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Revisiting 'Our' Place on Campus: A Queer(ed) and In-depth Interview Study of QT Resource Professionals in Higher Education

Kristopher Andrew Oliveira
University of South Florida

Revisiting ‘Our’ Place on Campus: A Queer(ed) and In-Depth Interview Study of QT Resource Professionals in Higher Education

by

Kristopher Andrew Oliveira

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Co-Major Professor: Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Maralee Mayberry, Ph.D.
Jason (Jay) Garvey, Ph.D.
Lakshmi Jayaram, Ph.D.
Will Tyson, Ph.D.

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To everyone Black, Brown, Queer, Trans, Disabled and Poor on campus and in the world: Who got next?

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers an interactional, structural, and theoretical analysis of the experiences of Queer and Trans (QT) resource professionals in higher education. Data from the empirical chapters draws on 41 in-depth semi-structured interviews that conducted with QT resource professionals from 19 different states across the United States. The interactional and structural chapters reveal tensions between institutional commitments to doing equity work on college campuses and the neoliberal and institutional barriers that QT resource professionals experience in promoting and fostering institutional equity on campus. The third substantive chapter offers a queer of color critique – through Muñoz's (2019) notion of queer futurity – of QT resource center work to implore institutions to adopt queer(ed) strategies for promoting livable and thrivable futures for QT stakeholders on campus. The overarching findings suggest that, through a lens of queer futurity, salient issues and structural challenges open possibilities for queer futures in higher education.

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO 'OUR' PLACE AND WORK ON CAMPUS

In 2002, Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg published *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education*. This seminal, edited volume identified the broad parameters for designing, implementing, and operating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (QT) Resource Centers in higher education (Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002). Since that time, a significant body of research has been published focusing on campus climate, visibility, and identity development for QT students *(Bardhoshi et al. 2018, Bilimoria and Stewart 2009, Bowling, Miller and Mather 2020, Garvey and Rankin 2015b, Garvey et al. 2018, Garvey et al. 2019b, Legg, Cofino and Sanlo 2020, Mayberry et al. 2019, Mollet et al. 2020, Vaccaro 2012)*. Scholars have explicitly studied the role of affinity and cultural centers on campus (Beemyn 2006, Fine 2012, Marine 2011, Nguyen et al. 2018, Patton 2010, Self 2015, Self and Hudson 2015); the experiences of, and strategies for, better supporting QT students of color (Duran and Jones 2020, Johnson and Javier 2017, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021, Vaccaro and Mena 2011, Vaccaro, Russel and Koon 2015); promising practices for supporting transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming students (Mayberry et al. 2019, Nicolazzo 2016, Pitcher 2017, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021); and strategies for queer(ing) data collection, research, theorizing and praxis in and for higher education (Denton 2020, Garvey 2020, McInroy 2016, Nicolazzo 2021).

Despite this body of literature, much less attention has been paid to the contexts, experiences, motivations, challenges, failures, and successes of the higher education and student affairs professionals who manage QT resource centers, and the connection between those

experiences and the impulses of neoliberalism in higher education. As Duran et al. (2022) recently demonstrated "[d]espite the emergence of this field, particularly since the formalization of the LGBT Consortium in 1997, few studies explored the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of LGBTQ+ student affairs leaders" (6). In fact, an in-depth review of the literature suggests that there are only a few studies (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Duran et al. 2022, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Sanlo 2000, Self and Hudson 2015, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019) which explicitly discuss the role and experiences of QT resource professionals and graduate assistants in higher education. Indeed, the extant literature often discusses the role of QT resource centers in disembodied ways – often making sense of the role and value of QT programs and services in ways that are disconnected from the material and structural reality of the practitioners who render those programs and services.

The Human Sexuality Office (today known as the Spectrum Center) at the University of Michigan was instituted in 1971 and is lauded for being the first center on a college or university campus to support QT (in this case LGB) students (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Duran et al. 2022, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002). The Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory (LGBTQArchitect n.d.) is jointly managed by QT resource professionals at the University of California-Irvine and Pennsylvania State University. This directory is a web-based and grassroots tool that maintains a comprehensive list of QT resource centers that are currently in operation.[1] According to the Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory, in the twenty years that

1 The Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory was first instituted in 2014. According to Nancy Jean Tubbs, one of the founders of the Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory, it was instituted to be a publicly available listing of all QT centers in the North America. This differed from the directory managed by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals because the Consortium directory is only available to members, and only has information about institutions that are affiliated members. In this way, the Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory is a more comprehensive and open access tool where center staff are invited to report their professional role, the centers foundation and campus presence, and their institutional characteristics, among other variables. https://campuslgbtqcenters.org/

followed the founding of the Spectrum Center at the University of Michigan, nine universities founded a QT resource center. Since 1991 there has been a proliferation of QT resource centers on college and university campuses and at the end of 2021 there were 268 centers in operation (LGBTQArchitect n.d.) in the United States, which served a total of 278 institutions[2].

Since the early 2000s, several articles have been published outlining the professional standards and competencies of QT resource professionals, and the role and presence of QT resource centers on campus (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Beemyn 2006, DeVita and Anders 2018, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002, Sanlo 2000). And in recent years, scholars have begun to talk about the experiences and tensions that QT resource professionals (including graduate assistants) experience in their work (Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019). Further, the CAS Standards for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, transgender, Queer+ Programs and Services (CAS 2019) has focused on the need for a contextualized understanding of QT students on their respective campuses, as well as outlining the core function of QT resource centers in higher education. Yet, the experiences and challenges of doing this work remains largely understudied, including a contextualized understanding of 'doing' this work in higher education and the limitations and successes that QT resource professionals experience in pursuit of achieving these and other standards.

To contribute to this growing body of research, this dissertation is framed by Muñoz's (2019) theorizing about queer futurity, and the following substantive empirical chapters makes sense of the regular issues that QT resource professionals are called to address and the most

[2] Several scholars have recently cited the "Find an LGBTQ Center" tool through the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals as the best estimate of the number of QT resource centers in the United States and Canada. However, they often cite 320 QT centers worldwide and it is not clear where that figure comes from. I believe the figure 268 centers serving 278 campuses in the United States to be a more reliable estimate. That figure comes from the Campus LGBTQ Centers Directory; ibid.

salient issues for QT people on campus. Data from the empirical chapters draws on 41 in-depth semi-structured interviews that I conducted with QT resource professionals from 19 different states across the United States. The two empirical chapters reveal tensions between institutional commitments to doing equity work on college campuses and the neoliberal and institutional barriers that QT resource professionals experience in promoting and fostering institutional equity on campus. The third substantive chapter offers a queer of color critique – through Muñoz's (2019) notion of queer futurity – of QT resource center work to implore institutions to adopt queer(ed) strategies for promoting livable and thrivable futures for QT stakeholders on campus.

Audience

The intended audience for this dissertation is manifold. Primarily the intended audience for this dissertation is other QT resource professionals and senior administrators who supervise QT resource professionals. In my own experience, and certainly echoed by many of the participants in this study, the work and context of QT resource professional work often goes underreported, and it is my hope that this dissertation and subsequent publications can provide evidence for the challenges embedded into 'our' work. I hope that it also gives QT resource professionals a sense of 'not being alone' in seeing the shared experiences of 'our' challenges and successes. Similarly, it is my hope that senior professionals who supervise QT resource professionals can better understand the limitations placed on the work of QT resource professionals and deploy their positions and authorities in ways that mitigate some of the structural challenges that QT resource professionals face in the context of their work.

The third substantive chapter (Chapter 6) leans more theoretical in orientation and offers an autoethnographic accounts and theoretical musings for the work of QT resource professionals, and plays with the theoretical underpinnings that have informed the work of QT resource

professionals on campus. From this vantage, this dissertation finds a third intended audience in queer theorists who can glean my interpretation of how to ground queer theory into the material reality of QT resource professional work. This chapter also takes a firm stance on the role that hope can play in queer theorizing – vis-à-vis Munoz (2009) – and queer futurity, such that the challenges might also produce sights of possibility for QT lives on college and university campuses. Importantly, some of these tensions go under-resolved (particularly the section on the role of safe spaces in queer futures) and I imagine that queer theory might further make sense of the multiple meanings and consequences of the necessity (or not) of safe spaces in higher education.

Queer Musings About Writing Queer in Queer Writing

The work of queer theorists Judith Butler (2011a, 2011b) Jose Muñoz (2019) and others (Denton 2016, Denton 2020, Edelman 2004, Nicolazzo 2021) greatly inspired this dissertation. As exemplified through the title of this section, 'queer' is a messy ontology, a blurred epistemology, a theory of (dis)embodiment, a method of liberation, a noun, a verb, and a way of exponential and unimaginable knowing, doing, and being. To this latter point (being), 'queer' has been widely accepted as an identity category, because 'queer' is a term that has the capacity to encompass the broad expanses of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and agender communities among others (LGBTQIA+). Here Judith Butler's (2011b) extended theorizing on the limits and role of identity categories is useful. Butler writes:

> …the temporary totalization performed by identity categories is a necessary error. And if identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of "queer" will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who

> are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of investments. Indeed, the term "queer" itself has been precisely the discursive rallying point for younger lesbians and gay men and, in yet other contexts, for lesbian interventions and, in yet other contexts, for bisexuals and straights for whom the term expresses an affiliation with anti-homophobic politics. That it can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term.

In plain terms, Butler is arguing that although 'queer' can never fully represent all identities that it claims to ("the necessary error"), it pragmatically and politically always and already has room for more ("necessary affiliation"). Further, Butler argues, and I contend, that different generations can and *should* deploy queer in meaningful and critical ways that further complicate a queer politic ("discursive rallying points that can democratize queer politics").

While 'queer' has the ideological and pragmatic potential to center all non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, I am reminded of both the racialized and cisnormative ways that the term evokes white and cisgender people. And in recognizing the ways that trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming people – especially Black transwomen – have been disparately impacted by compounding forms of domination (Nicolazzo 2021), it would be illogical to not specifically center trans communities in this study. This is the logic that informed my decision to deploy the term queer and trans (QT), as an umbrella term, throughout the remainder of this project.

Dissertation Structure

This empirical, interpretive, and queer(ed) dissertation extends Munoz's (2009) theorizing about Utopia by locating hope, struggle, meaning, disappointment and pride in the experiences and dreams of QT resource professionals in higher education. The overarching research questions that framed this dissertation study was: What role can and do QT resource professionals play in resisting the neoliberal impulses of traditionally heterogendered institutions in higher education? While the first three chapters serve as an introduction, a broad review of the literature, and an exposition of the methods that I employed within the empirical chapters, the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters are written as individual journal article manuscripts. Individually they reveal the most salient issues that QT resource professionals are called to address and the liminal campus climates that they navigate. In chapter 6, I depart from empiricism towards a queer of color analysis of queer futures and futurity (Muñoz 2019) on college campuses to locate hope in disappointment and pride in challenges. The findings suggest that in the absence of structural and systems-level changes, QT resource professionals work in a state of liminality in which they cyclically are called to address interactional moments, and less often the structural systems that reproduce interactional challenges.

In "Chapter 2: QT People, Places, and Research in the Literature" I unpack the body of literature(s) about QT resource centers, the people who work in them, the stakeholders that they serve, the campus climates in which their work takes place, a critical analysis of traditionally hetereogendered institutions (THIs) (Preston and Hoffman 2015), and the recent 'queering' work that queer theorists in higher education have been addressing. Despite a large body of research in these areas, very little energy has been dedicated to the experiences of QT resource professionals working in higher education, the impetus that drives their work, their interpretations of and

actions through campus climates, and how their work is informed by their understanding of student success. This dissertation provides some insight into those areas as I analyze the experiences of QT resource professionals and theorize about our queer futures on campus through a reflection of past failures and successes.

In "Chapter 3: Queer Futurity, Interpretive Methods, and Positionality," I briefly detail Muñoz (2009) framing of queer futurity and reserve the broader exposition of this theory for Chapter 6. While this may seem counter-intuitive, Muñoz's theory of queer futurity and writing about 'hope in the face of heartbreak,' grapples with questions of equivalence, e.g. the lack of equal alignment between hope and disappointments, or success and challenges. To resist the urge to over-intellectualize the meaning and import from the empirical chapters – as stand-alone articles – I elected to leave the more in-depth exposition of queer futurity for chapter 6. Importantly, this strategy works to nuance the social location and impact of QT resource professionals on college campuses. Following the brief exposition of Muñoz's theorizing, I discuss the interpretive epistemology and grounded theory methods that informed the data collection process and analysis of interviews with 41 QT resource professionals across the United States. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of my positionality as a Black QT person, junior scholar, and evolving-junior theorist.

In "Chapter 4: 'We Don't Have to Treat People like This!': An Interactional Analysis of the Challenges that QT Resource Professionals Face in Higher Education," I employed grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2003, Charmaz and Liska Belgrave 2012) to make sense of the most salient issues QT resource professionals are called to address including deadnaming and misgendering, campus housing concerns, and the limits of IT systems based on findings from my interviews with QT resource professionals. Often QT resource professionals working to update

these processes, policies, and physical structures involved consulting many campus stakeholders. As a result, participants often articulated nuanced strategies through supporting students as they navigated these spaces and places. Through a lens of queer futurity, the findings from this chapter suggest that queer futures on campus could or should include gender inclusive housing for residential campuses, accountability for deadnaming and misgendering, and inclusive IT systems. Despite these findings, I argue that more research is needed to make sense of the campus climate that QT resource professionals navigate, campus policies that impact the work of QT resource professionals, and QT resource professionals work in supporting QT people at the margins of identity.

In the previous chapter, my analysis focused on QT resource professionals' interpretation of their interactional experiences navigating the most pressing issues for QT students and other stakeholders that are often connected to the nuances of the campus climate. In "Chapter 5: 'A Polite Conspiracy of Silence' on Campus," through a more structural analysis, I co-locate the anticipated disappointments embedded into campus climates – as informed by past and present experiences exacting change – alongside the strategies that QT resource professionals recommend that institutions take to shift the culture and climate on campus. As it relates to campus climate, QT resource professionals articulated a polite conspiracy of silence' on campus in which the actual culture and climate are divorced from the material reality of QT people often through institutional practices and experiences with microclimates (Vaccaro 2012). The findings of this chapter suggests that QT resource professionals articulate challenges to transforming policies and practices in ways that inform alternative or queer(ed) routes to achieving similar results. Further, I suggest that queer material futures, through an institutional lens, would involve clearly identified professionals whose work is to be *actually* accountable for

the campus climate and microclimates as it impacts marginalized communities and being responsible for shaping policies that could impact QT people. Yet, the findings of this chapter fall short of imagining a queer future, because the fact of the ongoing need for support and accountability implies that QT people at the margins of identity can expect to continue experiencing those negative climates and systems. Therefore, I somewhat pessimistically argue that equity is a fleeting and moving target, for which queer theorizing can produce different ways of imagining a more 'radical' (or change oriented) approach to QT resource center work.

In the previous two chapters, I drew a connection between interactional and structural disappointments and hope, in ways that opens opportunities for queer futurity. In "Chapter 6: Queer Future(s) on Campus" I sharply depart from the empiricism of the earlier chapters to import Muñoz's (2019) notion of queer futurity in ways that allows me to co-imagine what queer futures on campus could look like, and how it can and should impact the work of QT resource professionals. To accomplish this, I further explain what queer futurity is, shed light on the evolution of this queer of color theory, and then apply this epistemic project to the context of QT people in higher education. I conclude by arguing that Nicolazzo's (2021) call for a trans epistemology and the political implications of trickle-up activism can help us to materialize colleges and universities where queer futures are possible. Through that lens I offer several tenets for what queer futures are *not*. Through this process, I identify what may be the antithesis of queer futures to create a space to imagine, and perhaps materialize the promise of livable and thrivable queer futurues on campus.

In "Chapter 7: Conclusion" serves as a brief summary and conclusion of the full dissertation project. When taken together, the contemporary challenges that limit the work of QT resource professionals also co-constitute future and (un)imaginable queer ways of being on

campus. In other words, our current struggle is the site of future collective liberation approaching a limitless queerness that centers the most marginalized. One such example is the necessary work in centering queer and trans people of color on campus.

When taken together, I make the theoretical argument that the challenges and successes, hostile climates and cultural shifts, and pride and failure, co-constitute queer futurity on campus. Pragmatically speaking, these experiences can help professionals facing similar challenges to find hope and a path forward in disappointments, and if possible meaningful strategies to approach liberation. Beyond finding hope in 'our' work on campus this research offers an important contribution to the literature by bridging educational, sociological, and queer theories and empirical research, and it offers a glimpse of work inside and around QT resource centers on college and university campuses. Indeed, even participants in the present study indicated that there is a body of research about QT people on campus, yet as Benjamin (a participant in this study) noted, "there's not enough [specific] scholarship about the work that is done by LGBTQ+ people in campus LGBTQ+ centers."

CHAPTER 2: QT PEOPLE, PLACES, AND RESEARCH IN THE LITERATURE

There is rich literature about the experiences and outcomes of QT people in higher education. This literature review attends to the ongoing debates in sociology related to the neoliberal reproduction of inequalities in education, as well as the ways that the extant literature has described the role and experiences of queer and trans students, faculty, and staff in higher education. In terms of the latter, recently scholars have been *more* attentive to the experiences of queer and trans people of color in higher education, but this is still an underdeveloped area of the literature. This literature review further reveals that less has been written about the contexts, experiences, motivations, challenges, failures, and successes of the higher education and student affairs professionals who manage QT resource centers.

Inequalities and Resistance in the Sociology of Education

A major tradition within the critical Marxist branch of the sociology of education has long held that the complex systems of inequality, inequity, and oppression produced in the larger social world are reproduced through formal education; otherwise known as correspondence theory (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that "by integrating new generations into the social order, schools are constrained to justify and reproduce inequality rather than correct it" (Bowles and Gintis 1976:102). Through this framing, schools prepare the future labor force and individuals develop a sense of their role in the economic system including their relationship to their work and a social class identification. They further posit that the reproduction of inequality takes place through the legitimation hypothesis; the idea that the "integrative function of education is the legitimation of preexisting economic disparities" which

takes place through the substantiation of meritocratic ideology in education (Bowles and Gintis 1976:102).

Through the legitimation hypothesis, students learn to value the "principles that govern the existing social order and … see themselves as largely responsible for their own places in it" (Oakes 1982:197). In other words, students are taught to accept, internalize, and rationalize inequitable practices leveraged against them (Bowles and Gintis 1976, Oakes 1982) through meritocratic ideologies. This partially explains what Garvey and Dolan (2021) meant when they stated "[i]n the current hostile sociopolitical landscape, students, educators, education administrators, and legislators are witnessing and experiencing vacuums in federal and state protections for equitable education outcomes for queer and trans (QT) students." (2-3). Arguably, the impact of these protections (or lack thereof) impacts the work of QT resource professionals in higher education. To that end, social and economic reproduction theory in education (or *correspondence theory*) suggests that schools recreate extant inequalities (within schools) based on a hierarchy of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued by those with privileged social statuses.

Historically, the concept of "equality" has produced a deficit framework for some students in which their success is linked to essential, personal, and community characteristics. A deficit framework relies on concepts such as the 'achievement gap' that assigns blame to students, their families, and factors outside of formal schooling to explain why students are not successful in primary education, secondary education, and higher education (Ladson-Billings 2006, Ladson-Billings 2007). These strategies have often insufficiently explained why Black students don't 'achieve' at the same rates as white students. In simpler terms, the deficit model of education argues that there is something deficient about a student or a group of students based on

their social statuses, rather than the way the culture and climate treats or refers to groups and individuals with those statuses. Deficit discourse in higher education has also been applied to the gender and sexuality statuses. For example, literature about QT students in higher education has often compared "QT students to their heterosexual and cisgender peers in social, academic, and career outcomes to demonstrate disparities in achievement for QT students" (Garvey and Dolan 2021:43). It is therefore a challenge for QT resource professionals to situate the barriers that 'we' face in 'our' work as the outcome – rather than the catalyst – of systemic, hegemonic, and cyclical oppression.

