ professionals can gain a sense of their own personal board of directors who are
giving advice and coaching them around strategies for what to anticipate as they consider continuing and advancing in higher education.

Showing up as your authentic self proved to be important not just for personal fulfillment but also professional fulfillment. By avoiding the living of a double life, LGBTQ professionals also avoid distractions to their work. A growing sense of people being unapologetic about their LGBTQ identities also helped to guide them in the job search process for where to apply next, as well as whether or not to stay in their same institution. Professionals felt more of a detriment in toning down or covering their identities than being their true selves.

This also leads to the inevitability of institutions recognizing the prevalence of LGBTQ employees along with the need for resources which cater directly to this growing constituent group. Being authentic inherently forces the institution to recognize you and put its money where its mouth is, by investing in their espoused commitment to diversity and inclusion whether through LGBTQ-specific services, professional development dollars for LGBTQ conferences, or the creation of spaces and committees that honor the climate, recruitment, and retention of LGBTQ individuals on campus.

Professional associations are vital platforms for affirming personal identities, broadening your support network of peers and mentors, finding a chosen family, and expanding your professional portfolio to include volunteer and leadership opportunities. Accessing mentors can also occur through brief in-person interactions or coffee chats during conferences, as well as explicitly asking someone to serve as a mentor. In the spirit of paving the way, most professionals agreed they would be flattered to be asked.
Even if they couldn’t serve, they would know other successful professionals to refer prospective mentees to.

Whether through professional associations or in-and-around the workplace, finding a sense of community was a massive piece of advice to help LGBTQ professionals avoid isolation and invalidation of their thoughts and feelings during work time. Off-campus activities allow a release from the inherent insular nature of colleagues-as-friends, while broadening LGBTQ professionals’ perspectives beyond campus boundaries. Some have also found community virtually through online communities and social media platforms catering to LGBTQ professionals in higher education.

Self-sacrifice is imminent in higher education, as professionals highlighted time management across personal life and work life as a key difference between being a student and a professional. Many professionals seeded so much of their time and energies into cultivating students that they didn’t leave any water for themselves to grow. Working as an LGBTQ professional in higher education means long hours and a schedule that is far from routine.

Setting boundaries is important to surviving and thriving, as your time could be split across early morning meetings, afternoon work time, weeknight speakers, and weekend events when students have fewer classes. Developing students holistically while changing systems to become more inclusive often can translate into sacrificing some of your time. That level of self-sacrifice should be a key consideration throughout your career in higher education.
Similarly to giving up some time, LGBTQ professionals will have to give up some control as well. Many expressed taking leaps of faith in hoping that an institution or workplace would truly value and prepare them for professional growth in a safe atmosphere. Overwhelmingly, professionals found higher education to be more inclusive than many other professional fields in terms of LGBTQ services offered a flexibility of scheduling.

When difficult times arise in the workplace, and they are bound to happen, the advice from LGBTQ professionals was to tap into your level of comfort around control. Students, colleagues, and superiors will likely say or do things that are microaggressive or even overt, related to LGBTQ identities and topics. The important thing is to consider when things are beyond your control, when to pick your battles, and what your non-negotiables are in relation to your LGBTQ identity.

Institutions often avoid sweeping changes, so incremental changes tend to help steer the ship in a different direction towards a more inclusive way of doing things. That might mean faculty, staff, and students feeling that the institution is doing little to nothing to implement certain recommendations around LGBTQ inclusion.

Continue to advocate while also recognizing that you can only control what you can control, until you advance to a level with more institutional power. If you spend all your energy upset about all the time, energy, and control that you’ve sacrificed in order to effect change, you could easily end up burnt out and in a spiral where each microaggression that follows feel like intentional salt in a cumulative wound.

When mistreatment arises, reporting to a supervisor, human resources, or a bias reporting system is always an option in the moment. However, often these instances can
replay in our minds for a long time. LGBTQ professionals suggest engaging in deep reflection on what the incident is truly bringing up in you, whether feelings from a previous employer or perhaps a cumulative impact built up from current events and microaggressions that feel like death by a thousand cuts.