Although correspondence theory and the legitimation hypothesis have been extended and later critiqued for being overly deterministic and for producing a "blackbox" framework of schooling and education (Apple 1980, Downey and Condron 2016, Mehan 1992) they remain useful frameworks for understanding the ways that formal schooling reproduces inequities, inequalities, and oppression. Other critical sociologists have intervened to suggest resistance theories and other pragmatic strategies to address the material outcomes of structural inequities in education (Apple and Beane 2007, Apple 2015, Giroux 1983, Giroux 2001).

Resistance theories, generally, provide a rebuttal to education theories that have not incorporated people (embodiment) and notions of agency. In other words, resistance theorists believe that much of the inequalities literature imagines nebulous and arbitrary structures that maneuver people. Giroux (2001) argues that resistance "redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with the logic of deviance, individual pathology, learned helplessness (and, of course, genetic explanations), and a great deal to do, though not exhaustively, with the logic of moral and political indignation" (107). Importantly, Giroux does not imagine a liberal rational actor in the context of schools, rather he is describing

the constraints that make ‘decisions’ seem like actual choices within a neoliberal bureaucratic system of education. In contrast to this form of neoliberalism, Giroux argues that resistance is a consequence of political and moral indignation, and therefore situated outside of the individual(s) (107). As a relevant example, QT higher education scholars (Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021) have employed queer of color theoretical concepts, such as “disidentification,” (Muñoz 1999) as a “a survival strategy that queer and trans people of color use to negotiate living in environments and worlds replete with multiple, reinforcing systems of oppression (i.e., racism, heterosexism, trans oppression)” (3). Here, Simms and their colleagues (2021) use the online disidentification strategies of trans students of color to implore QT resource professionals to center work around those who have been implicitly and explicitly framed as “irrespectable” (9). Arguably, this strategy of identifying strategies within the community serves as a form of resistance to cisheterogendered institutions (Preston and Hoffman 2015).

In either case, both the “black box” critique of correspondence theory and Giroux’s theories of resistance, leaves something to be desired. Both frameworks are theoretically linked to conflict theory and rely on a structural explanation in their emphasis of social-class statuses (and other statuses) within and beyond education. In doing so, the research subscribing to these ideologies often views students and other educational partners as pawns or objects in the broader social landscape. Thus, the general critique of the “black box” discourse is the failure to consider the social relations that take place inside of schools, at the interactional and interpretive levels, that do not neatly align with correspondence theory. And while resistance strategies often account for individual moments and movements, as well as constrained choices within structural neoliberal education, this literature has been largely (and understandably) theoretical, opening up questions for how this mode of knowing can be ground in some material action or change.

Employing education theories in sociology produces a site of analysis to better understand the ways that higher education may, as a social institution that co-organizes social life, reproduce inequalities for queer and trans people. Much of the extant literature about queer and trans people in higher education has focused on everyday experiences, without connecting those experiences to social theory. Because QT resource professionals do not have the institutional power and influence needed to make systemic changes on campus (Garvey and Dolan 2021, Pryor and Hoffman 2021) employing a queer of color and interpretive lens is a necessary strategy to identify and resist the social forces which reproduce the inequities (cissexism, hetero/homonormativity, transphobia, racism, sexism, ableism, and classism among others) that QT resource professionals are often expected to address.

Queer and Trans People in Higher Education

The literature about QT people in higher education is cross-disciplinary, incorporating psychology, education, higher education and student affairs, social work, and sociology among others. While there is a large body of literature addressing various facets of QT life in higher education, the literature and data has been inconsistently collected and reported. Further, Garvey and Dolan (2021) indicated that "[t]oo few education data sets exist nationally that include QT students, and there is vast inconsistency institutionally as colleges and universities fail to prioritize collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data about QT students" (Garvey and Dolan 2021:3).

The overarching foci of the extant literature(s) has been: (1) identity development for queer and trans students (D'Augelli 1994, Fassinger and Miller 1996, Miller, Wynn and Webb 2018, Renn and Bilodeau 2005, Rhoads 1997); (2) 'at-risk' factors and safe spaces for queer and trans students (including primary and secondary education) (Mayberry, Chenneville and Currie

2013, Rachmilovitz 2017); (3) campus climate for queer and trans people (Garvey and Rankin 2018, Patridge, Barthelemy and Rankin 2014, Pitcher 2017); (4) the role of QT resource centers and the professionals who run them (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Fine 2012, Nguyen et al. 2018, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002, Sanlo 2000, Self 2015, Self and Hudson 2015, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019); (5) the experiences of queer and trans students, faculty, and staff of color (Duran 2018, Garvey et al. 2019a, Johnson and Javier 2017, Pritchard 2013, Vaccaro and Mena 2011); and (6) critical institutional frameworks for understanding queer and trans identities in higher education (Preston and Hoffman 2015, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021). Organizing this literature into the distinct categories described above is challenging because their contents overlap, converge, and depart. The premise that these projects overlap suggests the complex relationship between queer identified students (and other stakeholders) and education.

Identity Development for QT Students

Identity development models for queer and trans students combine models which describe gender and sexual identity formation (Cass 1984, Lev 2013, Troiden 1989) with student development theories (Chickering and Reisser 1993, Tinto 1987). Each of these developmental theories is firmly rooted in the tradition of social psychology. These literatures are expansive because of the longtime focus on how and through which processes individuals identify as gender and sexual minorities (GSM); what the process is like to come to terms with one's identity as a GSM; and, similarly, what are the developmental phases of college students. The developmental models of gender and sexuality, and the student development models in higher education have been critiqued by scholars across disciplines (D'Augelli 1994, Rhoads 1997, Tierney 1992). Rhoads (1997) has argued that sexual identity development models seek

universality to the detriment of complexity. Similarly, Tierney (1992) has argued against the utility of some student development theories when those theories are misquoted extensions of classic social theory (see Durkheim's [1897] framing of ritual). Those theories which essentialize the complexity of sexuality and gender identity (as well as simplifying the process through which those identities develop in specific contexts such as schools and universities) may reinforce hegemonic and oppressive regimes. Further, more contemporary scholarship (Langdridge 2008, Renn and Bilodeau 2005) has critiqued gender and sexual identity development because "they incorporate a belief that successful coming out involves a move towards a fixed and stable identity and quiet acceptance of the wider social world" (Langdridge 2008:61). A queer(ed) position would implore fluidity to reject stable notions of identity that creates room for cisheteronormativity to persist.

Prominent student development theories in higher education have also been critiqued for producing a one size fits all model of student development. Tinto (1987), who is best framed as a college impact scholar in higher education, extended Durkheim's (2005 [1897]) framing of 'ritual,' and Van Gennep's (2013) framing of 'rites of passage,' to argue that students who are alienated from higher education processes are less likely to persist through to graduation; what Tinto calls 'departure.' He suggests that students who feel welcome on campus, who engage with faculty and staff in and out of the classroom, and who participate in social activities related to campus are more likely to be successful and to persist through graduation. However, Tinto's (1987) extension of 'ritual' has been critiqued because it divorces students' experience with their own social histories (Tierney 1992). Tierney (1992) specifically argued that this framing of ritual "extracts the terms from its cultural foundations" (608). Tierney (1992) used this lens to argue that colleges and universities deploy Tinto's (1987) extension of ritual to assimilate students

from diverse backgrounds into the college setting without recognizing that some students, in this case Native American students, were not able to identify with the cultural practices because the 'white university' did not recognize their cultural values. He states that in US "higher education we find that colleges and universities reflect the culture of the dominant society. In America, that dominant culture is white" (Tierney 1992:208).

Although Tierney does not cite correspondence theory (Bowles and Gintis 1976) one can see that this theory encapsulates his claim. Where Tierney cautions against the ways that schools reproduce dominant culture, Bowles and Gintis (1976) call this the 'reproduction of inequality.' Heteronormativity and cisnormativity are also central tenets of the dominant culture. If we take Tierney's (1992) critique seriously, one can also incorporate other systems of oppression and domination into the discussion of ritual. Particularly, queer and trans students may, and certainly do, face heteronormative, cisnormative, transphobic, masculinist, and racist cultural contexts which impact their ability to experience higher education fully as a 'rite of passage,' and therefore would be less likely to persist through to graduation because of this cultural context. Therefore, because these embedded 'rites of passage' were not designed to incorporate the complexity of identity, they do not hold space for QT students to work through those normative rites.

It seems that campus QT resource centers have been instituted with this contradiction in mind, yet (as is described in the critical institutional frameworks sub-section below) the existence of campus resource centers often leave hegemonic power structures and extant forms of oppression in-tact (Preston and Hoffman 2015). The main argument is that colleges and universities should not adopt a one-size fits all model. Rather, institutions should recognize that students come from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences, and those experiences should

be more critically examined when determining what successful integration (or assimilation) means for each student. Further, identity development models which sections off pieces of students' identities, necessarily fails to consider students at the intersection of their identities – consider that a development theory about gender and sexual minority students does not and cannot encapsulate the experiences of queer and trans students of color.

When scholars emphasize a 'normal' process or pathway to describe queer and trans identity development and student identity development, we potentially run the risk of denying the legacy that transphobia, homophobia, cis-sexism, and sexism have amassed (educational debt) to produce and reproduce the violence and discriminatory social context through which queer and trans students navigate the academy. If QT students experience developmental stages, they do so within the context of schools where they have been subject to experiences of marginalization, discrimination, limitations on free speech, exclusionary curricula and activities, unwanted "outing," and threats of violence (Rachmilovitz 2017:204). To that end, these models necessarily de-situate the institutional context from the experiences of students and often simply rely on at-risk framings of queer and trans students, as is evidenced in the next section. This requires QT resource professionals to split time between redressing risk factors and the necessary policy and advocacy work that challenges the systems which rearticulate risk factors. This dissertation study resists this temptation by making sense of the work, challenges, and successes that QT resource professionals have in supporting QT students in higher education. Doing so helped to highlight the structural conditions that negatively impact QT people – and especially students – in higher education.

Third wave, and potentially fourth wave, developmental theories have worked to reframe the overly deterministic nature of classic theories, to locate inequity within context, and to

analyze systems of power, oppression, and privilege to direct social justice-oriented praxis to create more equitable contexts for historically and contemporarily marginalized students in higher education (Abes, Jones and Stewart 2019). Despite these important contributions to re-center historically marginalized students, and in this case QT students, the challenges that professionals face in facilitating opportunities for identity development within the context of systemic inequity have been underconsidered. However, the CAS Standards for LGBTQ+ services indicate that "[s]uccessful LGBTQ+ initiatives target individual students while also creating and maintaining a healthy campus community for LGBTQ+ students in all of their intersections of identity" (CAS 2019:np). Arguably more research is needed to make sense of the way that these intiatives are impacted by localized phenomena to consider the ways that interactional and structural challenges may impact QT students in higher education. It seems imperative to consider the experience of QT resource professionals in facilitating these initiatives when structural challenges limit their ability to produce these initiatives, and arguably 'meaningful' identify development for historically marginalized students.

'At-risk' and Safe Spaces

Literature about identity development for QT students has often articulated an 'at-risk' framework (Griffin and Ouellett 2003, Russell 2005). At-risk discourse for QT people frames QT people as being essentially and inherently at-risk of adversity including poor mental and physical health, suicide ideation, and sexual violence among other factors. This at-risk framing was apparent in the 1980s, as discourse began to identify HIV and AIDS – solely and erroneously – with gay men and lesbian youth (Griffin and Ouellett 2003, Russell 2005). By the end of the 1980s the AIDS epidemic had wreaked global death and destruction, and stateside the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA; slated to protect the rights of QT people) was stalled to a

standstill (Conrad 2014) leaving QT people vulnerable to systems which produce risk factors. The proliferation of QT resource centers in U.S. higher education seems to coincide with the national climate for queer and trans people in the late 1990s, where much attention was given to the violence experienced by the broader queer community, and federal policies were created to bar QT people from several social and political institutions such as marriage and the military (*see* Defense of Marriage Act and the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' military policy). This moment re-ignited the movement to push for respect and dignity for (some) QT people, and necessarily produced the 'at-risk' narrative to report experiences of discrimination and violence. The movement also seems to have influenced the development of initiatives at colleges and universities which promoted diversity, equity, and inclusion. At the same time, newly proliferated QT resource centers were tasked with combatting the systemic issues that negatively impacted QT students, faculty, staff, and the community at large.

Although QT students are more likely to experience discrimination and violence, Mayberry, Chenneville and Currie (2013) argue that 'at risk' rhetoric results in the reproduction of 'safe-spaces' in high schools which leaves heteronormative practices and ideologies in-tact; a sentiment theoretically echoed in Preston and Hoffman's (2015) notion of traditionally heterogendered institutions of higher education (see more on that below). Distinctive from the problematic 'at-risk' framing (Mayberry, Chenneville and Currie 2013), recording experiences of discrimination and violence situates QT students within the context of formal education (e.g. schooling), and as the unwilling recipients of hetero/cis-normative practices and ideologies, homophobic and transphobic violence, discrimination, and oppression.

In a self-reported survey, QT students are (at least) twice as likely to experience harassment than students who are not gender or sexual minorities, and seven times more likely to

indicate that those experiences were related to their gender or sexual identity (Rankin et al. 2010). Surprisingly, "LGBQ respondents (70%, 76%, 64%) were significantly less likely than their allies to feel very comfortable or comfortable with the overall campus climate" (Rankin et al. 2010:12). In this case, at least two-thirds of LGBQ participants identified their campus climate as comfortable. QT students of color perceive more experiences of harassment and are less likely to view their campus community as comfortable than their white counterparts (Duran 2018). These effects are greater for non-binary participants. When taken together, it seems that more nuance is needed to understand what social conditions make it possible that QT students are more likely to experience discrimination on campus in response to (and *not* because of) the perception of their gender or sexuality. Given the role of QT resource professionals in supporting QT students on campus, redressing the socio-political processes that perpetuate these experiences seems paramount.

Experiences of discrimination and violence on campus are also linked to long-term outcomes for queer and trans students, which perpetuates an 'at-risk' framing. For example, the literature which has described QT student experiences has revealed that college and university campuses which foster oppressive and discriminatory climates are linked to a decrease in student engagement and involvement (Bazarsky, Morrow and Javier 2015, Garvey et al. 2017, Linley and Nguyen 2015). On an interactional level, QT students who are exposed to anti queer micro-aggressions are more likely to have a lower GPA – a predictor of future success beyond the academy (Mathies et al. 2019). Additionally, this literature identifies student success through traditional framings of GPA, retention, persistence, and engagement, and does not consider what success might look like for queer and trans students. Because of this framing, QT resource

professionals are arguably called to produce programs, policies, and initiatives to positively impact 'at-risk' students, but not necessarily to enact cultural or systemic change.

The 'at-risk' framing of QT students has given rise to 'safe-space' programming and rhetoric. A safe space is one in which individuals should feel comfortable to express and present their identities and ideas in ways that are most comfortable for them without the fear of ridicule, discrimination, and violence (Flensner and Von der Lippe 2019). This framing of safe spaces in higher education has come under attack in the popular media and in the academic journals as safe spaces are framed in contrast to academic freedom. This is often framed as the free exchange of ideas (Byron 2017) or the more conservative dog-whistle: 'diversity of thought.' From this perspective, a campus community can foster homophobic, transphobic, heterosexist, and cisnormative practices, and 'safe spaces' promote people and places where those discriminatory and oppressive values are not welcome. This presents yet another challenge for QT student identity development, wherein it seems implausible to fully realize one's identity when that identity is only 'safe' in those places which have been marked by a rainbow or pink triangle. Thus, 'safe space' rhetoric, although well-meaning, has the effect of reproducing hegemonic heterogendered campus communities by limiting those places which are welcoming to queer and trans students, and consequently identifying all other non-safe spaces as not welcoming or otherwise serving those who are cisgender and/or heterosexual. While it is important to recognize the multitude of ways that higher education has centered cis-heteronormative ideologies, simply framing queer and trans students as 'at risk' obscures the legacy that has produced the nuances of this hegemonic system(s). Further, the 'at risk' framing centers QT students as recipients of the violence which they are made subject to, rather than placing

dominant and majority actors, policies, practices, and discourse (including silence) as the architects and manufacturers of anti-queer oppression.

It seems necessary to strike a balance between promoting places on campus where queer and trans students can feel safe, while also recognizing that the production of 'safe spaces' is nearly impossible because those spaces are always on the verge of being compromised. For example, a QT resource center might be deemed a safe space for QT students, but those same spaces might unintentionally harbor anti-trans or racist ideologies, making the office less 'safe' for gender non-conforming students and/or students of color. It also says nothing about where QT staff, faculty, and administrators can feel 'safe' on campus when the QT resource center, in this example, is designated as a student-centered space. Differently, some campus departments house individual offices where students and professionals congregate for work or studies. Even if all members of that department have participated in a 'safe-space training,' is the space still 'safe' if other stakeholders access this space who aren't queer affirming? Is a space 'safe' for QT people with other marginalized identities? The insurmountable limitations around what is or isn't 'safe' largely renders the concept of 'safety' as meaningless extension neoliberal impulses in higher education. Further, if QT resource professionals are solely focused on creating a 'safe' (or as I often hear 'safer') space for QT students, is it possible to imagine a higher education setting where QT people don't need to seek safety?

The at-risk and safe space literature has proved useful in helping colleges and universities craft policies and create resources to help QT students to be successful. Despite illustrating the ways that institutions characterize students and spaces, it does not theorize the ways that institutions are responsible for perpetuating the systems of oppression that impact QT students, faculty, and staff. This glaring gap begs the question, how do institutional characterizations of

QT people create and constrain the policies, programs, and resources available to queer and trans people? How do those same characterizations shape the experiences, successes, challenges, hopes, and struggles of QT resource professionals in higher education? And how does that at-risk framework represent the experiences of multiply marginalized QT people, especially QT people of color in higher education.

QT People of Color in Higher Education

The research about QT people of color (QTPOC) in higher education and their/our involvement on campus constitutes a growing body of literature, and an increasingly more salient concern for higher education scholars and practitioners (Duran 2018). In his systematic literature review of queer and trans students of color, Duran (2018) argues that "[although] college campuses have started offering programs and spaces for queer and transgender students, these opportunities regularly fail to attract collegians who are also racial/ethnic minorities" (1). Central to this dissertation, these are the very programs and spaces that are produced by QT resource professionals.

According to Duran (2018), the literature about QT students of color, has focused on "coming out and finding sources of support, campus climate and navigating singular identity spaces, acknowledging the complex individuality of QTPOC students, and the lack of resources/representation for these collegians" (2). It is therefore no surprise that Vaccaro and Mena (2011) found that QT student activists of color had to push to create an organization for queer students of color "where their queer and racial/ethnic identities could be embraced" (359). Additionally, Garvey and Dolan (2021) have called attention to some of the disparate experiences of QT students of color and/or migrant students noting that "QT students of color and QT immigrant students have faced additional threats to their success in school and overall

safety through the Muslim ban, uncertainty of the continuation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, increased detention and deportation, continued voter suppression, and threats to affirmative action" (3). Arguably, developing spaces that support queer and trans students of color at the intersections of their identities requires recognizing the ways that queer spaces have been founded on notions of whiteness, and further recognizing the ways that spaces founded on racial and ethnic identities have historically centered heteronormative and cisgender people and ideologies.

More recently, scholars have moved beyond talking about the experiences and outcomes of QT students of color, to also discuss the experiences, resistance strategies, and practical approaches to intersectionality for queer and trans people of color working as faculty, staff, and administrators in the context of higher education. *Queer People of Color in Higher Education*, an edited volume by Johnson and Javier (2017), sheds light on this growing body of research. Contributors advocated for pragmatic intersectionality to produce action-oriented social justice strategies and described the experiences of queer people of color at the intersections of race, ethnicity, nationality, faith-affiliations, gender, and sexuality. It is important to note, however, that nine out of eleven of the chapters were focused on students. This is not surprising given that the student affairs profession centers students. However, it can be assumed that faculty, staff, and administrators tend to work for a university longer than the average student's enrollment. For this reason, the experiences of QTPOC faculty, staff, and administrators can reveal ongoing and consistent practices, experiences, and institutional mechanisms related to the intersections of their/our identities. Although there is a burgeoning literature outside of higher education – including the role that QTPOC supervisors play in supporting QTPOC employees (Singh and

Chun 2010) – less is known about their/our experiences working in the context of higher education.

Duran (2018) argues that research about QTPOC "might benefit from multiple theoretical perspectives, as long as scholars acknowledge the tensions that transpire from combining epistemological traditions" (8). Much of the literature about QTPOC in higher education stems from interpretive, critical, and post-structural theories (Duran 2018), it seems necessary to consider how research that transcends these boundaries (perhaps through queering) could be used to better understand QTPOC in higher education. This push for multiple theories suggests a research gap. As I will demonstrate, this dissertation coalesces with that research and theoretical gap by bringing together sociological theory, queer of color theor(ies), and the rich literature of higher education and student affairs scholars. This dissertation also employs interpretive methods in service of queer futurity in ways that allows us to articulate findings in hopeful and unintentionally pragmatic ways. I clarify this last point in the section on theoretical framework, and later in the research methods section.

Campus Climate for QT People

Research about the campus climate for QT people accounts for a sub-section of the literature about QT people in higher education. Research about QT staff and administrators has largely focused on QT resource professionals and faculty respectively. For queer and trans faculty, studies have shown their experiences with microaggressions, tokenism, stereotyping, judgments, isolation, issues in the classroom, and scholarship constraints are correlated with intentions to leave the institution (Bilimoria and Stewart 2009, Garvey and Rankin 2018, Rankin 2003, Sears 2002). Research has also been dedicated to queer and trans faculty mentoring relationships with students (Graham 2019, Mulcahy et al. 2016, Russell and Horne 2009). Much

of these experiences are connected to the broader campus climate as also experienced by students (Garvey and Rankin 2018).

In 2007, Campus Pride – the leading higher education QT benchmarking organization – created the Campus Pride Index (CPI) "in response to the increasing demand for tools and resources to support campuses in assessing LGBTQ-friendly policies, programs, and practices" (Garvey et al. 2017:62-63). In short, the goal of the CPI is to rate colleges and universities on their progress towards implementing and enforcing inclusive QT programs, policies, and practices. Completing a CPI produces a score which is then confidentially shared with schools, and the overall 'grade' that each school earns is (optionally) shared on the Campus Pride website. While QT resource professionals largely understand completing the CPI as a promising practice, the factors which the CPI measures can also be viewed as best practices. The best practices that the CPI measures are QT (1) policy inclusion, (2) support and institutional commitment, (3) academic life, (4) student life, (5) housing, (6) campus safety, (7) counseling and health, and (8) recruitment and retention efforts (Garvey et al. 2017:63). The CPI has been used as a recruitment tool for admissions teams, and a source of data for campus administrators which can help them to produce better policies, practices, and programs that impact QT students (Garvey et al. 2017). Taken together these domains provide a snapshot for an institution's overall success in providing a welcoming campus to queer and trans students.

The CPI has been updated (at least once) since its inception and attempts to create an evolving benchmark about queer and trans student support. Epistemologically speaking, any attempt at measuring something imagines that the something exists in the first place; in this case the CPI can be understood to imagine a QT student, faculty, and staff experience and/or best practices for creating more equitable inclusive campus policies, programs, and services. While

this measurement is useful to understand experiences of discriminatory practices and policies (at the least), the challenge with measuring gender and sexual minority identities and experiences is that they are fluid. And even students and other stakeholders who identify within the community, might identify with a different sub-identity, which comes with its own experiences and legacies. Thus, the challenge that Campus Pride faces is how to measure a campuses success related to affirming and supporting queer and trans people, while also resisting the impulse to reify the false notion of a monolithic QT community.

Because the CPI is a snapshot in time, it cannot account for the legacy and history of violence, oppression, policies, and practices that have worked against queer and trans students, faculty, and staff on campus – it only accounts for current policies, practices, programs, and commitments. Thus, for students, the CPI unintentionally contributes to an educational deficit framing. To produce a measurement, it imagines queer and trans people on campus as monolithic and necessarily different from non-queer and trans students. It then measures the current policies and practices of the institution and has (so far) failed to consider the legacy (or debt) of an institution in determining stakeholder's perception of inclusion and affirmation. To be clear, this is not a condemnation of the CPI. In fact, the CPI is useful for its strides towards addressing inequity for queer and trans students, faculty, and staff on campus. Or, as Renn (2010) has stated about campus climate surveys: they are "critical for uncovering persistent, systemic disadvantages based on identities and group membership, as well as for measuring progress where it is occurring" (136). Like so many other initiatives it must be viewed first as a launching point, and second as a pitstop on a long, winding, and unending road towards greater equity for QT people in higher education. Adopting this strategy embeds this snapshot into a past and future for queer and trans students on campus, and decision-makers on campus can better

understand the ways that the legacy of oppression influences the past and shapes the future for queer and trans students. From this angle, we can imagine a CPI that measures the legacy of oppression with a nod towards more equitable and queer(er/ed) futures.

Traditionally Heterogendered Institutions

Scholars have attempted to categorize the degree to which institutions have promoted equity for queer and trans students through campus policies and practices. Preston and Hoffman (2015) introduced the concept 'traditionally heterogendered institutions' (THI) to argue that THIs reinforce students' perceptions of their own identities and experiences on campus through QT resource centers. Today, colleges and universities can be classified as women's colleges, predominantly (or traditionally) white institutions (PWI), Hispanic serving institutions (HSI), and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), among others. The latter framings identify the majority race and/or ethnicity with whom the institution serves. THI, however, is the first term which identifies gender and sexuality, and differs from the other institutional framings because its referents are policies and practices, rather than the degree to which a social category is represented on campus.

Through THIs, students' perceptions of their identities and experiences on campus is accomplished when QT resource centers and other institutional actors identify certain spaces as 'safe' and articulate the experience of queer people, yet these spaces don't often challenge or resist heterogendered policies and practices which necessitate the designation of queer spaces in the first place (Preston and Hoffman 2015). Said another way, by distinguishing which spaces are 'QT-friendly,' or those that are 'safe-spaces,' all other locations on campus are co-constructed as not necessarily friendly and/or safe. Thus, the dichotomy between queer (and non-queer) people and spaces are reproduced by both the institution and the student body to the effect

of naturalizing heterogendered spaces. It is important to note that Preston and Hoffman (2015) are not calling for the destruction of QT spaces on college and university campuses, rather they are identifying the implementation of these spaces as a phase along a path towards greater equity; to call for further growth and change, rather than viewing the spaces as an end-goal or final accomplishment.

Traditionally heterogendered institutions critically, yet unintentionally, incorporate correspondence theory (Bowles and Gintis 1976) which suggests that the same critiques (which I have described earlier in this paper) against the reproduction of social and economic inequality are also extended to this theory. This is the idea that framing colleges or universities as THIs relies on an overly deterministic view of colleges and universities, and which leaves little room for social change within that system. However, this reading would be an over-extension of their argument, which is far more attentive to the nuances of placed-base policy and practices. Preston and Hoffman's (2015) view of QT resource centers can be viewed as a step in the process towards expansive substantive equality, where the identification of THIs is seen as a move towards addressing cisheterogendered hegemony in higher education.

The Role of QT Resource Centers & Professionals

LGB [sic] student services began at the University of Michigan in 1971, when they hired two human sexuality advocates "in response to pressure from students, including members of the campus Gay Liberation Front [a student organization]" (Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002:27). When queer and trans students found that they did not feel fully supported by their institutions, they began to advocate for dedicated spaces on campus where queer students could feel both safe and affirmed. QT resource centers are responsible for programming, events, and support services which affirm queer and trans students, and sometimes other campus community

members. QT resource centers have become a standard best practice for supporting queer and trans students in American colleges and university, and recent literature has begun to emphasize the needs for this resource in community and technical colleges (Nguyen et al. 2018). During the Spring semester of 2022 there were approximately 4,000 institutions of higher education in the United States, and there were 268 QT resource centers serving 278 institutions (LGBTQArchitect n.d.).

Despite a now more than 50-year legacy of QT resource centers in higher education, there are but a few empirical publications about the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of QT resource professionals (Duran et al. 2022:6, Pryor and Hoffman 2021). The three general areas that these scholars have attended to are professional standards, competencies, and the utility of QT resource centers (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002, Sanlo 2000); critiques and critical analysis of QT resource centers (Preston and Hoffman 2015, Self and Hudson 2015); and the experiences of the QT resource professionals who work in these centers (Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019). This is not to suggest that there aren't other publications that have talked about QT resource centers or the professionals who run them. In fact, it is commonplace for scholars who are discussing QT people in higher education to name QT centers and their professionals as valuable resources, or to recommend ways that we might shift 'our' work. Importantly, QT resource professionals and their/our experiences are not the site of analysis, rather our work, centers, and roles are named as sites of possibility for transforming the university or for creating welcoming spaces for QT people at the intersections of identity. However, those references are often through conjecture or potential implications, rather than an empirical analysis of those experiences.

This dissertation study is closely aligned with the small, yet growing, body of literature about the experiences of QT resource professionals who work or lead QT resource centers. In their recent study of 35 QT resource professionals, Pryor and Hoffman (2021) found that QT resource professionals:

> "…identified feelings of isolation in their work, navigating their job as the only LGBTQ+ expert on campus; operated under leadership lacking basic competencies related to supporting LGBTQ+ work on campus; and expressed tensions in their roles as institutional agents leading historically activist agendas. The [traditionally heterogendered institution] THI perpetuates environments that, despite institutionalized LGBTQ+ campus programs, continue to other the LGBTQ+ staff hired to manage these programs" (101).

Pryor and Hoffman's (2021) research offered an entry into understanding the tensions that QT resource professionals experience between doing equitable and constrained work. To further make sense of those tensions, this dissertation study addresses the question: What role can and do QT resource professionals play in resisting the neoliberal impulses of traditionally heterogendered institutions in higher education? This dissertation adds to this growing body of literature by making sense of the ways that QT resource professionals understand QT student needs to better address the campus climate, the most salient issues for QT people, and strategies for advancing queer(ed) notions of success. Sociologically, answering these questions suggests that we might better understand not only the constraints that QT resource professionals experience, but also how and in what ways QT resource professionals act (or are allowed to act) within complex systems of domination. When taken together, the tensions and disappointments that Pryor and Hoffman (2021) revealed, as well as those that surfaced during the analysis of this

study, are not only the catalysts and outcomes of THIs but, through Muñoz (2019) they offer hope and imagination for queer futures.

QT resource centers are doing necessary work in supporting queer and trans students, but much like 'safe spaces' they identify inclusive spaces on campus, which necessarily implies that other areas of the campus are less inclusive (at least) or not inclusive (at most). And further, while it claims that spaces are 'safe' related to issues and experiences of gender and sexuality, these spaces may and often do (in my own experience) foster colorblind racism and other forms of embedded oppression. Indeed, these compounding issues have more recently been the focus of *Consortium* members who are committed to doing "intersectional and anti-racist" work.

In this dissertation, I bridge Munoz's (2019) framing of queer futurity to resistance theory and the pragmatic literature produced by higher education and student affairs scholars. The overarching research question that frames this dissertation study was: What role can and do QT resource professionals play in resisting the neoliberal impulses of traditionally heterogendered institutions in higher education? In the next chapter, I expound upon the theories and methods that informed this dissertation project, as well as provide a broad overview of the QT resource professionals who participated in this queer and in-depth interview study.

CHAPTER 3: QUEER FUTURITY, INTERPRETIVE METHODS, AND POSITIONALITY

Throughout the analysis phase of this study, my gaze began to shift as I tried to locate the novelty of this project beyond the specific participant group. In short, I needed to locate the 'so what?' aside from QT resource professionals having the opportunity to share their unique experiences, challenges, and pride into consumable knowledge. When I began, I wanted to produce a formulaic dissertation that poses a question, analyzes data, finds answers, and offers challenging yet tangible theories and solutions. I wanted us to see promise and hope in our collective and disparate experiences of success, challenges, and failures.

Yet, as I read our transcripts and listened to our interviews, and later re-read and re-listened to those same artifacts, I lost the remaining particles of hope that I had for QT resource centers, chief diversity officers and their respective units, QT-centered student success, and the general belief that institutions critically affirmed Black, Brown, queer, and trans bodies. I lost hope because liberation through social justice felt like attempting to defeat the Lernaean Hydra of Greek mythology in which overcoming one challenge spawned or revealed two more challenges. I also began to see a significant disconnect between what I understood as self-aggrandizing academic publications (i.e. publication mills) about QT people in higher education and the actual struggle of supporting, uplifting, defending, and affirming QT people in higher education. I lost hope in the long-term impact of research or practice to advance the status of QT people on campus. In short, my ontological and analytical gaze changed. I went from believing I could contribute to communities of scholar-practitioners in ways that inspire meaningful

institutional change, to wanting to give up on all research and praxis – it all felt insurmountable; useless. That was the theoretical and analytical headspace I found myself navigating in the early weeks and months of this analysis.

In February 2022, I worked to institute a scholarly professional development plan for colleagues that I supervise. We operated from the belief that our professional development is often underwhelming in the absence of institutional leaders who know what QT resource professionals do (Pryor and Hoffman 2021). Thus, we looked to the literature for professional development. It was during this time that I rediscovered the work of the late queer theorist, Jose Estaban Muñoz (2019), through the work of trans* epistemologist and higher education scholar Z Nicolazzo (2021). What I found in both scholars' theorizing was hope in unexpected places. Nicolazzo (re)taught me the necessary and queer work of trickle-up activism and grassroots coalition-building which centers the most marginalized among us. Muñoz (re)taught me that hope and disappointment are co-constitutive and point to (un)imaginable queer (noun/verb) futures that queer (adjective) ways of being and knowing.

I broadly frame this dissertation through Muñoz's (2009) notion of queer futurity. Muñoz (2009), speaking out from the past, reminds us:

> "QUEERNESS IS NOT [sic] yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of

> reality, to think and feel a *then* and *there* [sic]. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (1).

Munoz's (2009) central concern was that scholars and activists were giving primary attention to failure or disappointment (framed as 'the opposite of hope') rather than recognizing past failures as the origin and catalyst of hope. Queer theorists have traditionally framed Muñoz's (2009) notion of queer futurity in dialogue with anti-social or queer negativity strategies (Denton 2020:550, Edelman 2004) which takes epistemic issue with progress narratives that overlooks the negativity that persists in the heteronormative social world. Yet, as Denton notes "both social and antisocial visions of queer futurity reject things as they currently are and look to opt out of them and refashion them" (2020:551).

Centered in this hopeful theorizing, my analysis was sensitized by grounded theory methods within chapters (Corbin and Strauss 1990, Glaser and Strauss 1967) to draw an inductive connection between the most salient issues QT students report and the queer(ed) notions of success that QT resource professionals articulate for QT students; to locate the anticipated disappointments embedded into campus climates for QT students and the strategies QT resource professionals recommend that institutions take to address those issues; and to theoretically analyze (and implicate) the role of safe spaces, campus boundaries, and whiteness in QT resource centerrs. When taken together, the contemporary challenges that limit the work of QT resource professionals also co-constitute future and (un)imaginable queer ways of being on

campus. In other words, 'our' struggle is the site of collective liberation approaching a limitless queerness that centers the most marginalized.

In this study, I worked to take the side or stance of the QT resource professionals without lending primacy to the extant literature. This was not challenging given that my professional-practitioner career has been as a director of three QT resource centers (*see* the section on my positionality). Epistemologically, as Campbell and Gregor (2002) explain, "the danger in reading the literature and in beginning to use the concepts of these studies to think about one's own topic is the possibility of importing dominant perspectives into one's own thinking about the research" (52). Yet, I argue that attending to the extant literature in the foreground offers a more reflexive way of accounting for our own theoretical and methodological training, and the nuances of our gaze as researchers.

Positionality

I have been intimately engaged in QT work and life in higher education since 2010 – as an undergraduate student, graduate student, QT resource professional, doctoral candidate, and junior scholar. Each of these positions reminds me of the various ways that I came to be aware of voices that were left out, voices that were promoted, and processes that shaped my experience. As such, I am aware of *some* (and arguably not all) of the predispositions that influenced the ways that I approached this project. These predispositions have centered the ways that I have advocated for systemic and cultural change on campuses, my belief and informal understanding that most QT resources centers are disparately under-resourced, and the ways that QT resource professionals' voices have not been centered in the extant literature. And as a result, I am concerned about the long-term consequences of my research. Yet, I queerly contend that those challenges, when nuanced and understood through complex systems of domination, reveal more

about oppression and potential strategies for better addressing them, than it does about the material work of QT resource professionals.

So, how did I work through these predispositions? I committed to producing an honest account of QT resource professional's experiences. I did that by being mindful of my subject position as a researcher seeking to better understand the quotidian and extraordinary success, challenges, failures, hopes, and dreams that QT resource professionals experience, and in ways that are influenced by other systems of oppression, especially anti-black racism. I take seriously the idea that systems of oppression coalesce and overlap in ways that compound deep-seated and hegemonic forms of oppression – especially racism, both institutionalized and interactive forms. Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) framing of abductive reasoning argues that objectivity is never 'truly' pure, therefore careful methodological data analysis should be employed alongside the researcher's social and intellectual position. Therefore, I worked to maintain a critical gaze in not only deriving meaning from the participants' experiences, but also noting the ways that racism, white supremacy, xenophobia, ableism, and other forms of oppression shaped their experiences. Because I have also experienced similar struggles or barriers on campus, I carefully analyzed the participants words and experiences, so as not to overlay my experience onto theirs.

I was emotionally and personally invested in this work. My interest in identifying trends in QT resource work was rooted in the hope that 'we,' QT resource professionals, might achieve contextual and collective liberation, or that we might just feel a little less alone in this work. And before developing that feeling of hope, I felt the emotional distress of losing hope during the earliest moments of writing this dissertation. It is important to draw attention to the emotions that I felt and experienced throughout this project because, as Black feminist scholar Hordge-Freeman (2018) has indicated, "when we tap into emotions, we are empowered to write stories

that are persuasive, tell narratives that make power and domination visible, and produce research that stirs people deeply and viscerally" (8). Making sense of these shared experiences and then articulating implications of those shared experiences was one of the most exhilarating, terrifying, and illuminating projects of my career thus far.

Research Methods

To explore this research question, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 41 QT resource professionals who work in QT resource centers at colleges and universities across the United States. I conducted interviews between February 2021 and May 2021. Through the interview guide, I asked about what these professionals thought their work can and does accomplish; how decisions are made about their work; the role that students and other stakeholders play in determining goals and objectives; and other questions about their day-to-day work. Importantly, I asked specific questions about how student success is understood through their work and how their work addresses student success goals. A significant part of each interview was dedicated to the unique challenges that QT resource professionals face in the context of their daily work-life. To recruit participants, I shared a call for participants with the membership of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. I also shared the call for participants on social media including through my personal twitter account, and through seven different Facebook groups for higher education professionals, generally, and subgroups for QT resource professionals and QT higher education professionals of color. I benefitted from colleagues and mentors who reposted my call for participants on their accounts.

The call for proposals directed participants to complete a brief demographic Qualtrics survey, that I reviewed for eligibility. To be eligible to participate in this study, participants had to meet two requirements: (1) be at least 18 years old, and (2) must have been working as a full-

time professional in an LGBTQ+ Resource Center at a college or university in the United States. While I recognize that there are several graduate assistants who individually (and brilliantly) manage QT resource centers, I elected to limit participation to full-time professionals because I did not want to further tax the time of our brilliant graduate assistants in the field. Further, given our distinct positionalities, I believed that the power dynamic and positionalities would be too different to draw similar implications and conclusions in the findings.

Each participant who completed an interview received an Amazon giftcard made possible by a research grant that l received from the American College Professionals Association's (ACPA) Coalition for Sexual and Gender Identity (CSGI) and the Cahill-Loseke Outstanding Dissertation Proposal Scholarship. I conducted eligibility screening for 59 prospective participants and ultimately interviewed 41 participants. Two prospective participants did not complete the full survey, two seemed to have been completed by spam accounts, one was not a QT resource professional, and three didn't work in higher education. Another ten prospective participants did not respond to my follow-up email requests for an interview.