As people with minority identities, we also have to recognize that people might perceive us as being a token or spokesperson, which unfortunately means an additional burden of having our reactions and responses scrutinized and henceforth applied to other LGBTQ employees or LGBTQ people at large. We may want to bawl, we may want to yell out loud, and we may want to flip a table. LGBTQ professionals suggest that these reactions unfortunately can just give employers more reason to believe that LGBTQ people are being too sensitive, too touchy, overemotional, or incapable of the level of seriousness and professionalism that allows us to rise into senior leadership.

Is this fair? No. But, do LGBTQ professionals feel a duty to keep it together in the workplace and perhaps express that anger, irritation, or sadness outside so future generations of LGBTQ professionals aren’t held back based on colleagues’ perceptions from us when we blew up? The LGBTQ professionals interviewed would say yes, and that is where support networks of friends, colleagues, and outside community members can become vital to navigating higher education when mistreatment arises.

Doing your homework when applying for jobs can set you up for success. Beyond viewing an array of resources through campus websites and national assessments like Campus Pride Index, professionals commonly typed in keywords similar to “LGBTQ” in the search engine just to see what would pop up. Professionals suggested that if the results were very few, or if the results were focused more around bias incidents
and protests than on celebration of LGBTQ identities and events, that’s a telling sign regarding the institution’s lack of LGBTQ inclusion.

Doing homework also means chatting with current or previous employees, as well as your broader network through professional associations, to gain a fuller picture of what the employment experience might be like for an LGBTQ professional at that institution. Just as you would ask the tough questions of your network, ask the tough questions in your interviews as well. Professionals emphasize that interviews go both ways, so take the time to ask questions. Comparison shopping across institutions, as well as companies or fields beyond higher education, can give you further insight into what types of resources, benefits, or opportunities you could inquire about throughout the interview process.

Aligning with the aforementioned roles of LGBTQ professionals as advocate, not activists, future generations are encouraged to quickly recognize that working at a college is not a continuation of attending college. Strategic advocacy can create collaborations and change, while protests and activism against institutional policies or practices should be left to students. LGBTQ professionals are now in the position of helping students understand how to protest or demonstrate in ways that provide physical safety or avoidance from arrest. Being self-absorbed in your own experience will not get you far in higher education. Many professionals simply feel it’s not about them any more, it’s about students which takes some getting used to.

Students who have an amazing experience during their undergraduate years may decide to seek out a graduate degree or job in higher education. However, these students should examine coursework, syllabi, and possible internships in higher education offices
to avoid feeling trapped in a degree program for which they weren’t quite prepared. Many higher education programs are not student affairs personnel focused. These programs may include courses on financial aid policies, presidencies, shared governance with faculty, and legal cases which might fall outside of a student’s desires or comfort zone if they come in with expectations from a narrower view of higher education stemming from connections to 1 or 2 student-facing offices.

Expanding your circle and professional portfolio can be accomplished through your supervisor, colleagues, campus committees, or professional associations. Honest conversations with supervisors around areas you may want to grow can help them take on a mentor type role that connects you with other offices and opportunities.

Some professionals were able to intern with other offices a few hours each week, teach classes, lead committees, or volunteer for conferences. This helps expand your professional skill set and portfolio, while also allowing employees to see you in a broader capacity, as more of a divisional citizen or institutional ambassador rather than an individual representative from your department.

Attending graduate school to advance your credentials is a key way to help you both in your current role as well as in future roles. Professionals felt that connecting their practitioner-level job with scholarly research and data made them stronger candidates for future jobs while also providing credibility to fortify the work they’ve undertaken in their current professional roles. Graduate school at the masters or doctoral level is an important retention mechanism for institutions to keep LGBTQ professionals across the next few years, especially if you’re able to negotiate financial support or time away without using vacation time.
LGBTQ professionals offered advice not just on what to do, but also on what not to do. These include not covering your identity, never believing you’re stuck forever in a position, and never leaving a job without giving feedback. Also, it’s ok to say no, especially around cultural taxation tasks when they are being asked or expected of you. Colleagues and superiors may come to you often with different tasks or requests, and while it may be the first time each has asked, that creates a cumulative effect that can lead to feeling tokenized and feeling burnt out or devalued, especially if compensation is not provided for completing these additional tasks.