The interviews took place over the Zoom videocall platform at a time that was most convenient for participants. I had approximately 65 hours and 15 minutes' worth of interview data, and the interviews ranged from 48 minutes to 2 hours and 16 minutes with the average interview taking approximately 96 minutes. I used a project management software, Trello, to manage records discreetly and privately for each participant. Using Trello, I kept track of their engagement with the study, including contact information, a record of their verbal consent to participate, and the status of their interview files. I created additional checklists to organize the data into different stages of the data collection process including audio, transcription status, and

coding status. I also recorded major themes or utterances that I heard while editing the transcripts and coding the data.

I kept meticulous field notes during the interviews to document significant moments that inspired follow-up questions and to reflexively (Stuart 2017) adjust the interview guide. For example, in earlier interviews I asked the participants "generally, what types of programs or events do you host through the Center?" Not surprisingly, they would respond by discussing the context of COVID-19. This makes sense as this *was* the context, but I hoped they would also reflect on their pre-pandemic operations, to make sense of the physical centers, programming, and work on campus. For those participants who had been working in their roles prior to COVID-19, I often asked them something akin to 'In a non-pandemic year, what types of programs or events does the center offer?' And when I later asked about COVID, I inquired, 'In what ways did your work change, if at all, due to the COVID-19 pandemic?' To the latter question, each participant discussed the impact of COVID-19 on programming and other aspects of their work and life throughout the pandemic. The reflexive process of updating my questions helped to illustrate what their work and physical centers looked like before and during the pandemic.

I also made a similar shift at the end of the interview guide when asking demographic questions. In earlier interviews, I found that participants were befuddled and sometimes uncomfortable when I asked them to identify their race and ethnicity. In several instances, participants used terms typically associated with ethnicity or nationality (for example "I'm German and Irish") when asked how they best describe their race. And then when I followed this question with a question about their ethnicity, several were apparently flustered before indicating that that they were racially white ("I guess my race is white?") and that their ethnicity instead

was connected to nationalities or heritage[3]. I shifted the question to 'How do you best describe your race, knowing that I will follow that by asking about your ethnicity?' When asked this way, the participants were being cued to think about race and ethnicity differently. These are but two of many examples of how I reflexively updated the interview guide throughout the interview phase of this dissertation study.

Analysis

I organized the data by first transcribing the transcripts with auto-transcription services (otter.ai), and then listened to each interview to make modest edits for clarity. It was during this process that I recorded major utterances that I believed would later be significant or worthy of further analysis. After cleaning the data, I employed a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2003, Deterding and Waters 2018) to analyzing this data. I used structural coding to isolate and categorize emergent themes within transcripts. "Structural Coding applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question used to frame the interview" (Saldaña 2021:130). Methodologically, structural coding helps researchers to organize the data into early categories that often align with the interview questions. One exception to this trend was conversations about the pandemic, which flavored much of our interview. After completing this initial analysis, and in employing a grounded theory analytical approach (Charmaz 2003, Glaser and Strauss 1967) I employed descriptive coding across transcripts to identify subthemes within the emergent themes to aide in the explanation of the phenomenon at hand. Descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short

[3] While not the purpose of this introductory chapter, these moments stuck out to me because I had also asked about the ways that these professionals support queer and trans students of color. This confusion about race and ethnicity didn't happen for most participants, but that it happens at all reminded me of the challenges that QT resource professionals face. Further research is needed to make sense of the ways in which QT Resource Professionals, of which white professionals are the overrepresented majority, enact anti-racist praxis and resist multiple layers of racism – including the color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2017) that could be one explanation for their discomfort to naming whiteness.

phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña 2021:134). Afterwards I employed axial coding to analytically and "strategically reassemble data that were 'split' or 'fractured' during the initial coding process" (Saldaña 2021:308).

In interpretive epistemology the writing process that follows the formal analysis is the most significant (second only to the interview or encounter) part of the research process. It is in this moment that we draw theoretical and empirical connections between social actors, social structures, and hegemonic systems of domination. In aligning queer theory and interpretive methods, I argue that it is necessary to approach analysis through an abductive lens. Abductive reasoning "rests on the cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis" (169). Timmermans and Tavory (2012) contend, and I concur, abductive analysis focuses on reimagining grounded theory methods and highlights the role that extant theoretical and methodological processes have on developing research projects. I used abductive analysis to draw connections between Muñoz's theoretical framing of queer hope, disappointments, and futurity to not only articulate the successes, failures, hopes, dreams, and challenges that QT resource professionals experience, but also to pragmatically highlight strategies for improving the status of QT people on campus. My commitment to scholarly practice implores scholars to consider practice as a one of many vehicles to queer futures. In everyday terms, when queer of color analysis can inspire social justice action, then we are moved towards liberation.

Participants

I conducted in-depth semi-structured virtual interviews with 41 QT resource professionals working at colleges and universities in the United States. Demographic and institutional information for each participant can be found in Table 1. The geographic regions

indicated in Table 1 are adapted from the regions delineated by *the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals.* These regions were delineated to allow the Consortium to balance the number of members and member institutions within a region more equally. The participants worked at 41 unique institutions in 19 continental-domestic states. To put this into scope, there are currently 268 QT resource centers in the United States and Canada serving approximately 278 distinct institutions (LGBTQArchitect n.d.). While there is no definitive data (or publicly available dataset) about the total number of QT resource professionals in the field, we know that many QT resource centers are staffed by only one full time professional. The participants varied in terms of the length of time that they had served in their current role, from a few months to more than twenty years. The participants worked at a variety of institutional types including regional comprehensive universities, liberal arts colleges and universities, research universities with varying levels of research activity, small and large institutions, community colleges, Ivy League schools, rural and urban schools, and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are noticeably absent from this this study, despite direct attempts to recruit participants from QT resource centers at HBCUs.

The QT resource professionals in this study ranged in age from 24 – 65 years-old. Despite my attempts to recruit a racially and gender diverse participant sample, 31 of 41 participants identified as white, 2 identified as mixed-race Latino/a, 1 identified as Black, 1 identified as a biracial Latino, 1 identified as Asian-American, 1 identified as a multiracial Latino, 1 identified as Latinx, 1 identified as Native, 1 identified as mixed, and 1 identified as Multiracial Puerto Rican. This was not surprising given the well-known critique of the ways that QT spaces and the larger QT community have centered whiteness when not explicitly naming

queer of color spaces and experiences. In terms of gender identity, 10 identified as non-binary, 2 identified as gender-nonconforming, 11 identified as cisgender women, 7 identified as cisgender men, 4 identified as gender queer, 5 identified as transgender men, 1 identified as androgynous, and 1 identified as "unknown." Here I resist the impulse to conflate the experiences of gender diverse people and I instead encourage readers to read about their identities in the table below.

Beyond asking each participant to share their age, race, gender, sexuality, pronouns, location, degree attainment, and citizenship, I also asked each participant "are there any identities which I have failed to ask about, but for which you think are important to name?" Their thoughtful responses respectively included (in exact terms): low-income, first generation, veteran, white-passing QTPOC, rural background, southern, Jewish, refugee, Crip, Fat, disabled, middle-class, able-bodied neuro-divergent, ethically polyamorous-polysexual woman, someone struggling with mental health, person with a disability, person with a learning disability, neuro-atypical, middle-class, child of immigrants, and agnostic. I share this to underline the breadth and depth of experiences that informs this work. Because these identities were important for the participants to name, I incorporate them in the analysis, findings, and discussion. In some instances, to avoid unintentionally revealing the identity of the participant, I elected to obscure those identities.

After experiencing the interview, and later analyzing the transcript and audio recordings, I realized that the most difficult question that I asked participants was 'what pseudonym can I use for you if I get the chance to write about our conversation?' I knew from the outset that I would prefer for my colleague-participants to give a name to the stories, ideologically and literally, that they had just shared with me in ways that would resonate for them when I shared back my writing. I wanted to magnify the nuanced ways that we can agentically bend race and

gender through our names, lives, and experiences. Some voiced the names of family, friends, parents, and partners. Some adopted their drag performer names. Some adopted World of Warcraft characters. Some adopted a name for the ‘gay tribe’ with which they identify. And some simply shared the first name that occurred to them.

Table 1. Participant Demographics							
Pseudonym	Title	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Institution Type	U.S. Region
CJ	Coordinator	40	White	Gender Queer	Queer	Regional Comprehensive; Public	Mid-Atlantic
Roger	Assistant Director	26	White	Cisgender Man	Gay Man	Liberal Arts, Private	South-East
Kyle	Director	37	White	Cis Man	Bi & Queer	R1; Public	South-East
Rosie	Coordinator	26	White	Cis Woman	Queer	R2; Private	South-East
Eli	Director	34	Biracial Latino	Trans Man	Queer	Liberal Arts; Private	New England
Marie	Director	30	White	Gender Queer	Queer Panromantic	Liberal Arts; Private	New England
Gary	Administrator	27	Black	Trans Man	Unknown	Liberal Arts; Private	Mid-Atlantic
Austin	Assistant Director	31	White	Non-Binary	Queer	R1; Public	Mid-West
Riley	Program Coordinator	26	Asian-American	Non-Binary; Agender	Queer	R1; Private	Mid-Atlantic
Alex	Director	31	Multiracial Latino	Cis Man	Queer	R1; Private	Mid-Atlantic
Edith	Coordinator	30	White	Woman	Queer	R3; Private	Mid-West
Benjamin	Director	38	White	Gender Queer Man	Queer/Gay	R1; Public	Mid-West
Aleks	Program Assistant	26	White	Trans Man	Queer	R2; Public	South-East
Sean	Director	28	White	Gender Queer	Queer	Regional Comprehensive; Public	Mid-West
Otter	Assistant Director	35	White	Non-Binary	Queer	Regional Comprehensive, Public	Mid-Atlantic
Kenzie	Assistant Director	29	White	GNC Woman	Queer Panromantic	R1; Public	Mid-Atlantic

Table 1. (continued)							
Pseudonym	Title	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Institution Type	U.S. Region
Mary Duggin	Coordinator	39	White	Androgynous	Dyke & Queer	Regional Comprehensive; Public	Mid-West
Toni	Director	65	White	Cisgender Woman	Pansexual	R1; Public	Mid-West
Kameron	Director	32	White	Non-Binary & Transgender	Queer	R2; Public	North-West
Ben	Director	38	White	Man	Queer	R1; Public	Mid-West
Casamir	Coordinator	27	White	Trans Femme Non-Binary	Queer	R1; Public	Mid-Atlantic
Cris	Senior Director	37	White	Cis Woman	Polysexual, Polyamorous, Ethically Non-Monogamous	R2; Public	Mid-West
Mateo	Associate Director	28	Latinx	Trans Non-Binary	Queer	R1; Public; HSI	Pacific-West
Callie	Coordinator	33	White	Cis Woman	Bi-Pan-Queer	R2; Public	Mid-West
Blue	Center Supervisor	29	White	Cis Man; GNC	Queer Gay Polysexual	R1; Private	Pacific-West
Christopher	Director	33	White	Trans Man	Bi-Queer	R1; Public	Pacific-West
Jaime	Director	32	White	Cis Man	Queer	R1; Public	Mid-West
Penelope	Coordinator	30	White	Cis Woman	Bi-Pan	R1; Public	Mid-West
Peter	Director	52	White	Trans Man	Queer	R3; Public	Mid-West
Mary	Director	50	White	Woman	Queer Lesbian	R1; Public; HSI	Pacific-West
Taylor	Manager	32	White	Non-Binary Femme	Queer	R2; Private	South-East
Heron	Assistant Director	36	White	Non-Binary Gender Queer	Queer	R1; Public	Mid-West

Table 1. (continued)							
Pseudonym	Title	Age	Race	Gender	Sexuality	Institution Type	U.S. Region
Harley	Coordinator	45	Native	Cisgender Male	Queer Two-Spirit	R1; Public	Mid-West
Robyn	Director	45	White	Cis Woman	Bi-Pan-Queer	R2; Private	South-Central
Alice	Coordinator	33	White	Cis Woman	Bi-Pan	Regional Comprehensive; Public	Mid-West
Katie	Coordinator	26	Mixed-Race Latina	Cis Woman	Queer	R1; Public	South-East
Sebastian	Coordinator	30	Mixed-Race Latino	Cisgender Man	Gay	Regional Comprehensive; Public; HSI	Mid-Atlantic
Kelly	Coordinator	27	White	Woman	Straight	Regional Comprehensive; Public	Mid-West
Kai	Coordinator	24	Mixed	Non-Binary	Queer	Regional Comprehensive; Public	Mid-West
Mac	Program Coordinator	25	White	Non-Binary Trans Feminine	"Men and Masculine Aligned People"	Two-Year Associate's College; Public	Mid-Atlantic
Jose	Interim Associate Director	33	Multi-Racial Puerto Rican	"Unknown"	Queer	R1; Private	Mid-Atlantic

CHAPTER 4: "WE DON'T HAVE TO TREAT PEOPLE LIKE THIS!": AN INTERACTIONAL ANALYSIS OF SALIENT ISSUES THAT QT RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS FACE ON CAMPUS

As estimated by the Consortium of LGBT Resource Professionals, there are approximately 268 LGBTQ+ Resource Centers (hereafter referred to as QT resource centers) servicing 278 unique colleges and universities in the United States. From an institutional perspective, much of the research and writing about queer and trans (QT) resource centers has attended to best practices, the role of centers on campus, the role of the professionals who manage those spaces, and the value that these spaces contribute to creating a more welcoming, accepting, and affirming campus community. With few exceptions (Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019) there has been very little engagement with the QT resource professionals who work in these centers and their experience doing this work. Additionally, scholars writing and researching about higher education from a critical sociological lens have long been invested in moving beyond a deficit framework of education towards a debt analysis to advance systemic and structural changes for the academy (Ladson-Billings 2007).

This chapter is framed by Muñoz (2019) notion of queer futurity and draws on data from in-depth interviews with 41 QT resource professionals working at 41 unique institutions in the United States. Findings from this study suggest that contemporary QT resource professionals are often called on to address issues of dead-naming and misgendering in the classroom, inequitable campus housing structures that disparately impact QT students, and inequitable information

technology systems which rely on binary logics, or which do not contain data about QT identities. When viewed through a lens of queer futurity, these interactional experiences offer a glimpse of what future queer success (and failure) could look like on campus.

Queer(ing) Language Choice

Before unpacking the extant literature about queer and trans people in the context of higher education, it is important to clarify my language choice. The term queer has taken on multiple meanings. It has been understood as a movement, a theory, an identity, an inclusive term, a noun, adjective, and action verb. There is a debate among leading student affairs scholars – who research the experiences and outcomes of QT students – about which term or phrase is most useful or explanatory. Some scholars have adopted the phrase "queer-spectrum" and "trans-spectrum" (Garvey and Rankin 2015a, Rankin, Garvey and Duran 2019) to further emphasize the multiplicity and complexity of identities that this term(s) attempts to include. The debate centers whether 'queer and trans' alone can signify the multiplicity that 'queer/trans-spectrum' produces. As Judith Butler (2011b) notes, although 'queer' as an identity term will never "fully describe those it purports to represent," employing queer "ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term" (230).

I employ QT because (1) the phrase 'queer and trans' produces a comprehensive identity category to include all gender and sexual minority people, and (2) although 'spectrum' has been deployed as a mechanism to dislocate identities on a continuum, I believe that it falls short of that goal. Finally, other terms such as LGB, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQ+, QPOC [queer people of color], QTPOC are used throughout this dissertation to reflect the terminology used within literatures and participant responses. Where those acronyms are unclear, I explain them. These

variations most often reflect cultural and temporal shifts, the scope of the research being reviewed, and (potentially) the institutional commitment of a given college or university.

In taking seriously Nicolazzo's (2021) exposition of a trans epistemology, which centers the most marginalized communities through 'trickle-up activism,' it is important to center trans and non-binary communities through naming and resource allocation. As such, I deploy queer *and* trans (QT) as an umbrella category which explicitly names and centers the needs of transgender, non-binary, gender-non-conforming, and agender communities which have been historically un(der)served or who have been made subject to greater degrees of discrimination, violence, and oppression.

Literature Review

While there is a large and burgeoning body of literature on identity development for QT students (D'Augelli 1994, Fassinger and Miller 1996, Miller, Wynn and Webb 2018, Renn and Bilodeau 2005, Rhoads 1997); the role of safe spaces and 'at-risk' frameworks for QT students (Mayberry, Chenneville and Currie 2013, Rachmilovitz 2017); the campus climate for QT people in higher education (Garvey and Rankin 2018, Patridge, Barthelemy and Rankin 2014, Pitcher 2017); the experiences of QT people of color on campus (Duran 2018, Garvey et al. 2019a, Johnson and Javier 2017, Pritchard 2013, Vaccaro and Mena 2011); and queer and critical institutional frameworks for understanding queer and trans identities in higher education (Preston and Hoffman 2015, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021), only about a dozen published articles have directly discussed the role and future of QT Resource Centers and the professionals who run them (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Fine 2012, Nguyen et al. 2018, Oliveira 2017, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002, Sanlo 2000, Self 2015, Self and Hudson 2015, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019).

At the end of the 1990s, and after the proliferation of QT resource centers in U.S. institutions of higher education, scholars and practitioners began to chart the field for QT resource professionals and the centers and programs that they lead (Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002, Sanlo 1998, Sanlo 2000). In her trailblazing edited volume, Sanlo (1998) and her colleagues mapped out strategies for supporting LGBT students on campus through different structural and developmental challenges. Later, Sanlo (2000) published *The LGBT Campus Resource Center Director: The New Profession in Student Affairs,* which analyzed survey data from the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals to describe the qualifications and relevant issues that impact this work. Building on Sanlo's (2000) articulation of the role of QT resource center directors, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg (2002) published an edited book which established guidelines for instituting and operating QT resource centers and comparable program offices on college and university campuses. Recently, Bazarsky et al. (2020) revisited the role of QT resource professionals on campus to establish a list of 12 core competencies for the profession[4]. Scholars have also attended to the likelihood and availability of these centers at four-year universities (Fine 2012) and community colleges (Nguyen et al. 2018). While these works have helped make the case for these professionals and spaces on campus, less is known about the experience of doing this work, or the contemporary issues QT resource professionals face.

Scholars have also critiqued QT resource centers, including Self (2015) and (Self and Hudson 2015) who argued that the foundational texts about QT resource centers – including Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg (2002) – employed essentialist identity politics in their

[4] The CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education has also charted professional standards for QT resource professionals in partnership with the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. [2019]. *CAS standards for higher education* [10th ed.]. Washington DC: Author)

articulation of QT resource centers in ways that reify white homonormativity through regulating discourse on campus and in centers. Further, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones (2021) argued that QT resource centers are not adequately meetings the needs of trans students of color and, as a result, trans students of color explore notions of self on the internet in ways that help them to navigate and circumvent the material realities of campus life. Despite these important findings, less is known about the ways that QT resource professionals describe their work in supporting QT students and other stakeholders at the margins of identity.

Recently scholars have begun to describe the experiences of QT resource professionals and part-time graduate assistants on campus. Tillapaugh and Catalano (2019) interviewed five graduate assistant who were the primary leaders of a QT resource center. Graduate assistants in their study articulated feeling set up for failure, and "felt overworked and overstressed given their specific positions" (Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019:129). Their later analysis found – among other findings – that "[t]here was still an assumption held by campus administrators that being a sexual minority gave individuals the necessary content knowledge to adequately fulfill the job of working in a[n] LGBTQRC" (528). Focused on full-time QT resource professionals, Pryor and Hoffman (2021) focused on the structural challenges that professionals face in navigating institutional politics. They argued that "the burden of centering LGBTQ+ students did not rest on campus leadership or the institution, but on the (often only) staff member dedicated to LGBTQ+ support" (Pryor and Hoffman 2021:106). This chapter, and the larger dissertation study builds on literature by exploring the experiences of QT resource professionals in addressing the most salient issues that students and other stakeholders face on campus.

The intended audience of this chapter is QT resource professionals working to make sense of the salient experiences that QT resource professionals face and to begin to locate the

root of those challenges. Further, findings from this chapter can be useful to senior administrators in higher education who are working to create more equitable campuses for historically and contemporarily marginalized students, and to better support the QT resource professionals who are often called to address these challenges. Finally, sociologists may find utility in making sense of the ways that larger social issues are reproduced within a more specific social institution – specifically higher education. Doing so suggests that there is an ongoing need to analyze inequity in education through critical theories in ways that – when applied – may reveal opportunities to change systems and queer futures.

Theory and Methodology

This study was epistemologically and theoretically framed by Munoz's (2009) notion of queer futurity, which is a queer of color critique that prioritizes "[a] posterior glance at different moments, objects, and spaces [that] might offer us an anticipatory illumination of queerness" (22). I, and Muñoz himself, describe queer futurity as a theory of hope that can be located within and around, past and present disappointments that help us imagine livable, hopeful, and thrivable futures. Muñoz (2009), writing from a queer cultural historical lens, identified queer futurity as an epistemological tool that links historical struggles for liberation with real or potential moments of collectivity and collective organizing. In this way the methods (both the interview and later the analysis) adopted a more exploratory stance to derive meaning from experience. Further, queer theory offers an opportunity to address and theorize about 'what isn't quite there.' In this case, the hope and disappointments – through analysis – have the potential to reveal the way things 'could be,' rather than solely focusing on the stated experience.

For sociologists, queer futurity (as a queer and critical post-modern theory) can locate past and present social order and action in ways that can imagine or anticipate future social order

and action. And for educational sociologists, queer futurity can offer resistance to neoliberalism in higher education (Apple 2013, Apple 2016, Giroux 2001, Russell 2005), because queer futurity can be attentive to the educational debt (Ladson-Billings 2006) historically waged against QT people in higher education, rather than as a deficit. And although Muñoz rejected pragmatism (when framed as oppositional to queer theory), there *are* practical implications for higher education administrators and student affairs professionals. Specifically, queering notions of success, failure, (Denton 2020) and struggle in higher education, helps us to illuminate pathways forward – in other word, solutions. Conversely, identifying queer systemic change and moments of queer success can illuminate the practices and social structures that have and have not made queer and queer of color lives livable – in other words, the ongoing challenges. Thus, this study is framed in a way that allows readers to make sense of past and present queer struggles and triumphs, with a critical reflection of the ongoing challenges and a nod towards queer futures in higher education.

To make sense of these struggles and triumphs, methodologically, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews that were sensitized by the epistemological underpinnings of constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2003, Charmaz 2016). Grounded theory is derived from constructivist tradition which allows the researcher to "make sense of human experience and to understand and derive shared meaning within a particular context" (Abes 2016). Important to the work of QT resource professionals, this approach and its findings enables us "to make better decisions and run programs and services more likely to successfully serve the needs of diverse students" (Guido, Chávez and Lincoln 2010:15). The purpose of this study was to make sense of the most pressing issues that QT resource professionals worked to address through their roles on campus. Therefore, employing a constructivist and interpretive approach

allowed me to analyze their shared and disparate experiences to understand shared meaning and highlight possibilities for queer future(s) on campus.

Procedure

To recruit QT resource professionals to participate in this study, I shared a call for participants through a national listserv of QT resource professionals managed by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. I also shared the recruitment materials in seven Facebook groups for higher education and student affairs practitioners, broadly, and some that were specifically for QT resource professionals. I sent direct emails to professionals working in QT resource centers at HBCUs and HSIs, to attempt to recruit representation from institutions with 'minority serving' designations. Ultimately, this strategy was unsuccessful. This study benefitted from snowball-sampling to garner participation and recruit a more diverse sample. Eligibility for participation was qualified in two ways: (1) the participants were at least 18 years old, and (2) they must be working as a full-time QT resource professional in a QT resource center at a college or university in the United States. I elected not to include graduate assistants – some of whom solely manage QT resource centers – so as not to further tax their time and labor. Further, the power imbalance – between researcher and participant, and in their roles on campus – suggests that their unique role in the social organization of higher education should be discreetly studied and interrogated.

QT resource professionals were operationally defined as employees working in higher education whose primary responsibilities were to manage a QT resource center and/or whose primary responsibilities were to QT programming, experiences, engagement, or advocacy for a college or university (Bazarsky et al. 2020). While QT resource professionals are not (or should not be) the only professionals on a given campus whose work centers success and advocacy of

QT students, arguably QT resource centers and their staff have this functional work as their primary objective. Thus, it is a reasonable assumption that these professionals have been making sense of the status of QT experiences on campus over time.

Recruiting participants for this project involved four distinct phases: social media, the Consortium of LGBT Resource Professionals[5], targeted recruitment via email, and snowballing through interview participants. In the first phase, at two different points in time (three weeks apart) I shared the recruitment materials and a statement of purpose in seven different Facebook groups and on twitter. In the second phase, I posted the recruitment materials on the research forum webpage for the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. Near the end of the recruitment and interview process, and after doing an early analysis of the institutional types and individual demographics of the participants, it became clear that there were no HBCUs in the sample, and only one participant identified as Black, with most identifying as White, and an only few profesionals who identified as AAPIDA or Latinx. I sent direct emails to administrators working at HBCUs, but did not receive a response for participation.

Through the recruitment materials, I directed prospective participants to complete a brief virtual demographic questionnaire to determine their eligibility to participate in an interview. 59 prospective interviewees completed the demographic survey of which 51 were eligible. Eight prospective participants were not eligible because they didn't complete the survey; didn't work in a QT resource center; and/or didn't work in higher education. I contacted all 51 eligible

[5] The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals is the national professional organization that supports individuals who work on campuses to educate and support people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as advocate for more inclusive policies and practices through an intersectional and racial justice framework. They have dedicated space for virtual community connection, as well as specific forums to recruit participants who might be interested in participating in research.

participants, and in the end, conducted 41 semi-structured in-depth interviews. The remaining ten eligible participants did not respond to my requests for an interview.

Participants

41 QT resource professionals working at 41 distinct institutions in 19 states participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. Their professional titles included program coordinator, program assistant, program manager, administrator, assistant and associate director, director, and senior director. They worked in QT resource centers in every region[6] of the United States. In terms of demographics, their ages ranged from 24 to 65. 31 participants identified as white, while 10 others identified as mixed-race Latino/a, Black, biracial Latino, Asian-American, 1 identified as a multiracial Latino, Latinx, Native, mixed, and Multiracial Puerto Rican, respectively. As it related to gender identity, 10 identified as non-binary, 2 identified as gender-nonconforming, 11 identified as cisgender women, 7 identified as cisgender men, 4 identified as gender queer, 5 identified as transgender men, 1 identified as androgynous, and 1 identified as "unknown." Rather than conflate the nuances of race, gender, and sexuality, readers are encouraged to review the full profile of the participants in Table 1.

Data Collection

Interviews for this study happened over Zoom videocalls between February and May 2021 at a time that was most convenient for each participant. Interviews ranged in length from 48 minutes to 2 hours and 16 minutes, resulting in more than 65 hours of interview data. In true semi-structured interview fashion, I asked questions from the interview guide, but made space for participants to expand on their thoughts and experiences, as well as asked substantive follow-

[6] The regional designations for this study were based on the regional structure outlined by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. Their regional structure balances geography with member sub-populations, in an effort to balance the number of members assigned to each region.

up questions when the conversation warranted it. I asked each QT resource professional to describe the context and history of their centers; the mission and vision of their work and who informs those visions; the salient issues and successes that students report; their thoughts about campus climate and systemic oppression on campus; the ways that each professional and their center is resourced; their involvement in policy work; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work; and their opinion on how to better support QT students in higher education (among others). This line of questioning helped to expose the most salient issues that QT resource professionals are called to address in ways that points to the mechanisms that produce these issues and illuminate possibilities for queer future(s).

Data Analysis

After obtaining verbal consent from each participant to participate in the study and to be recorded, I recorded the audio for each interview using a voice-memo app on my personal computer. I transcribed the interviews using artificial intelligence (otter.ai) and later edited each transcript for precision and clarity. Finally, I uploaded each transcript and its accompanying audio to MAXQDA – a qualitative data processing and analysis program.

Germane to the exploratory and interpretive epistemology of grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2003, Deterding and Waters 2018, Glaser and Strauss 1967) interviews were first coded using a structural coding technique. Structural coding is a process by which a researcher segments out, by topic, sections of the data that center a specific research or interview question. Structural coding helps the researcher to organize the interview data in the early phases of analysis (Saldaña 2021:130). In this study, structural codes mirrored the line of questioning, except for our discussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which unsurprisingly surfaced several times throughout each interview. From a sociological lens, structural coding can have the

unintentional effect of de-contextualizing the data, such that the coded segments become divorced from the broader meaning that a participant may have intended. To avoid this trap, researchers employ further analysis to better analyze social phenomena. After this first pass-through of the data, I employed descriptive coding (Saldaña 2021:134) to compare codes across participants and further identify and define emergent themes and codes. After defining the emergent themes and concepts, I used axial coding to analytically and "strategically reassemble data that were 'split' or 'fractured' during the initial coding process" (Saldaña 2021:308) and to draw analytical connections between the tangible experiences that QT resource professionals describe, the mechanisms that reproduce those experiences, and their hope(s) for queer future(s).

Positionality

A statement of positionality, as we have come to know them, implores researchers to consider the ways that our ascribed and achieved identities and/or social locations influence our relationship to participants, the research, and the analytical process. This is different from stating a laundry list of demographics. Rather, it should encourage thoughtful insight, reflection, or reflexivity into the ways that one's demographics have shaped the research or how the identities and social location of the researcher undoubtedly influences the responses from, and relationship to, one's participants. Attention to positionality also draws attention to the analytical gaze and stylistic tools that one employs during analysis and writing. From a critical lens, I believe that liberation with and for communities implores us to address positionality more adequately in ways that help the reader to understand how our worldviews, epistemic beliefs, and social location shaped our writing, to resist abstracting and de-contextualizing knowledge and knowing from communities without regard for how this way of knowing came to be or the (potential) consequences of the findings. Further, in the process of analysis and writing, it helped me to

reflect about what influenced the participants to respond in a certain way, or to consider when and why responses intuitively seemed inspired or performative – consistent or contradictory. To that end, I frame my positionality in two overlapping ways: my professional positionality and my identity-based positionality.

Professionally speaking, I am an interdisciplinary junior scholar and an early-career higher education professional working as a mid-senior manager. As a junior scholar, I feel pressed to identify pragmatic solutions through my research that can have meaningful and practical import to practitioners. Yet, I also find Muñoz's (2009) theorizing around pragmatism useful to deal with the often-felt tension between theory and praxis. He wrote "[g]ay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that I associate as endemic to a forward-dawning queerness that calls on a no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining a futurity" (2019:21). Here he insists (and I believe) that pragmatism should not be the central focus, yet I also believe that queer and queer of color futures can illuminate practical implications for the here and now (present), and the then and there (future). This belief shapes my interest in speaking practically about experiences, and aides my interest in locating praxis within queer theories.

It is illogical to disaggregate my professional and personal positionality because the personal is political is professional. Yet in my experience as a QT resource professional, and as a diversity leader in higher education, I have found that institutions value the 'professional' over the personal and political, particularly when one's personal-political positioning is at perceptible odds with majority (and oppressive) logics. As a Black queer man working in and studying higher education, I have a vested interest in queer and queer of color futures in higher education, and a commitment to offer critique and – at this point – critical *hope* for the future. It is my hope

that by identifying the strategies that QT resource professionals employ to vault the institutional barriers that disparately impact QT students, we are given a brief glimpse at manifest future queer(nes)s.

Findings

Findings from this chapter suggest that the most salient issues that QT resource professionals are called to address are deadnaming and misgendering in the classroom, challenges connected to IT systems, and issues related to campus housing. Importantly, these issues are often interconnected such that the shortcomings in IT systems make it possible for binary-sexed and/or gendered housing, as well as deadnaming and misgendering through class rosters that that are populated by data filtered through institutional IT systems. Yet, from a liberatory perspective, it is important to isolate these challenges so that QT resource professionals can articulate strategies for mitigating them. Identifying these past and present issues also has the potential to identify and magnify what queer future(s) on campus could look like. Here I first describe the empirical findings to make sense of the challenges as they have been described, and later I frame those findings through a lens of queer futurity (Muñoz 2019) to find hope and locate limitations in this imagining.

Deadnaming and Misgendering

Instances when faculty and staff deadname or misgender queer and trans students inside and outside of the classroom were cited by QT resource professionals as among the most detrimental and salient experiences that QT students have reported on campus. Deadnaming is referring to one's name assigned at birth, or 'legal name,' rather than the name that one utilizes in practice – sometimes called a 'lived name' or 'chosen name.' Misgendering is often associated with referring to another person through pronouns (or names) with which an individual does not

identify, and often erroneously connected to the sex that one was assigned at birth. QT resource professionals in this study referenced reports from students about the experience of being deadnamed and misgendered on campus and in classrooms:

> "Issues around misgendering and deadnaming people is a very common issue that we hear, despite many of the efforts we've taken to have their chosen name show up on class rosters, ID cards, and anywhere that you can have your chosen name. I think the big challenge is that we live on a campus that's 150-years-old, and many of our buildings reflect the brick-and-mortar issues of 150-year-old campuses – very gendered spaces. And a campus that often will say, 'well, that's just the way things have been.' And so, our response is, 'well, it's a different time.' And so, we have been overwhelmingly successful at pushing this very old and very large institution into new territory. And we still have good work to do – lots of good trouble." (Benjamin: a white, Queer, Jewish, 38-year-old Center Director at a large public-R1 in the Mid-West)

Benjamin's commentary articulates the accrual of educational debt (Ladson-Billings 2006, Vavrus 2017) that disparately impacts QT students in a way that mirrors the literature on traditionally heterogendered institutions (Preston and Hoffman 2015); that is, the university reproduces cisnormative and heteronormative social structures through its policies and practices, and physical places (e.g. 'brick and mortar'). Here, Benjamin was frustrated with senior administrators and decision-makers who framed processes in a way that articulates history, tradition, or habits, as though the fact of historical inequity (e.g. educational debt) warrants the continuation of inequity, rather than a moment to redress (or at the very least reform) policies and practices. Despite Benjamin's success in advocating for pronouns and chosen names to be

listed on non-legally binding university records, he still finds that students are often reporting the experience of being deadnamed and misgendered inside and outside of the classroom.

Deadnaming and misgendering has made its way through the legal system as colleges and universities grapple with the limitations of academic freedom and Title IX as it relates to gender identity. In March 2021, the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit (2021) ruled against Shawnee State University in a highly contested and publicized case in which the university disciplined a tenured professor[7] who refused to address a student by their correct pronouns. In his lawsuit, the professor alleged that when the university compelled him to employ a student's correct pronouns, the institution "violated his rights under: (1) the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment; (2) the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment; (3) the Ohio Constitution; and (4) his contract with the university" (9). The majority opinion, in favor of the professor, reads:

> "If professors lacked free-speech protections when teaching, a university would wield alarming power to compel ideological conformity. A university president could require a pacifist to declare that war is just, a civil rights icon to condemn the Freedom Riders, a believer to deny the existence of God, or a Soviet émigré to address his students as "comrades." That cannot be. "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe" such orthodoxy." (14)

Aside from the loose and problematic analogies above, this now legal precedent argues that employing a student's correct name and pronouns are a matter of academic freedom in the classroom, rather than as a consideration for how perpetuating deadnaming and misgendering stokes a hostile academic setting in which students are not treated with basic principles of

[7] I elected not to use the professors name, so as not to lend more airtime to those who advocate for misgendering or deadnaming others, regardless of the motivations.

decency. In the aftermath of an incident when QT students are deadnamed and misgendered in the classroom, QT resource professionals stated that they are often called to support the students who have experienced this harm, and to work with faculty to promote more inclusive classrooms through training and policy development.

Alice (who identifies as a white, Bi-Pansexual, 33-year-old Center Coordinator at a mid-sized regional comprehensive university in the Mid-West) articulated the embodied negative consequences of deadnaming and misgendering students. She stated, "Students – if they don't feel safe, or if they don't feel like they can be themselves in the classroom – they're more worried about if they're going to be outed, or if they're going to be misgendered, or if they're going to be deadnamed, than they are about learning what's happening in the classroom." Alice argues that misgendering, as an interactional sociocultural phenomenon, has the potential to impact the ways that QT students engage in course content, when they are burdened with the possibility of being outed, misgendered, or deadnamed in the classroom. Pryor's (2015) research on the experiences of transgender college students in the classroom has suggested that trans students often use 'masking' strategies, that minimize conflict, as a protective factor against further outing or negative interactions with faculty.

Many of the QT resource professionals in this study described two strategies that were necessary for addressing misgendering in the classroom: educational trainings and comprehensive policies to address this issue. In terms of educational trainings, QT resource professionals often referred to these curricular activities as 'Safe Zone,''Safe Space,' or 'LGBTQ+ 101' trainings, in which they covered basic terminology, an exposition of resources on and off campus, and common strategies for promoting a more inclusive campus community for QT people. However, Alice and others believed that employing this strategy was challenging.

She added, "… no matter how many times I tell faculty [about this issue] you're preaching to the choir in some ways, right? The faculty that I talked to, and the faculty that I come in contact with are the ones that are already doing 'the things.' They're not the ones who are deadnaming students or misgendering them." Alice suggests that the strategies that QT resource professionals employ through educational trainings, such as 'Safe Zone,' or more intimate conversations, are not useful for shifting anti-QT culture on campus because those presentations and meetings are often held with faculty and staff who are already committed to (and already are) enacting strategies to create more inclusive classrooms and campuses. This was a belief held by QT resource professionals in this study who found that Safe Zone trainings were often viewed as an accomplishment, rather than an ongoing commitment to uplifting equitable practices for QT people on campus. Otter best illustrated this point when they noted: "Faculty members, of course, faculty members and their invincibility, because nobody can touch them. If they do something stupid and homophobic and transphobic, nobody can touch them. And they don't want to attend any diversity trainings. And it's exhausting because… then they get these students, and they do not realize that it's hurting the community."

For these professionals, Safe Zone could be an act of resistance against anti-QT culture on campus if Safe Zone was not being taught in echo chambers where participants are largely already committed to concepts like 'safe spaces.' While the literature about safe spaces (e.g. physical places) has challenged the feasibility of the concept in favor of other concepts such as 'brave spaces' and 'contested spaces,' (Arao and Clemens 2013, Bonner-Thompson, Mearns and Hopkins 2021) the research about the efficacy of Safe Zone training programs to shift the climate and culture has been largely understudied (Flensner and Von der Lippe 2019, Poynter and Tubbs 2008). Thus, it is unclear how, or even if, Safe Zone training programs work to mitigate

experiences like deadnaming and misgendering on campus, and recent theorizing suggests that a more nuanced approach is needed (Flensner and Von der Lippe 2019).

Although deadnaming and misgendering was among the most salient issue that QT resource professionals are called to address, the professionals in this study argued that hostility in the classroom and on campus was experienced disparately depending on the departmental context. Kameron (a white, Queer, trans-non-binary, Center Director at a mid-size, Public R2 in the Northwest) best exemplified this disparity when they stated: "Students report a pretty high experience of discrimination and harassment in the classroom. Peer-to-peer sort of harassment and discrimination is pretty low. And then it depends on which academic department we're talking about in terms of accessibility and feelings of welcome in the classroom." Kameron's comments reflect the ways that some academic disciplines have historically been more (or less) welcoming to QT students than others. This finding has been substantiated in the literature, especially as it relates to the often-chilly microclimate (Vaccaro 2012) for QT students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors (Hughes 2018, Mayberry et al. 2019). However, the literature often over-romanticizes praxis for improving microclimates in STEM fields by offering recommendations, such as: "[s]tudent affairs professionals should invite STEM faculty to collaborate on campus climate assessments and interventions in addition to traditional programs (e.g., Safe Zone, social justice basics) aimed at improving the experiences of [QT] students in all campus microclimates" (Vaccaro et al. 2021)(307). Recommendations like these, as was previously noted, may be lost (or even *wasted*) on those faculty and academic administrators who are unwilling to engage in these programs and events. Therefore, strategies like these are doomed to (to use Alice's earlier phrase) 'preach to the choir.' This is not to suggest that these recommendations are altogether counterproductive, rather that these practices

may do very little to shape the experiences of QT students, especially trans students, in classrooms with faculty who harbor anti-QT attitudes, and who intentionally deadname and misgender students.