Ultimately, it is up to you to make your own choices and create your own journey within your own timeframe. Across these stories, experiences, and nuggets of advice, there are a lot of options for a reason. If there were just one path to success, we would be seeing LGBTQ professionals across all levels and departments of higher education institutions. Given the different geographic and institutional contexts, there is wide variability in what has assisted each individual professional to continue and advance in higher education. You can implement pieces of advice from some people and not from others.

LGBTQ professionals are encouraging future generations to not abide by a single story, a single path, a single timeline, or a single mentor or role model to follow. Rather, they ask that you queer the lines, create new pathways, new journeys, and pave the way as a mentor or trailblazer for future generations of LGBTQ professionals in higher education.

Despite providing all these strategies, advice, and guidance, most LGBTQ professionals remarked that they rarely received advice themselves during the job search
process regarding what to consider as an LGBTQ employee. Of the few that did receive advice, most said they had received advice that was either terrible or not useful to them.

**Generational differences**

Generational differences emerged across the participants. Millennials tended to enter higher education already out and quite unapologetic about their identities, labels, and the fluidity of their identity labels and pronouns. While all of the 33 participants had entered their current jobs already out, many of the senior-level administrators had not been out upon their first employed position in higher education.

Senior-level administrators also highlighted that a mix of their age, years of experience, and societal changes over time have helped them to reconcile and overcome previous feelings of fear, social isolation, or professional exclusion that they may have felt when their identities were more salient and vulnerable as entry-level professionals just starting their careers.

Additionally, senior-level administrators tended to find that cultural taxation was just the price of admission for rising in the ranks of higher education. Many of them were initial pioneers for this work at their institutions and didn’t even imagine that they would ask for additional compensation to do identity-based service because they are LGBTQ.

Entry and mid-level professionals were much more likely to recognize cultural taxation and challenge the use of it as institutional corner cutting. They viewed it as a copout for institutions to extract additional diversity and inclusion efforts from LGBTQ staff members without them receiving institutional funding, resources, or a lightening of LGBTQ staff members’ overall workload in order to serve on committees, task forces,
and planning teams to implement campus initiatives. They refused to feel like tokens or community voices without being compensated, as it often brought additional emotional labor without compensation.

Senior-level administrators were also more likely to highlight the importance of advocacy, collaboration, and education as important tools over activism, disruption, and protesting. Rising in the organizational chart, departments and divisions are drawn much tighter together, so building collaborative partnerships is vital to advancing overall inclusion goals. However, the perception that staff members would protest or disrupt other departments because of perceived LGBTQ exclusion or practices can have great impact on these professionals being viewed as troublemakers and impediments to the institution.

Activism was not valued as important for professional advancement, as it carried undertones of “you’re doing this wrong” or “you’re intentionally excluding people” and “we’re going to shut you down.” Rather, advocating for inclusion by helping to educate and suggest co-created solutions seemed an important way to get ahead and build good faith, avoiding stereotypes of vocal LGBTQ professionals as potentially disgruntled employees or disruptive institutional activists.
CHAPTER 6

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

This study set out to compile advice and guidance for future generations of LGBTQ professionals in higher education through excavating the stories and lived experiences of seasoned out LGBTQ professionals. The findings and analysis provide a wealth of takeaways to assist current and future generations of LGBTQ professionals as they continue and advance in higher education.

Discussion Summary

In discovering what aided LGBTQ professionals in continuing and advancing their careers in higher education, a vital duality exists across connecting inward and connecting outward. Connecting inward means recognizing one’s majority and minority identities, discovering where and when to be authentically out, and using privileged identities as mechanisms to enact action that benefits people with identities that hold less power in higher education institutions.