While deadnaming and misgendering was most often articulated as a faculty-perpetuated classroom phenomenon, professionals also indicated other places on campus where QT people are misgendered including campus health clinics, residence halls, the registrar, and campus identification card offices among others. Beyond the physical classroom, QT resource professionals indicated that deadnaming and misgendering by faculty heightened during the remote operations of the pandemic, because a student's name and/or pronouns were often visible on Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms.

Although the issue of deadnaming and misgendering in the classroom was frequently directed at students, some QT resource professionals, such as Alex (who is a 31-year-old, Queer, multiracial, Puerto Rican cisgender man and director of a QT resource center in the Mid-Atlantic Region) noted that faculty and staff on his campus have also been subject to deadnaming and misgendering. He said "we do not have a pronoun policy for employees or faculty in the same way we have it for our students, which is a major problem for our trans and non-binary faculty [who] are getting deadnamed and misgendered by their students…." Alex's reflection suggests that QT resource professionals – regardless of their intended institutional stakeholder – are also called to respond to these experiences when they happen to faculty and staff. Deadnaming and misgendering also overlapped with issues related to campus housing, as well as the IT systems that colleges and universities use to manage institutional data. As the next two sections reveal, making sense of these challenges offers a glimpse at future strategies for queering colleges and universities. Albeit trite, QT resource professionals experience with redressing deadnaming and

misgendering on campus co-imagines a queer future in which QT people on campus are not made subject to intentional (or not) deadnaming and misgendering.

Campus Housing

QT resource professionals shared stories about their time spent advocating for gender inclusive housing or helping students to access a living environment on campus that is akin to gender inclusive housing. Mollett and her colleagues (2020) argued that "[r]esidence halls are generally revered as sites of potential to foster students' sense of belonging" (11). In order to foster a sense of belonging (Strayhorn 2018) in residence halls, Mollet et al. (2020) argued that it is necessary to promote staff-education and opportunities to question and remedy systemic contexts that disparately impact QT students in housing (Mollet et al. 2020:11). This recommendation was echoed by Blue; a 29-year-old Center Supervisor at a Private, R1 University in the Pacific-West who named being able-bodied, yet 'struggling with mental health,' as a significant part of his identity. When asked about his goals, he stated that he was working to develop "multiple spaces for community, as well as supporting, or identifying, other spaces on campus that aren't necessarily within our center, [but] that can provide community and a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ students." Despite this goal, and in the absence of policies and practices that are designed to promote a sense of belonging for QT students in the residence halls, QT resource professionals in this study expressed a sense of frustration with having to invest time and energy advocating cyclically and annually for gender inclusive housing. Blue noted that gender inclusive housing was not yet written into policy at his institution, and the movement to drafting this policy was "a multi-year battle" with no end in sight.

Despite awareness that gender inclusive housing helps to promote a sense of belonging, QT resource professionals further explained the ways that these challenges have persisted and

the sometimes-unsatisfactory solutions that administrators use to address them. When asked what colleges and universities can do to better support QT students, Rosie reflected on the history of gender inclusive housing at her university stating that:

> …it's absolutely unacceptable for students to have to go through a disability model for all the historical reasons that the community has been pathologized… In so many ways we individualize the needs for student housing, whether it's creating Living Learning Communities… whether it's giving people the option to have suite-style bathrooms or a space with a kitchen, right? We've even had all women's floors! Trans and Queer students need to have that avenue to have their needs met. So, we created a system that parallels our disability office's system, where a student can submit a gender-based housing consideration, and say, 'Hi, I just got surgery and I'm dilating, I need a single and I shouldn't have to pay any more for that single than I would for any other room, just because I'm trans and need it.' Or 'I'm looking for a trans inclusive roommate!' And we're lucky to have students who apply through that system [who write], 'Hi, I'm not trans, but I'm cool with living with anybody.' And so I am able to put those students together and know that the [trans] student that I'm placing with an [affirming] student is going to have a safe, safe space.' (Rosie: 28 year-old, white, Queer and cisgender woman, serving as a coordinator of a QT center in the Southeast region of the U.S.)

Rosie's reflection is complex. At the outset she takes issue with those strategies for creating or mandating gender inclusive housing which approximate or liken gender identity to the experience of having a disability. She then takes issue with the ways that many residential colleges and universities have created housing processes which makes assignments based on a cisnormative binary (e.g. all women's floors) or through Living-Learning Communities (LLCs)

which often center 'special-interests' or academic programs. Yet, on those campuses without gender inclusive housing options and in which QT students express the need to live with or near other QT students (similar to all-women's housing) when possible, it is often framed as an accommodation that requires a separate process and disclosure. Although she was reluctant to approximate QT identities with a disability, she describes the "gender-based housing consideration" process that she helped to instate as mirroring the disabilities accommodation process at her institution. Although she challenges the disability model of QT inclusion, she returns to that method because it gives QT students a "safe" housing option. In other words, it gives students the material access to inclusive housing, despite an unsatisfactory and "unacceptable" method for achieving this goal.

While instituting QT affinity housing[8] and gender-based housing accommodations were strategies that frequently surfaced during our interviews, Benjamin's advocacy resists the neoliberal logic to section-off segments of housing for QT people, because it allows cisheteronormative hegemony to persist in other parts of housing and campus; what Preston and Hoffman (2015) would frame as a mechanism and product of the traditionally heterogendered institution. In describing the process for QT students to access housing at his institution, Benjamin said that the housing office pulls:

> "…housing information for a student registering based on whatever is in the database connected to sex assigned at birth. Then you're only presented with options based on what information is in there about your sex assigned at birth or your clinical legal sex. So, for example, if I were a student at [this university] I may only see housing options for

[8] QT affinity housing at colleges and universities is often ana LLC or housing accommodation process in which QT (and allied) students can elect to live with other QT students. As an LLC, these affinity groups have gone by many names including Stonewall Suites, Pride Community, Marsha P. Johnson LLC, Rainbow LLC, Gender Inclusive Housing, and more.

men's housing. It's just trash. As far as I'm concerned, we are better than that. We can let these adults – because they are adults – pick their housing that is appropriate for them. Stop it. We don't have to treat people like this. Let them pick their housing."

Benjamin is suggesting that housing offices have been relying on archaic and neoliberal IT systems to aide in decision-making for how students, generally, and QT students, specifically, are organized into campus housing.

Similar to the challenges that QT resource professionals face with the sociocultural factors related to deadnaming and misgendering, here the challenge is the ways in which some systems and practices are designed to only allow students to select housing options that have been designated based on sex assigned at birth. These are both tangible examples of the ways that IT systems, which contain and share data, have material consequences for QT students across campus(es), as we have seen thus far, within campus housing and classroom tools and systems which report names and pronouns. Benjamin and Rosie both pointed to the binary and arbitrary logic that undergirds housing processes in ways that are identifiably inequitable. Said another way, some housing programs are not yet designed to adequately accommodate the needs and living interests of QT students, and this is often connected to the binary 'biological sex' data that the university maintains. The impact is far more devastating when we consider that nearly every participant in this study noted housing related challenges that QT students face was a primary issue that QT resource professionals were called to address *in the aftermath* of housing placements. It seems that these professionals are invested in identifying solutions at their root, rather than the toxic fruit that housing processes like these inevitably blossom. That these are present disappoints of the here and now, queer futurity gleans a campus community in which institutions do not rely on 'sex assigned at birth' as a model to organize the material campus.

Data & Information Technology Systems

According to the QT resource professionals in this study, information technology (IT) systems presented illustrative – and in some ways nebulous – challenges for QT resource professionals and the students that they serve. Some participants claimed that their institutions had not yet done an adequate job capturing data about QT identities (including gender and sexuality). Edith's (who identified as a white, 30-year-old, Queer woman and QT Center coordinator at a private, R3 in the Mid-West) comments are exemplary of this problem:

> "I don't think we can say we're one of the top schools in [this state] for LGBTQ inclusiveness, if we don't even know if our students are graduating. It's impossible to do a lot of work until we know things like that. The pushback is always, 'oh, well, we don't want to pry – it's private and students would be scared to share that. They'll [students] be concerned with what we do with the data.' And to me, it's all inherently trans and homophobic. You're telling us that it's shameful for us to want to share this information with the institution, is what I hear in that statement. And there will definitely be people who don't want to list [their gender or sexuality] just like there are people who prefer not to answer the question about what their racial or ethnic background is. And so, there's definitely ways to phrase it, but to me, it's a huge point of institutionalized homophobia and transphobia."

Edith argues that institutions have limited opportunities for students and other stakeholders to report or share their QT identities in systemic ways. Yet, she notes that failing to do so has meant that higher education administrators don't know how well QT students are doing based on traditional higher education metrics, in this case persistence through graduation. She argues that failing to collect and report data is rooted in shame and connected to institutionalized systemic

oppression and argues that because we collect this data about race and ethnicity, we should also collect it for gender and sexuality.

The previously discussed issues related to housing and misgendering are interconnected with IT systems within colleges and universities. QT resource professionals believed that work in improving IT systems and data collection was necessary to be more inclusive of QT people on campus. For example, Alex said:

> "I've done so many damn programs that I'm ready to kind of imagine work that's systematic. So, a lot of my time has been focused on like, how to make [this university's] systems better, more inclusive? How do we collect data that's more inclusive? How do we like, just immerse it into everything, right? Because you know, you can have a cute program, where someone feels seen... But if they're getting deadening or misgendered over here, that's not, we're not meeting our mission as an institution and not as a center."

Alex's thoughts address what seems to be at the core of many of these issues. He identifies a tension between hosting identity-based programs that showcase the breadth and depth of QT experiences but finds that those programs do very little – beyond visibility – to address systemic issues like deadnaming and misgendering. It seems that what Alex and others take issue with is what is best framed as symbolic inclusion – inclusion in statements and programs, but not in sustainable, material, equitable and systemic ways.

The lack of adequate gender inclusive housing also has connections to the challenges precipitated by non-affirming IT systems, and certainly reinforces systems, structures, and interactions in which deadnaming and misgendering are commonplace. For example, Katie (who identified as a Queer, 26-year-old, mixed-race Latina serving as a program coordinator for LGBTQ initiatives at a large, R1 University in the South) described the interlocking challenges

of data about gender identity in her institutions IT system and the impact it has on creating inclusive housing assignments for transgender, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming students:

> "The way that housing works is that all the rooms have to be either male or female. And so, what we can do is a gender override for a student, but the student has to be coded as either male or female in the system. And any two students would have to match in the system to allow those two people to be housed together. For example, if an AFAB [assigned female at birth]-non-binary student and a trans woman wanted to live together, I could give the trans woman – whose paperwork might say male – I can give her a gender override for a female and then it would work for the AFAB-non-binary student. I would be able to pair them, but I couldn't just like leave it as it was male and female. That I think is kind of bizarre. And it's just one of those things, because housing is supportive of someone's needs and works with me on these things.

For Alex, Edith and others, reports of deadnaming and misgendering, and housing related concerns are interlocked with data systems that they frame as not inclusive of QT people on campus. Scholars have also made similar claims. As Garvey (2020) notes, "[b]ecause the body of scholarship in higher education and student affairs has not historically recognized QT students, the constructs used to measure interpersonal and individual contexts may not reflect the lived experiences of QT students" (447). For participants in this study, the limited and sometimes non-existent data about QT students not only impacts scholarship, but also erases the experiences of QT students on individual campuses, and limits QT resource professionals' ability to meaningfully address issues as they surface, or devise strategies to proactively mitigate these negative experiences in the first place. It's as though if the data doesn't exist, then there isn't a problem to address.

How is it that colleges and universities still rely on binary institutional data? The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is responsible for maintaining the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). According to the NCES "[t]he completion of all IPEDS surveys, in a timely and accurate manner, is mandatory for all institutions that participate in or are applicants for participation in any Federal financial assistance program…" (2021-2022) and nearly every major accredited university does; including those that employ the QT resource professionals who participated in this study. IPEDS has historically required institutions to report demographic data about 'biological sex' in a binary way, and as a result the experiences of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming students has not been accurately or consistently represented within and between campuses. According to the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (2022):

> "NCES requires all colleges and universities to report data on their students in the form of a gender binary to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Because of this requirement, most colleges have been unwilling to allow their students to identify as nonbinary on their campus records. The Consortium is working with other national LGBTQIA+ and higher education organizations to urge NCES to change all of their questions to include nonbinary students."

As is indicated in the quote above, the national organization for QT resource professionals has articulated a vested interest in updating the federal reporting requirement because it will require colleges and universities to ask about gender identity in non-binary ways[9]. They argue that the reason colleges and universities often have limited gender identity data, particularly about trans

[9] At the time of writing this dissertation, the NCES was taking comments on their proposed language for a third gender category: "gender other." The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals took issue with this term for institutionalizing 'stigmatizing' rhetoric.

and nonbinary students, is because the federal government has not required institutions to collect data about trans and nonbinary students.

Eli (who identified as a queer, 34-year-old, white-passing, first-generation, biracial, Mexican American trans man and serving as a QT center director at a private, liberal arts college in the New England states) noted that as higher education administrators increasingly rely on data systems in the 'aftermath' of the COVID-19 pandemic, there must be alignment between IT systems and institutional practices. He was particularly concerned with strategies to support QT students, such as emergency funding, when there are no institutional ways to communicate these resources to QT students – especially trans and nonbinary students. He asked, "how can we make sure our systems, which is what we are now fully relying on, are immediately responsive to the protocols and procedures that we've set up?"

Discussion

When viewed through a lens of queer futurity, the issues connected to misgendering, housing, and IT systems are indicative of the current queer future of the *here* and *now*. The queer future(s) of the here and now points to the ways that the mere consideration of these issues, and others, suggests that higher education has come a long way. This is because QT resource professionals and others can imagine, are aware of, and perhaps have lived during a time when institutions actively moved against the presence of QT students, faculty, and staff, or a time when violence and discrimination against QT people was at worst promoted, or at 'best,' ignored. Those moments, and the struggle that imbues them, helped produce queer future(s) on campus today that have developed into different mechanisms of promoting QT inclusion on campus, despite the recognition that issues related to campus housing, misgendering, and IT systems persist. Yet, through the lens of queer futurity, these current struggles also illuminate

hope. This is what Muñoz (2009) might call the *then* and *there*; a queer future juxtaposed with the disappointing reality of the present. The frustration that QT resource professionals articulated in this chapter reveals that we have not yet arrived at queer inclusion in the classroom, IT systems, and housing. To that end, and to extend Muñoz's (2009) theory of futurity to higher education broadly "we are not yet queer" on campus.

Implications for Queer Future(s)

QT resource professionals in this study were commonly called to address interactional and systems-based challenges related to faculty interactions in the classroom, cisheternormative campus-housing 'options,' and inequitable IT systems. However, understanding these issues through a pragmatist lens risks mistaking the issues in anachronistic and neoliberal ways. Said another way, understanding these challenges as instances that 'happen to QT students,' rather than as the accrual of oppression over time lends greater import to a deficit model of QT life on campus, rather than a debt model which articulates how colleges and universities have historically included (or not) QT people on campus. And as Denton (2020) noted in his queer critique of retention strategies for QT students "when students raise concerns, university administrators position problems as individual issues rather than institutional ones" (550). Therefore, making sense of the challenges helps to imagine a queer future where these challenges are relics of the past; challenges that – once overcome – become points of pride for the success of QT resource professionals on campus.

The most salient issues that QT resource professionals are called to address suggests that queer futurity looks like mitigating the interactional issues described in this chapter. The tension in identifying what queer futurity might look like is that it is not clear what strategies or vehicles are needed to realize these queer futures. It is unclear what systemic changes are needed to

address these material challenges; the ways that the hegemonic campus climate fosters inequity for QT people; and the ways that QT people at the margins (especially QT people of color) differently experience these systems and interactions. Yet, recognizing the challenges of today provides at least a glimpse or a vague outline for the future campus communities that QT resource professionals are working to foster.

Implications for QT Resource Professionals

Although Muñoz (2019) argued that queer theory, and therefore queer futurity, should not be overly concerned with pragmatism, the findings articulated in this study offer practicial implications for QT resource professionals working in higher education. In the year between conducting the interviews for this chapter and the analysis that followed, one-in-four of the QT resource professionals in this study changed jobs or left the profession altogether. While this chapter does not attend to the context of departure for QT resource professionals, this trend does align with the national discussion about the great resignation. For those current and future QT resource professionals, these findings articulate the common struggles that many face but that are not articulated through the literature. Therefore, this chapter opens opportunities to consider how the challenges might be contextually overcome on one's campus. It might also suggest that the individual practitioner is not alone in addressing these challenges, and that there are a community of practitioners and scholars who are also working to mitigate these issues. In other words, it can give QT resource professionals hope for queer futures on campus, and possibilities to consider through shared experiences.

Issues that QT students face and report to QT resource professionals illuminated a brief glimpse of queer futurity. It implies that *if* we eliminated these issues *then* their movement towards success would not be impeded. Yet success for QT people on campus is a moving target

when the college or university is not equitably experienced by all campus community members. As QT resource professionals work to support QT people on campus, it seems necessary to refashion notions of success that are lent legitimacy over concepts like queer failure (Denton 2020) which can illuminate the limitations that neoliberalism has on queer futurity. It asks QT resource professionals and the corporate university to further consider Denton's (2020) thinking on queer futurity: "What opportunities are available for queer students to craft the futures, spaces, and communities they want rather than what higher education administrators and researchers seek to impose on them? Are those of us who work in higher education willing and able to share or hand over power to queer students to retain them" (551)? It seems that beginning with issues and challenges that QT students present to QT resource professionals – like those discussed in this chapter – are one way of promoting QT affirming spaces and places on campus in ways that are not impeded by systemic and structural barriers. To that end, it is imperative for QT resource professionals to work alongside students and other QT stakeholders to unmask these issues and work to mitigate them both interactionally and systemically. Yet, further research is needed to make sense of systemic issues, campus climates, and the ways that state and federal laws impact the experiences of QT people on campus.

Implications for Theory

Arguably the ability to focus on past, present, and future iterations of queerness relies on the ability to make sense of past actions and ways of being (and identifying) in service of imagining queer futures. Though that reflective (non-)sense-making theorists and practitioners can reveal or produce future actions and ways of being and knowing. Queer theories are epistemologically located in the post-modern tradition, yet, this tradition resists boundedness. In that vein, employing queer futurity through a critical epistemological lens allows empiricists and

theoreticians to seek liberatory ends through queer means. Similarly, for sociologists, this chapter represents an attempt at bridging empiricism and queer theory in ways that allows scholars to attend to shared meaning-making that is framed by post-structural critique. In this way, contemporary challenges which are representative of social organization(s) are viewed through a lens that allows us to theorize about future social order. It necessarily resists the epistemological encampment that happens far too often in the social sciences (Crawley 2018).

Conclusion

Many of the QT resource professionals in this dissertation study were, to differing degrees, aware that the experiences of QT people on campus were further influenced by the impacts of anti-black racism, elite classism, and ablism. If we are to take seriously the ways that hegemonic systems of oppression coalesce in insidious and embedded ways, then it is necessary to make sense of the joint ways that systems move against QT people at the margins. Scholars and practitioners must be concerned with the mechanics of hegemonic oppression in ways that outline the component and interdependent cogs of the neoliberal regime and machine of higher education. In the absence of the ability to meaningfully, culturally, or substantively address these forces that disparately impact QT people at the margins, it calls scholars and practitioners to question what has been understood as vague institutional commitments to equity and inclusion in higher education.

Findings from this chapter suggests that QT resource professionals are commonly called to address interactional challenges related to faculty interactions with students in the classroom, inequitable IT systems, and cisheternormative campus-housing 'options.' Yet, it is too easy to mistake these issues as a comprehensive explanation for the challenges that QT resource professionals address in their work or the experiences that QT students have on campus. Framing

these challenges irrespective of the systems which birthed them, mistakes systemic, historic, and violent histories with localized interactions. In short, asystemic critiques call QT resource professionals to prioritize responding to moments, rather than the policies and practices that precipitate them.

However, there can be a usefulness to making sense of these issues and working to resist them – namely that these issues are tangible, felt, and (sometimes) definitive. Framing tangible issues gives QT resource professionals recognizable and often measurable accounts of the experiences and barriers that QT students, faculty, and staff are compelled to navigate. Further, framing tangible issues uplifts the mandate to contextually addressing the material reality of QT students and other QT stakeholders' lives on campus. Yet, at the same time, an emphasis on material issues directs attention away from the hegemonic systems of oppression operating beneath the surface in complex and nuanced ways. As such, more research is needed to identity the forces of systemic oppression that undergird the issues that QT people face on campus, and the power that QT resource professionals have (or do not have) in resisting oppressive systemic forces.

CHAPTER 5: 'A POLITE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE' ON CAMPUS: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE CAMPUS CLIMATE AND POLICYMAKING FOR QT RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The queer citizen-subject labors to live in a present that is calibrated, through the protocols of state power, to sacrifice our liveness for what Lauren Berlant called the "dead citizenship" of heterosexuality. This dead citizenship is formatted, in part, though the sacrifice of the present for a fantasmatic future. – Jose Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

In Chapter 4, I focused on the most salient material issues that QT resource professionals addressed in their work on college and university campuses. Specifically, the 41 QT resource professionals in this study indicated that they were often called to respond to and address (1) deadnaming and misgendering in the classroom, (2) navigating queer and trans (non-)affirming housing accommodations, and (3) issues related to the ways that identity is reported through IT systems. Recognizing that these were common issues that QT resource professionals experience, can help to sensitize future (as well as current) QT resource professionals into what are the enduring challenges of this field.

Reflecting on strategies to redress these salient issues, can also offer a roadmap for QT resource professionals who are looking to identify other mechanisms to address these issues. And through an extension of Muñoz's (2019) notion of queer futurity, it offers a glimpse of what could make campuses a more welcoming place for QT people and students. Despite this good-faith effort to find meaningful paths forward, it seems important to locate these interactional, material moments within the larger structure of the institution; to make sense of larger hegemonic social forces in which the issues described in the previous chapter are commonplace. Failing to interrogate those social structures leaves open the possibility that these good-faith

efforts will be cyclically reproduced in ways that marginalize subgroups of communities, or differently marginalizes the community in the first place.

This chapter explores the experiences of those same 41 QT resource professionals' in navigating the campus climate for QT people and their experiences with policymaking for and about QT people – especially students. Guiding this analysis were two interrelated questions: How do QT resource professionals understand the campus climate for QT people; and, given their roles, how, if at all, do QT resource professionals influence policies that impact the campus climate? While it makes sense to consider the link between the perception of the campus climate, and implementing policies that can positively shift that campus climate (Bazarsky et al. 2020) it is also important to take seriously how and if those strategies center QT people at the margins of identity, and the most marginalized among us. Critical theories have long advocated for centering the most marginalized and Nicolazzo's (2021) trans epistemology suggests that 'trickle-up activism' begins with centering the most marginalized – specifically trans people – to inform decisions related to social justice activism, and arguably policymaking and other strategies to improve the campus climate.

Findings from this chapter suggest that QT resource professionals find that the campus climate is dependent on the social identity of the student or other stakeholder, and policymaking to improve the experiences of QT people has not been a focused or organized effort on college campuses. As a result, and because of limited resources and time, QT resource professionals articulated an ongoing interest and struggle to center an intersectional lens meaninfully *and practically* in their work. When taken together, QT resource professionals report that strategies such as policymaking and 'intersectional praxis' have not substantively addressed the insidious nature of the campus climate in which some QT people thrive and others fall through the cracks.

This suggests that QT resource professionals are often structurally limited in their ability to influence policies that impact the campus climate. These findings theoretically suggest that queer futures on campus must necessarily center a trans of color epistemology to realize campuses where the most marginalized can thrive.

QT Language Choice

In this chapter, I employ queer and trans (QT) as an 'umbrella term' to describe those who have been broadly and popularly framed as the LGBTQ+ community. I employ 'queer' for its epistemological attempt to encapsulate all gender and sexual minority people (Butler 2011a) and 'trans' as an epistemic and theoretical way of centering the most marginalized (Nicolazzo 2021) within the broader queer community. A more extensive explanation of the value of QT as an umbrella acronym is located in the 'Queer(ing) Language Choice" section of Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Literature Review

There is a significant body of literature about the campus climates for QT people and QT people at the margins of identity on college and university campuses, and strategies for shifting policy to be more inclusive of QT people in higher education. A simple definition of campus climate is "the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (Rankin 2005:17). Despite the well-established body of literature on campus climates for QT people, less has been written about QT resource professionals' work in navigating the campus climate, or their experiences with policymaking, and strategies for centering the most marginalized on campus to shift climates or to better focus policymaking.

Research about the campus climate for QT people in higher education has logically focused on the perception of campus climate by different stakeholder types. For example, research has shown that microaggressions, tokenism, stereotyping, issues in the classroom, and constraints on scholarship are factors which have prompted a faculty members' desire to leave the institution (Bilimoria and Stewart 2009, Garvey and Rankin 2018, Rankin 2003, Sears 2002). Research has also suggested mentoring relationships between QT faculty and students not only improves success factors for QT stakeholders on campus but improves the perception of the campus climate for QT people (Graham 2019, Mulcahy et al. 2016, Russell and Horne 2009). More wholistically, the Campus Pride Index (CPI) "assesses LGBTQ-friendly policies, programs, and practices" (Garvey et al. 2017:62-63) and measures QT (1) policy inclusion, (2) support and institutional commitment, (3) academic life, (4) student life, (5) housing, (6) campus safety, (7) counseling and health, and (8) recruitment and retention efforts (Garvey et al. 2017:63). QT resource professionals are often called to attend to various – if not all – of these domain as consultants (Bazarsky et al. 2020) or as defacto managers of these projects, yet less is known about their experience in helping to improve the campus climate for QT people.

While the CPI offers a useful benchmark for colleges and universities to advance widely accepted inclusive strategies, it fails to address the education deficit (Ladson-Billings 2006, Ladson-Billings 2007) that has been stacked against QT people, especially students, on college and university campuses. This deficit is the historic result of anti-QT discrimination, violence, and oppression, and policies and practices (or the lack thereof) that have been leveraged against QT people. At present, the CPI unintentionally frames the needs of QT people, without nuanced strategies for assessing compulsory hetereogenderism (Preston and Hoffman 2015) on campus. As Preston and Hoffman (2015) explain "[u]sing heterogender as a theoretical lens from which

to view the experiences of LGBTQ students allows for the understanding that assumptions regarding individuals' sexuality will always be made in congruence with assumptions about the role of gender in sexuality for both the individual in question and society at large" (67). The CPI looks at a baseline of policies, practices, resources, and services on campus that can (and arguably do) work to make colleges and universities a more affirming space for QT students. Renn (2010) noted that the CPI was "critical for uncovering persistent, systemic disadvantages based on identities and group membership, as well as for measuring progress where it is occurring" (136). Therefore, it is worth viewing the CPI as a launching point, and – when looked at through a lens of futurity – an instantaneous measurement of equity for QT people in higher education. To that end, one can imagine a CPI that could measure the legacy of oppression pointing towards more equitable queer futures on campus based not only in practices and policies, but in ways that QT students and other stakeholders can participate fully in the academic community without the barriers of hegemonic hetereogenderism.

Policy work on college and university campuses has been identified as a strategic priority for QT resource professionals in higher education (Bazarsky et al. 2020:7) to positively shift the campus climate for QT people. This broad literature has described the experiences of QT students, faculty, and staff at college and university campuses, and nearly all of them argue advocate for policies, practices, and procedures to create more inclusive communities for QT people is needed to mitigate negative experiences and improve the perception of the campus climate (Bardhoshi et al. 2018, Beemyn and Rankin 2011, Bosch 2020, Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Garvey and Rankin 2015a, Mollet et al. 2020, Pitcher 2017, Pryor 2015, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019). Rankin, Garvey and Duran (2019) drafted a comprehensive literature reviews of 'LGBT issues' in higher education, arguing that continued research is needed to assess strategies

for facilitating successful outcomes. And Duran (2018) produced a systematic literature review about queer and trans student of color in higher education, and found that despite a burgeoning body of literature, more scholarship is needed that specifically focuses on "how these individuals experience belonging, resilience, and success" (8). Research about faculty, staff, and other employees has focused on their experience of the campus climate and microclimate, and has historically advocated for QT affirming policies to mitigate discrimination and microaggressions on campus (Bilimoria and Stewart 2009, DeVita and Anders 2018, Garvey and Rankin 2018, Patridge, Barthelemy and Rankin 2014, Sears 2002, Vaccaro 2012). Despite the awareness of the impact that QT-affirming policymaking can have on the perception of campus climate, as well as the belief by QT scholar-practitioners that policymaking is a core competency (Bazarsky et al. 2020), less is known about the role that QT resource professionals play (and the experiences they have) in influencing policies that can positively shift the campus climate.

To shift away from the constructivist and interpretive analysis in chapter four, this chapter examines QT resource center professionals' perceptions of the campus climate in ways that offer a structural view and analysis of the campus climate for QT people and the impact of QT policymaking in higher education. Because the existing research and guiding documents have suggested that QT resource professionals have some role in shifting policies that can influence the campus climate(s), two questions guided this chapter: How do QT resource professionals understand the campus climate for QT people; and, given their roles, how, if at all, do QT resource professionals influence policies that impact the campus climate?

Theory and Methodology

This chapter was framed by Muñoz (2019) hopeful and queer of color theorizing of 'queer futurity' in which he argued that "[a] posterior glance at different moments, objects, and

spaces might offer us an anticipatory illumination of queerness" (22). An overly deterministic, blackbox reading of Muñoz (2019) would claim that forming a historical materialist critique of identity, social movements, and frameworks of hope (and desire) renders a definite queer future; one that is singular and contained. Rather, Muñoz's (2019) framing of queer futurity argues that a queer historical materialist critique of LGBT social movements, identity framing, and notions of hope and desire yield *possibilities* for queer futures that "staves off the ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in contemporary popular culture" (22). That's a complex way of stating that queerness is limitless, and queer theorizing and empirical applications do not render an answer, rather potentials for queer futures and ways of being in the world. Muñoz simply stated "[m]y approach to hope as a critical methodology can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision" (4).

This liberatory framing does not bode well for scholars and practitioners of higher education who are seeking pragmatic answers to the insidious nature[10] of inequity on campus, specifically as it is felt by QT people on college campuses, and especially as it is experienced by QT people at the margins of identity. Muñoz (2009) took issue with queer movements and theorizing that lend primacy to pragmatism or the practical, stating that "[g]ay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that [he] associate[s] as endemic to a forward dawning queerness that calls on a no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining a futurity" (21). This is a challenging project when one considers the felt and embodied forms of discrimination that scholars of QT people and places in higher education have articulated (Duran

[10] In the social sciences, critical theories assume that inequities and inequalities exist in the social world. While framing challenges in value-laden ways risks overlaying my biases as empiricism, framing these challenges as anything less than harmful risks over-romanticizing the status of inequity in higher education.

2018, Duran et al. 2022, Rankin, Garvey and Duran 2019). Yet, I contend about that literature, as I do about the analysis herein contained, that those challenges reveal the struggles of queer pasts and presents, which help us to co-imagine queer futures and – to use Muñoz (2009) framing – is a "queerness that is not quite here" (21). In this chapter, I focus on QT resource professionals experience with campus climate and policymaking, which reveals the ongoing struggle to attend to the experiences of QT people at the margins of identity on campus. Because queer futurity offers a historical materialist critique, it suggests that an analysis of the past, informs the present challenges, and offers a road map for what queer futures could look like on campus.

I methodologically employed in-depth semi-structured interviews that were sensitized by constructivist grounded theory methods in service of queer futurity. Grounded theory is rooted in constructivist and phenomenological traditions (Charmaz 2003, Glaser and Strauss 1967, Timmermans and Tavory 2012). According to Charmaz (2003) "grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain collected data. Through the research process, grounded theorists develop analytical interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses." (249-50). Though constructivist grounded theory methods, QT resource professionals' stated experiences with campus climate, policymaking, and strategies for improving the climate for QT people at the margins, opens a site for historical material analysis where one can glean insight from the past to offer glimpses of queer futurity through a systems-change lens. It suggests, much like the interactional findings of chapter four, that institutions and their systems of social organization are not yet queer and asks us to consider whether they can be.

Procedure

I recruited QT resource professionals to participate in this study by sharing a call for research participants with the national listserv for QT resource professionals work in higher education, as well as on social media groups for QT higher education and student affairs practitioners. In recognizing that historically white institutions were (unsurprisingly) over-represented in the field, I sent emails to QT resource professionals working at HBCUs and HSIs. To further aide in recruiting a diverse sample of participants, I also employed snowball sampling by asking each participant to share the call for participants with their colleagues. This latter strategy was more successful than the direct emails that I shared with HBCUs and HSIs. Participants were eligible to participate if they were at least 18 years old, and were working as a full-time QT resource professional in a QT resource center at a college or university in the United States. Importantly, some QT resource centers are individually managed by a part-time graduate assistant, and as Tillapaugh and Catalano have noted (2020, 2019), this lack of time and resources has "left them feeling ill-equipped and underresourced in ways that are detrimental to doing their jobs and serving LGBTQ+ students on their campus" (2019:133). For that reason, I elected not to include them in this study. Yet, I believe that future research should include them, and better compensate them for their time and energy.

Bazarsky et al. (2020) defined QT resource professionals as higher education administrators, student affairs practitioners, and staff members whose work involves managing a QT resource center, with primary oversight for QT programming, evenings, engagement, advocacy, and on-campus consulting. Other people on college and university campuses help to shape QT life, however, (and as reaffirmed in the analysis below) QT resource professionals are

often looked to as change agents on campus, or those who have primary responsibility for improving QT life in higher education when their role exists.[11]

Participants were recruited for this project in four phases: social media; through a listserv managed by the Consortium of Higher Education Resource Professionals; through direct emails; and through snowball sampling. Despite my best efforts to recruit a more racially diverse sample, many of the participants in this study identified as white. I reflect more on their identities in the participant section below. I determined interview participants by reviewing the results of the brief demographic survey that they were directed to complete through the recruitment materials. As I moved to analysis, I recorded 59 participants who completed the demographic questionnaire of which 51 were eligible to participate. Eight participants were removed from the pool because they did not fully complete the survey or did not or no longer worked in a QT resource center or higher education. Of the remaining 51, only 41 participants completed an interview. The remaining 10 participants did not complete an interview because they didn't respond to my follow-up emails requesting to schedule an interview.

Participant Demographics

41 QT resource professionals participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The QT resource professionals in this study worked in 19 states across every major region of the United States. As was previously noted, despite attempts to recruit a racially diverse sample of participants, approximately 25% of the participants identified as professionals of color (e.g. not white). The gender, sexuality, and age of participants greatly varied, and readers are encouraged to review the selected demographics for the participants in Table 1. Of note, I also asked each

[11] Bazarsky et als.' (2020) paper articulates the many activities that QT resource professionals are called on to improve the 'campus climate' for QT people in higher education. Importantly, they viewed QT resource professionals as taking on responsibility for systems change work informed by political acumen and the ability to communicate desired changes to disparately situated institutional actors.

participant ‘if there were any salient identities or characteristics that I have not asked about, but for which they believe to be important to name.’ Some participants named mental health and disability statuses, fat identities, socio-economic status and background, and veteran status among other identities. When those participants are introduced throughout the analysis I name those identities to honor their experiences.

Data Collection

Virtual video-call interviews took place over the zoom platform for two months during the Spring 2021 semester at a time and ‘place’ that was most convenient for each QT resource professional who took part in this study. Some elected to take part in the interview at home where they felt more comfortable to be honest about their work, while others took the call during their normal working hours. Interviews lasted between 48 minutes and 2 hours and 16 minutes, totaling more than 65 hours of interview data. All participants were asked the same questions based on a pre-defined interview guide. However, I allowed conversations to flow organically therefore not all interviews were experienced in the same way.

The broad topics that we covered during our interviews included the history of the QT center that they work in; the strategic mission and vision for their work and centers; the most salient issues that students report to them; their knowledge of their institutions campus climate and reported experiences of discrimination and oppression; their operating budgets; their involvement in policy work and the current status of this work at their institution; the impact of COVD-19 on the QT resource center; and what they believe is needed to better support QT people in higher education. An analysis of the QT resource professionals’ responses to these questions helped to reveal the ways that their experiences with supporting students with disparate

experiences of microclimates on campus, their role in policymaking to shift the campus climate, and the struggle to center the most marginalized in this work.

Data Analysis

I asked each participant for verbal consent to participate in the interview and to record the interview. After obtaining consent, I recorded the audio for our interviews using the voice-memo app on my personal computer. I later transcribed the interviews using the otter.ai artificial intelligence program. The program produced an automatic transcript, that I later modestly edited for clarity, accuracy, and flow. I then uploaded the final transcript and its accompanying audio to MAXQDA – a qualitative data processing and analysis platform.

Grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2003, Glaser and Strauss 1967) is exploratory, and is derived from interpretive epistemology and phenomenology (Deterding and Waters 2018). To begin this exploratory analysis of QT resource professionals' experiences with policymaking, campus climate, and supporting QT people on the margins, I first organized the data using structural coding. Structural coding allowed me to organize the data by topics (Saldaña 2021:130), usually connected to the line of questioning. One risk inherent to structural coding is that it can have the unintended effect of decontextualizing the data, when the segments are isolated from each other. This is especially troublesome for portions of the data where organic conversation led us away from the form of the interview guide. To avoid this pitfall, further analysis is needed to revisit sections of the data and identify where structural codes overlap.

After employing structural coding across the data, I used descriptive coding (Saldaña 2021:134) to identify emergent themes and codes, as well as subthemes within these larger themes. In my last phase of coding, I employed axial coding to "strategically reassemble data that were 'split' or 'fractured' during the initial coding process" (Saldaña 2021:308). This was

helpful in drawing connecting between the ways that QT resource professionals described the campus climate, the role and status of policymaking that centered QT people on campus, and the ways that QT people at the margins are often under supported.

Positionality

As I noted in the previous chapters, positionality is not intended to be a litmus test of whether one is 'qualified' to have conducted the research at task. Rather, the focus here is in reflecting about the ways that one's social position – within and between various social locations – necessarily shapes the gaze through which we come to understand the social world, and derive meaning from the participants with whom we engage in the research process. In the previous chapter I shared about the ways that my social location as a Black Queer Man, as a QT resource professional, and as junior scholar shaped my interest in sharing the stories of QT resource professionals in higher education. In other words, I am committed to sharing these stories about the ways that QT resource professionals have understood and navigated their/our work.

In writing about QT resource professionals, I began to include myself in the analysis more directly by employing terms like 'we' and 'us,' or phrases like 'our work.' The apprehension that I felt in removing myself from the analysis and subsequent write-up is arguably connected to (1) the ongoing influence of positivism on constructivist, critical and even queer and post-modern work, and (2) I intimately understood many (but not all) of the stories my colleagues shared during our conversations, our interviews. There was perhaps something cathartic about hearing, and later listening and reading, about the experiences and stories of QT resource professionals. Thus, despite our differing contexts and the unique challenges that we have faced in this work, the kinship I felt, and the underlying tensions in our work, led me to approach this analysis from a liberatory lens – one that seeks to redress the social problems that

QT resource professionals face in the context of *our* work. While in the subsequent sections of this chapter I return to a more distanced and researcher-removed analysis, I take seriously the commitment to advancing interpretive, queer, and critical work which centers the needs of the most marginalized.

Findings

When asked about their perception of the campus climate for QT students at their respective institutions, QT resource professionals largely stated that the campus climate was dependent on the social location of the student. They specifically remarked on the ways that students experienced microclimates, such that some experienced a queer affirming campus, while others – given their involvement and identities – experienced and perceived a more hostile climate. The core competencies for QT resource professionals outlined by Bazarsky et al. (2020) notes that QT resource professionals should foster political acumen in order to exact social change on campus and influence policy development. With that reasoning in mind, I asked QT resource professionals about the extant policies that influence the campus climate for QT people on their campus. Findings suggested that many of the policies that were in place promoted individual inclusion but did very little to shift negative cultural attitudes about QT people on campus. A major theme about policymaking that emerged in this analysis was that QT resource professionals were often not positioned to directly inform or instate policies that could positively shift the campus climate for QT people.