Connecting outward means finding colleagues, supervisors, and mentors on campus while also expanding to connect with off-campus communities, online groups, professional associations, conferences, and graduate schools to help validate your identities and fortify your positional status as you advance in the profession.

LGBTQ professionals also experiences inward challenges and outward challenges influencing their ability to continue or advance in higher education. Inward challenges relate to difficulty integrating their personal and professional lives, difficulty navigating multiple intersectional –isms while also being LGBTQ (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia,
transphobia), all while carrying a self-described disappointment in being less connected to an overall LGBTQ campus life than they had hoped.

Outward challenges included experiences microaggressions, threats, conservative or religious viewpoints that denounced their identities and humanity. Additional outward challenges include being asked, expected, or required to take on responsibilities simply due to their identities, which for many still was not a path towards breaking the lavender ceiling which blocked many, particularly professionals not identifying as cisgender, white, gay men.

Professionals perceived institutions as being able to assist in further recruiting, supporting, and advancing professionals in both individual and collective ways. Institutions could help individual LGBTQ professionals by offering funding and time away to engage in professional development, graduate school, conferences, even self-care during times of family illness or national tragedy.

Further support of individual LGBTQ professionals would include increasing the ability of professionals to queer any rigid binary lines around gender pronouns, nametags and door placards, information on forms, invitations for partners, and acknowledgment of expanded and co-parented families. Institutions could help LGBTQ professionals collectively by assessing and promoting LGBTQ-specific resources, funding and promoting both social and action-oriented groups around LGBTQ inclusion, and increasing the amount of pro-LGBTQ written messaging and visual iconography.

Finally, senior leadership are urged to become ambassadors of LGBTQ inclusion through supportive public statements, presence at LGBTQ events, and educational
trainings on inclusion. These all help LGBTQ professionals to feel validated, valued, and victorious within a workplace setting and contribute greatly to their retention.

Future generations now can gain an awareness of the many roles they will likely encounter, in addition to general guidance and strategies for career advancement from successful out LGBTQ professionals. Themes across all participants included defining success for yourself, making choices to create your own timeline and journey, locating people on- and off-campus to help you navigate and integrate your personal and professional life, and engaging in behaviors that will pave the way for the next generation.

**Strengths of the Study**

A key strength of this study involves the overall diversity for the study participants. Identity-wise, there was a strong critical mass of people of color, nearly 40% of the participant pool. Additionally, there were more than 20% identifying as transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary professionals among the participant pool.

The number of years of experience ranged 5 to 28, with professionals across 12 job functional areas including graduate programs, career services, advancement and development, international and study abroad centers, academic administration, residence life, student activities, diversity centers, and administrators working in provost’s and president’s offices.

This allowed the study to not be steeped within a particular division, whether Student Life, Advancement, Academic Administration, or Diversity and Inclusion. Also, the number of professional associations these participants were involved in ranged quite a
bit, including a barrage of acronyms across both generalist higher education associations and those connected to specific functional areas and professional competencies.

Geographically, more than half of the country was covered in the study, with 33 professionals interviewed across 26 states and the District of Columbia. It is important to note that geographically, no major differences arose across Western, Southern, Eastern, Midwestern, and Northeastern institutions. In fact, that only aided in more fully supporting the overall themes that surfaced because there were no distinctions across geographical area found.

Regarding institutional types, there was a near 50/50 split where approximately half of the participants’ institutions represented public institutions and half represented private institutions. No major differences were shared across institutional type, the one exception being that LGBTQ professionals at private liberal arts colleges perceived their campuses in general as more inclusive than larger public institutions in metropolitan areas.

Contributing to this perception is a mix of private institution status allowing for less scrutiny of legislators coupled with private liberal arts institutions often geographically situated in a less populated tighter-knit campus community, as opposed to campuses in areas where the draw of large metropolitan cities takes much of the LGBTQ community life away from campus. However, in terms of experiences beyond that, no major differences were found regarding the extent of cultural taxation, lavender ceiling, or level of help and support from supervisors, mentors, and professional associations.

While many of the participants identified as cisgender gay men (both White and of color), a sizable number of professionals participated who identify with terms
including bisexual, pansexual, asexual, agender, transgender, nonbinary, and queer. In many previous research studies related to LGBTQ professionals, participants identifying with terms other than gay and lesbian are either often excluded from criteria or simply do not constitute a critical enough mass to have their experiences show up time and again across the data.

In research, often transgender and nonbinary peoples’ experiences can sometimes feel diluted down to single-issue topics involving gender-inclusive restrooms or access to health care. Through the participants’ experiences, topics expanded that range of complexity around their overall experiences in higher education to also include safety, resilience, pronouns, attire, interactions with faculty, advocacy for trans students and staff, and the importance of locating trans friends, role models, and elders throughout the community.

Finally, a key strength involved the interview protocol. The fact that interviews were publicized for 45 minutes, yet not a single interview went shorter (by request of the interviewee to continue), it means that the interview protocol had intriguing questions which sparked nostalgia, story-sharing, and emotional touchpoints that made LGBTQ professionals feel invested.

The interview protocol was designed to help uncover and extract important information about participants’ lived experiences while allowing opportunities for them to self-reflect and guide the discussion as they wished. These are 33 full stories of powerful real-life experiences, both personal and professional, that will help future generations prepare themselves for an easier time navigating higher education than the group of roadpavers who came before them.
Limitations of the Study

The use of participants who are open and out may serve as one potential limitation. Many LGBTQ professionals do not have the luxury or privilege of being publicly open about their sexual or gender identities, and therefore their closeted status excludes them from participating in this study. In research, choices guide the focus of inquiry, and while some of the participants’ stories and experiences may provide parallels for closeted professionals, this study does not possess the voices of closeted LGBTQ professionals.

Additionally, it was surprising that women were not nearly as represented in the study. Many participants shared an acknowledgment that among senior levels, the most likely to be represented from LGBTQ communities would be cisgender gay men. However, many also recognized and named specific LGBTQ women being represented in mid-level and senior leadership positions. Many of these professionals were unavailable to participate in the study. In fact, transgender and genderqueer professionals were much more represented in this study than participants identifying specifically as women, despite specific attempts at purposeful sampling to gather additional women professionals for the study.

Another possible limitation includes the connection between the researcher and the overall self-selection of professionals to participate. In full transparency, I hold a number of leadership roles in LGBTQ-related professional circles, and participants who are aware of my name or my work in this field may have actively agreed to be participants. Therefore, the pool of participants did include a number of LGBTQ professionals in higher education who know of my work professionally. I am unsure as
to what effects the professional proximity or simple knowledge of the researcher may have regarding participation in this study. However, I feel these connections are important to note.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

This study holds many implications for future research. Further research studies could create a critical mass of literature to support the transferability of concepts and lived experiences across racial, gender, and sexual identities. These include the exploration of cultural taxation as a phenomenon faced by LGBTQ professionals in higher education.

In this study, I examined three particular realms of how LGBTQ professionals experienced cultural taxation through being asked, being expected, and being assigned/required to complete tasks beyond the primary scope of their positions because of their LGBTQ identities. Further research could corroborate and expand the ways in which cultural taxation manifests across professionals with various identity differences.

Regarding the lavender ceiling, further research could be done on exploring the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in higher education. This study showed a prevalence of cisgender men (whether white men or men of color) who were situated in senior-level positions. However, women (whether white or of color) were far less likely to be as represented as cisgender gay men (whether white or of color) in positions of senior leadership.

While some participants mentioned women being represented in mid-level and senior-level positions, other participants openly expressed the difficulty of locating lesbian and bi women in senior leadership, attributing the invisibility to perceptions and
assumptions around gender expression, partnerships, and family status. Given that the glass ceiling and lavender ceiling both exist, the combination of the two seem to provide a larger obstacle or hindrance for queer-identified women to achieve advancement in higher education leadership.

This study also acknowledged a generational shift regarding LGBTQ research in the 1990s focusing on outness while many LGBTQ professionals are already out heading into the 2020s. Therefore, further research looking to the growing visibility and outness of bisexual and transgender professionals would help to create a critical mass of literature and advice for paving the way for future generations of bi and trans professionals. Such research would also place a burden on bi and trans professionals in senior leadership who are often far less likely to be located in senior leadership positions than gay and lesbian professionals.

More research is needed on exploring the professional journeys of LGBTQ professionals whose gender identities and sexual identities intersect with additional identities across race, religion, international status. For LGBTQ professionals of color, the prevalence of cultural taxation experienced across race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality seemed overwhelming, in terms of the amount of identity-based requests or requirements. Many expressed feeling disappointed that they weren’t uplifted further at their institutions, that their service was important for developing collaborations across the institution but resulted in a further pigeonholing into diversity-related areas where they could not advance towards a position with non-diversity responsibilities.

With regards to religion, LGBTQ professionals struggled to reconcile their faith and sexual identities. Many cited being reprimanded or removed from religious
communities and institutions, so further research could illuminate the experiences and career journeys of LGBTQ professionals of faith in higher education.

Coupled with experiences of being embraced and excluded from religious communities, LGBTQ professionals of faith hold a particularly poignant perspective around the core purposes of higher education. If one of the aims of higher education involves elevating humanity to greater levels of meaning, purpose, knowledge, understanding, and enlightenment, how might LGBTQ professionals of faith be able to serve as bridges and conduits for both secular and faith-based institutions to see the light?

This study focused on out professionals, however not everyone has the ability or luxury of being openly out. Sometimes this runs across other identity lines. For instance, an international professional may already feel like an outsider at an American institution. Therefore, in creating community and finding a circle of people to connect with, international professionals may cover or hide their sexual identities in order to not further isolate themselves from an already somewhat isolating situation.

While we are seeing more stories of out professionals at younger ages, it can still be a bit lonely at the top for LGBTQ professionals. Many become concerned if they can advance to a Vice President, Provost, or President level, especially given the assumptions that the majority of faculty, staff, and Boards of Trustees tend to be heterosexual. For professionals growing up in a generation categorized by secrecy and the emergence of HIV/AIDS, these feelings of being different can carry profound psychological worries.

These feelings can accumulate over decades, causing many professionals to not come out for fear that others might perceive them as not professionally viable or credible enough to achieve at the highest levels of the organizational chart. Further research could
delve into the levels of outness still experienced by LGBTQ professionals across their employment level, including added levels of pressure for senior-level professionals born in prior generations.

Additionally, though LGBTQ presidents were recruited for this study, not a single LGBTQ president was able to participate in this study, underscoring a key professional demographic missing from such research. While this study included deans, vice presidents, and academic administrators, the number of LGBTQ presidents is not a deep bench from which to choose. As prefaced earlier, previous numbers placed the group at approximately 30 total LGBTQ presidents nationally. However, the Presidents in Higher Education group has also recently gone defunct, signaled by their website’s messages of cancelling their annual institute and leadership conference in order to re-envision the group’s mission and purpose.

In the absence of this group fully functioning, that leaves an opening for some sort of symposium that can bring LGBTQ senior professionals together to learn from one another. Such a symposium could continue the legacy-leaving of advice, guidance, and strategies to help future generations of LGBTQ professionals continue and advance their careers in higher education.

**Conclusion**

This research study fills important gaps because much of the recent qualitative research conducted on LGBTQ professionals in higher education includes a limited sample size by functional area or geographic location. Some studies involve engaging in deep semi-structured interviews with participants within a specific position or division, such as university presidents or the division of student affairs (Bullard, 2013; Leipold,
2014; Robinson & Seyforth, 2018). Other studies delve into salient workplace experiences of LGBTQ professionals within the same state or as a comparison across two campuses (Smith, 2013; Pryor, 2017).

This recent research is vital for deepening our understanding, enlightening future professionals, and expanding the canon around the experiences of LGBTQ professionals in higher education. However, additional phenomenological research is needed to further explore the experiences and career journeys of LGBTQ professionals.

Against a backdrop of newer emerging identity terms intersecting with ever-changing university policies, legal landscapes, and fluctuating levels of LGBTQ inclusion and exclusion nationally, this research will serve future generations of LGBTQ professionals by preparing them for what they might anticipate while continue and advancing their careers in higher education.
APPENDIX

Appendix A: Pre-Interview

Pre-Interview

**Contact Participant**

- To send consent form which lists purpose, benefits, risks, and confidentiality
- To provide options of interview dates and times for the video chat

**Follow-up email upon receiving signed consent form and requested interview times**

- To confirm official interview date and time
- To request resume, curriculum vita, or listing of jobs with titles, dates, and years of experience
- To receive demographic information across gender pronouns, gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and faith or spirituality.

**Included in follow-up email request:**

1) Please email your resume/cv (or at the very least, a detailed listing of past job titles, workplaces, years)
   
   a. This helps me gain a fuller sense of some steps in your career journey.
   b. Confidentiality warrants that this document/information will not be shared beyond myself.

2) Answer the following 5 basic questions around how you describe your identities:

   a. What gender pronouns do you use?
      i. (e.g. she/her, he/him, they/them, etc.)
   b. What terms do you use to describe your gender identity?
      i. (e.g. female, male, cisgender male, transman, nonbinary, etc.)
   c. What terms do you use to describe your sexual orientation?
      i. (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, pansexual, etc.)
   d. What terms do you use to describe your faith identity?
      i. (e.g. Jewish, Christian, Catholic, Atheist, Agnostic, Hindu, Buddhist, “I’d rather not answer,” etc.)
e. What terms do you use to describe your racial and ethnic identities?
   i. (e.g. Asian-American, Latinx, Hispanic, African-American, Caucasian, Black, South Asian, Multiracial, French Canadian, Middle Eastern, White, Indigenous, Native American, “I’d rather not answer,” etc.)

NOTE: With these 5 identity questions, you may be as broad or as specific as you’d like. In my writing, I will remove identifying information to protect your privacy.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1) Do you agree to be recorded for the purposes of this study?

2) Could you walk me through your career journey in terms of your level of outness – when and where were you out at work and also with your family?

3) In the pre-interview questionnaire, you used the term ____ to describe your sexual orientation. In which situations does your ____-ness pop up or show up at work?

4) As you consider the steps along your career journey, what has helped you to continue and advance your career in higher education?

5) Are there specific professionals or role models who have supported your professional development or advancement?

6) How have you accessed these role models or mentors?

7) You mentioned many things that helped you throughout your career. On the flip side, where have you encountered challenges or obstacles – have you ever felt blocked or hindered professionally?

8) What strategies have you employed to overcome some of these challenges?

9) Have you experienced any anti-LGBTQ remarks, harassment, or discrimination in the workplace?

10) What do you feel workplaces have done right to help you feel supported and valued as an LGBTQ employee?

11) During your career journey, have your workplaces provided any resources that were particularly helpful to you?
12) Think back to when you were first deciding to apply for different jobs. Was there any messaging you received from institutions regarding their level of LGBTQ inclusion, either positive or negative?

13) If someone asked you to describe the LGBTQ climate at your current workplace or institution, what would you say?

14) If you could change any aspects of the institutional culture or climate at your current workplace, what would you change?

15) How would you describe your level of involvement in LGBTQ life on your campus?

16) Have you encountered any additional responsibilities, outside the primary scope of your job, that you were asked or expected to complete because of your LGBTQ identity?

17) What keeps you at your current workplace, and do you envision staying long?

18) Since the crux of this study focuses on advice for LGBTQ professionals, what advice would you give to LGBTQ professionals who are wondering if they should continue or advance their careers in higher education?

19) Did you ever receive any advice as an LGBTQ employee about your career?

20) Is there anything I haven’t asked, that you think I should have?

21) Final question – why higher ed? Why did you decide to do a career in higher ed?
Appendix C: Interview Protocol Matrix

This diagram maps the 21-question interview protocol onto the four research questions, in order to elicit and assure a richness of responses pertaining to each research question:

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