Differing from the previous chapter, this chapter offers a structural analysis of the campus climate and policymaking for QT people which suggests that QT resource professionals, although aware of facets of the negative climate and the benefit of specific policies are often called to respond to the interactional consequences of those climates, rather than addressing

structural and policy changes that could mitigate those issues. From a lens of queer futurity, awareness of the negative cultural climates for QT people and the personal frustrations that QT resource professional face, as well as their awareness of policies that could benefit QT people, imagines QT futures where these types of challenges are issues of the past.

Liminal Campus Climate: 'It depends on who you ask…'

To sensitize our conversation and to begin to make sense of how QT resource professionals understood the campus climate for QT stakeholders on campus, I asked them what success looks like for queer students, how their work supports the success that they described, and their thoughts on how their institution, or 'higher education broadly' could better support success for QT stakeholders at colleges and universities in the United States. Participants offered several considerations such as creating affirming communities and spaces, helping students to 'find themselves' during their collegiate experience, survivability, and tangible considerations like funding and better resources. They also often argued that the discursive strategies they employed with and for other employees (e.g. cultural trainings, conversations and writing) to address or make sense of a "campus climate" also needed to be queered and reframed. They remarked that the campus climate is not monolithic, and any framework for asking about campus climate must ask the question 'campus climate for whom?' For instance, Eli, a biracial trans-man, who leads gender and sexuality programs at an "elite," small, and private liberal arts college in the Northeast region of the United States notes that the "campus climate" was dependent on the social location of the individual. When asked about the climate for QT people on campus he said:

> "So, the climate is okay, depending on where you land. I've literally talked to men's athletes who snuck in the back way to come and see me in the center and who've talked

about fearing for their physical safety when their teammates find out. I've also talked to other queer students like the ones who hang out in the Center all the time, who are like '[this institution] is the queerest space that I've ever been, this is amazing. I live in queer utopia,' right? Those people are not athletes. So, it really depends on the pocket you find, and the experience that you create at [the institution] in a way that is truly unfortunate and does not do right by the folks for whom 'queer' may not be the most salient identity. I think, unfortunately, we have folks who are still terrified on our campuses to come out and who will also feel real consequences because of the things that they're involved in. And then we have other trans students who walk around with the trans and rainbow pride flags. And folks don't mess with them, which is phenomenal."

Here Eli reflects on what some higher education scholars have called microclimates (Vaccaro 2012). Microclimates described a social phenomenon in which "groups of people who shared common roles in an organization had a localized (or micro) perspective of climate that differed" from stakeholders with other roles (Vaccaro 2012:432). Eli's reflection is attentive to disparate experiences within and between microclimates on campus. In his example, the microclimate for 'out' and visible QT students is reported as being much more affirming, than those students who are less 'out' because of their other involvement within different microclimates on campus. Yet, Eli is called to support both the 'proud' students, and the student athlete who can't be 'out.'

Eli was not alone in this framing of microclimates. QT resource professionals often argued that they perceived students' experience of the campus climate and microclimates in relation to their level of 'politicization' or their comfort with heteronormative and heterogendered social structures. For example, Roger (a white, 26-year-old, cisgender gay man

who worked as an assistant director for a small, private, liberal arts college in the South-East) framed microclimates as being dependent on the students' alignment or comfort with heteronormativity. He said:

> "I think it depends on who you ask. Some students that are either less expressive about their queerness or are more I don't want to say heteronormative but are more comfortable with heteronormative ideals and hetero-typical ideals. I guess they don't feel as strongly about it? They know that there are some things that they would like change, but I don't think they are hugely bothered by some things. Some of our students who are more politically active [and] politically minded or more visibly queer, or sometimes, I think feel a stronger sense of urgency for some things to change. And they will cite experiences that they've had with different people on campus of either microaggressions or sometimes major things that are eventually addressed by the institution.

Roger indicates that those students who are 'less expressive,' or who are aligned with heteronormativity, may not take issue with the campus climate because they do not believe that the negative aspects of the climate impact their experiences on campus. This is unsurprising considering that scholars have argued that "[s]tudents still face oppression, marginalization, and stigmatization for asserting their queerness outside the boundaries of heteronormativity" (Denton 2020:549). From a Marxist lens, Roger's arguments suggest that if one has an identity or political position that is aligned with, or at least 'unimpacted' by the dominant culture and climate then one may be less compelled to address the logics of domination because one does not notice or feel the impact of domination. Both Eli and Jake's framing links students' perception of the campus climate to the salience that individual students assign to their ascribed identities (in this case, gender, sexuality, etc.) and/or achieved social identities (athlete, artist, etc).

Kelly and Quinn were also reflective of the ways that the campus climate is different for students with multiple marginalized identities, particularly students of color. For example, Kallie said:

> "…we have students who struggle more finding a sense of community when they are our students of color, and our queer students of color in particular. So, I think it would really depend on the students that you asked really. I don't want to just say, 'our students are doing well,' because you know that that's not the case. And I don't think that's a helpful framework for the work we due. Because I think what really keeps us going and wanting to push to do more is, is because of the students that are feeling like there could be better resources and things provided for them" (Kallie; a white, 27-year-old, straight, cisgender woman, working as a coordinator for a QT resource center at a public, regional-comprehensive university in the Mid-West).

Mateo (a Latinx, 28-year-old, Queer, Trans and Non-binary QT Center associate director at a public, R1 university in the Pacific-West) expanded on this noting:

> …if you ask our white LGBTQ students, they're fine – they're great! They're thriving! They're wonderful! They're just chillin… They're happy to be on a campus that asks for pronouns and… has an LGBTQ Center. But if you ask our QTBIPOC students, they say 'it is very racist. It is very transphobic… Faculty are trash. Faculty don't care about students. They don't care about LGBTQ things.' If you ask our trans and non-binary students, they're like, 'I don't even exist here. I don't even exist on this campus.' So, I think it really depends on who you ask; what their race is, and, what other privileges that they hold or do not hold…"

It is not surprising that QT resource professionals identified increasingly hostile climates for QT students of color, given that previous research has found that QT students of color often experience a lack of institutional support "as a result of the student culture/climate, the lack of funding for and representation of diverse identities, as well as in the erasure of queer People of Color (QPOC) identities in curricula and programming" (Duran and Jones 2020:288). Yet, Kelly's reflection begins to anticipate a mechanism of queer futurity that 'keeps us going and wanting to push to do more.' Here the acknowledgement that some students are not 'doing well,' become the impetus for doing more equity centered work. The disappointing experiences of QT students of color imagines and opens opportunities for efforts to mitigate those negative experiences.

While QT resource professionals are called to deal the with nuances of the campus climate or working to improve negative microclimates in places like athletics, or in ways that attend to the convergence of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, it is less clear how the campus climate and microclimates are reproduced over time. Otter, who uses no pronouns, and who identified as a white, 35-year-old, Queer and Non-binary immigrant[12] at a mid-size regional comprehensive university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., was reflective about the structural circumstances that reproduce these systems. When asked about the campus climate at their university, Otter said:

> "So, there is a polite conspiracy of silence. People do not necessarily offend or verbally assault [others], although I've heard the stories... So, there's a politeness and they do not necessarily talk to your face. But there is something said behind your back – they will exercise their transphobia, queerphobia, and homophobia. But overall, the campus is

[12] Otter's identities were more complex than what is reported here to protect privacy and confidentiality, and during the course of our interview Otter framed Otter's work in relation to their more nuanced global experiences.

> more progressive than the community outside, that's for sure. The campus is more accepting than the town or even the county. But we still experience slight institutional problems because of the history of… transphobia and homophobia, within the campus. But I feel that we are much better than other schools in many respects, and the policies help that, along with prevention and public critique to all those instances."

Otter's thoughts begin to unearth some of the challenges in addressing inequitable campus climates for QT students and other stakeholders. Specifically, Otter is pointing to discrimination and oppression that is not quite there; those challenges that you cannot quite pinpoint.

Otter contrasts interactional and active forms of oppression and discrimination ('offend or verbally assault'), with the culture and climate that is germane to traditionally heterogendered institutions (Preston and Hoffman 2015) in which active, passive (e.g. interactional), and systemic forms of oppression are commonplace. Scholars have theorized about the ways that these systemic forms of oppression are reproduced. For example, Garvey (2020) noted that the "historical exclusion of QT students within retention scholarship has fostered a climate of unaccountability and silence" (434). In this way, the lack of data about QT students has placed limitations on fully making sense of the experiences of QT students on campus. As a result, many of the QT resource professionals in this study could not point to the exact outcomes for QT students because there was no 'evidence' of those outcomes. Arguably, however, their work in mitigating the impact of systemic and interactional challenges on campus, points to the need for more structured and meaningful ways to articulate and then redress the negative experiences and outcomes of QT people on campus. When taken together with the earlier emergent themes, the quiet conspiracy of silence that some QT resource professionals navigate produces campus climates in which *some* QT students report inequity and oppression, while other QT students are

unaware of, or feel unimpacted by, direct or passive mechanisms of overlapping systems of domination.

The difference and connection between interactional hetereogenderism and systemic hetereogenderism parallels Bonilla-Silva's (2017) critique of "racism without racists" in which he argues that colorblind racism is manifest through a politics of niceness where racism is framed as (only) interactional and less often systemic. To extend a similar type of theorizing here, the active and material forms of oppression, here referred to as interactional hetereogenderism) mentioned in the former chapter (e.g. deadnaming and misgendering, binary housing structures, and binary data and IT systems) are reproduced through a systemic 'polite conspiracy of silence' in which stakeholders and institutional actors are aware of hegemonic and systemic heterogenderism, yet fail to or are not positioned to engage in discursive and systemic change to improve those conditions. In this way, the modus operandi is: if the issues are unidentifiable, then the issues don't exist. As such, the success stories of 'prideful' people on campus are viewed as evidence of acceptance, while a quiet conspiracy of silence suggests that inequity is manifest through silence and complacence. And QT resource professionals are aware of and called to address both experiences. As the QT resource professionals in this study mentioned, they were contending with the challenge of producing celebratory, engaging, and representative programs, while also advocating for systemic change to redress the experiences of the most marginalized on campus.

It seems that QT resource professionals may also unintentionally contribute to the conspiracy of silence through comparative discourse. In this case, Otter frames the university as "more accepting" than the surrounding township. This discursive strategy works to mitigate the stated impact of the problematic facets of the campus climate by suggesting that 'it could be

worse.' Otter was not alone in this discursive strategy as CJ and others framed the campus climate as 'better than' the active and interactional forms of discrimination that happen 'in town.' This was, in large part, dependent on the location of the institution, such that QT resource professionals working at urban colleges and universities reflected on being situated amidst 'queer culture.' Thus, the quiet conspiracy of silence is attributed to the lack of discourse, critique, and/or policies needed – in Otter and other's views – that redress inequitable campus climates and microclimates for QT people.

QT Resource Professionals' Policymaking Work

Calls for policies to redress QT institutional barriers that can shift the campus climate have become a staple in the literature about QT students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders (Broadhurst et al. 2018, Denton 2020, Duran et al. 2022, Preston and Hoffman 2015). Related to QT resource professionals, scholars have questioned whether QT center staff ultimately influence the construction of policies given their positioning (Duran et al. 2022:10). Central to sensemaking about QT resource professionals' work with policymaking are two unanswered questions that Duran et al. (2022) posed: "Does having an LGBTQ+ center or role responsible for LGBTQ+ student services relieve other areas of campus from their responsibility to queer and trans identities through the process of referral to those offices? How does organizational placement, location, funding, and leadership of LGBTQ+ student services (mis)align with power structures to advance or thwart LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts" (9)? I asked QT resource professionals in this study about their experience with and knowledge of policymaking that impacts QT people on campus to make sense of the ways that their work influences the campus climate through policymaking. In their responses, they articulated the existing policies, yet expressed a sense of frustration that they often serve as consultants, rather than policymakers and

shapers. Despite being aware of the types of policies that are needed, they were often positioned in ways that did give them authority or the social capital to directly shape or institute those policies.

According to the QT resource professionals in this study, policies that promote inclusive campuses varied. Some QT resource professionals – particularly those working in private institutions like Robyn (a 45-year-old white, Bi-Queer-Pan, cisgender woman working at a small private, religiously affiliatied, R2 college in the South-Central region of the U.S.) – named that their institutions did not have any policies or stated protections for QT students, faculty, or staff. While others, such as Alice, a white, 33-year-old, bi-pan, ciswoman, working as a program coordinator at a public, mid-size regional comprehensive university in the Mid-West, stated that their institution did not have a local non-discrimination policy, but that they did comply with a state-level non-discrimination policy which offered protections against discrimination on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Most QT resource professionals in this study named several existing localized policies that had been instituted on their campus. Jose, Mateo, Taylor, Sebastian and Casamir, for example, specifically discussed name change policies, 'preferred name'[13] policies, restroom and facilities policies, housing policies and practices, and healthcare policies. These policies, respectively, give stakeholders to a process to update their names when it legally changes; allowed stakeholders to employ their lived name (rather than legal name) on visible and non-legal documents and systems; instituted and enforced building codes or commitments to have gender inclusive bathrooms in new buildings or renovations to existing buildings; gave students access to gender inclusive or gender

[13] 'Preferred name' is more affirming as 'preferred name' framings articulate a choice that others get to make about one's identity.

neutral housing; and gave students and (sometimes) faculty and staff access to gender affirming healthcare.

The existing policies that QT resource professionals named in this study are important, yet these policies often centered individual access to support, rather than policies that attend to the systemic and cultural climates within which an individual studies, works, and/or lives. This is not to diminish the value of those policies – those policies are vital to the livelihood of QT people, especially trans and non-binary stakeholders for whom inclusive healthcare and access to a myriad of non-gendered facilities are connected to positive facets of well-being (Bonner-Thompson, Mearns and Hopkins 2021, Garvey and Dolan 2021, Nicolazzo 2021). These types of policies address material and discernable needs – this is imperative, too. For example, policies which allow individuals to report their name or correct gender identity markers, makes identifying oneself through institutional means far more accessible. And despite these valuable policies, it is equally important to consider the effectiveness of a policy to list your lived name and pronouns, in the aftermath of federal judicial opinions which give faculty the right to deadname and misgender students in the classroom; a major issue with which QT resource professionals are called to address as was outlined in Chapter 4. Arguably, without grievance policies that condemn and make actionable deadnaming and misgendering, the individual ability (and perhaps 'right') to list your lived name and pronouns become ineffective for improving the campus climate in classrooms where faculty can intentionally deadname and misgender students in the name of exercising their first amendment rights and emboldened by academic freedom.

It was a common theme that these policies often predated QT resource professionals' employment on their respective campuses, so while most professionals could name the extant policies, less had a clear understanding of the process for instituting these policies. This was not

necessarily a symptom of the policies being longstanding, but rather that many of the professionals in this study had shorter tenures in their roles. On some of their campuses these localized policies were sometimes informed by state-level legislation, or advocacy leveraged through a state-system(s) higher education governing body. During our interviews, when this theme emerged, it often surfaced as a point of frustration for QT resource professionals. Mary's frustrations underlined this point as she explained why colleges and universities have struggled to develop policies to collect better data about gender identity in non-binary ways. She said:

> "… more and more young folks are identifying as trans or non-binary… and particularly non-binary is becoming very, very visible. And our higher education models still often do not recognize that, or they're in a state [that has a] bad state of the union. They're in a battle with their legislation, and they [colleges and universities] want to make change and they're being punished. They're absolutely being punished, and they're trying to do the right thing" (Mary: a 50-year-old, white, Disabled, Gender Non-conforming, Queer and Lesbian QT resource center director at a large, R1 Public university in the Pacific-West).

Mary was specifically remarking, as others have, about the struggle to institute sanctions against those faculty who intentionally deadname and misgender others in the classroom. Beyond this reflection, Mary believes that colleges and universities must continue to push against state sanctions against QT affirming policies. She empathizes with the position that institutions are 'being punished,' yet, it is not clear who is the recipient of these 'punishments.' This makes the process of policymaking that can influence the campus climate and culture even more contentious for QT resource professionals who may or may not be organizationally situated to encourage or exact QT affirming policies that can positively shift the campus climate for QT people. It calls into question who might be responsible for this work.

Beyond asking about which policies exist, I asked QT resource professionals who participated in this study: 'who is responsible for creating policies that impact QT people on campus?' Their answers ranged from 'I guess it's me?' to discussing the ways that their input is sought for departmental, office, divisional, and sometimes institutional policies. While the focus of this question was 'who is responsible for instituting those policies,' many professionals articulated the role that student activism and advocacy played and play in pushing for policy changes. In several cases, QT resource professionals were unaware of who would be directly responsible for recommending and implementing policies that impact QT students, faculty, and staff on campus. In circumstances where they were directly involved in policymaking, QT resource professionals described either being consulted to shape departmental level policies and practices or having to get sponsorship and buy-in from a senior or executive administrator.

Bazarsky et al. (2020) described political acumen, arguably informed by access to social capital (Portes 1998), as well as experience with QT policies and practices as core competencies for QT resource professionals in higher education. In prefacing this political acumen, they state: "Colleges and universities are complex organizations with multiple layers of administrative structure, each encompassing their own mission, values, culture, and institutional priorities. The LGBTQIA+ director/professional interacts with each of these layers in their specific context, *to affect and sustain institutional change toward a positive campus climate* for LGBTQIA+ students, staff, faculty, alums, and other campus stakeholders. Further, exacting institutional change necessitates political acumen in negotiation, communication, and managing power dynamics" (Bazarsky et al. 2020:7)(emphasis added). And in framing policy experience they state: "The ability to incorporate intersections of sexual and romantic orientation and gender identity and expression into ongoing diversity and inclusion conversations, practices, and

policies requires both deep knowledge and significant interpersonal skills" (Bazarsky et al. 2020:7). When taken together, these competencies suggest that to affect change towards a positive campus climate for QT students and other stakeholders, QT resource professionals are most successful when they can effectively negotiate, communicate, and manage power dynamics.

In cases where QT resource professionals were able to employ political acumen (Bazarsky et al. 2020) to encourage a policy or practice document, the administrator who was granted authority for implementing or charging this work was not always clear, and often changed between initiatives, suggesting that the process for instituting equity centered policies is often disjunctured, which requires QT resource professionals to accrue social capital through political acumen, negotiation, and communication. For example, Rosie said:

> "Policies that are related to diversity, equity and inclusion don't come around that often. The name and gender stuff has been five years in the works. And it took me lighting a fire under people's ass to finally get a working group together that was sponsored by our vice president. …in the time that I've been here, if someone were responsible for it [DEI policymaking], it would be our AVP for inclusive excellence. But it's not until an issue is brought up that that happens. And often it's a practice and not a policy" (Rosie: a white, 26-year-old, Queer, cisgender Woman, who was serving as the assistant director for a QT center at a Private, R2 university in the South-East).

Rosie describes having to politically convince others to engage in name and gender policymaking by articulating the magnitude of the challenges that QT people face in the absence of those policies or practices. Further, she claims that senior leaders are motivated to engage with policymaking and practice strategies in the face of presenting 'issues,' rather than as proactive

strategies to promote equity. Her explanation suggests that she had to first convince a campus leader of the challenges, to receive a formal charge to assemble a working group, yet it is not clear whether the outcome of that labor would inform the development of a formal lived name policy (in this example), or whether it would inform a practice document. Policies – even when vague – are binding, practice documents are recommendations, and Rosie draws attention to this distinction in her reflection.

While there is much to consider from Rosie's description of policymaking at her institution, her explanation warrants specific attention to the structural positioning of her role, and specifically that the QT center she leads is positioned within the student affairs division, but the work of policy development – for which she had to galvanize support through political acumen – would be accountable to an AVP in the inclusive excellence division; a different division. This suggests that for Rosie, and for others, that when QT resource centers and their staffs are structurally and organizationally situated within a student affairs division the work of policy development to support QT stakeholders on campus, including students, is positioned outside of their 'direct chain of command.' Heron, a QT resource professional in this study, described engaging with a shared governance process similar to the process Rosie described, yet was also not in a position of authority to institute policies. From this lens, and through these experiences, it is not surprising that QT resource professionals navigating these organizational structures were often unsure who is directly responsible for institutional policy shifts to better support QT stakeholders on campus; policies that directly influence the stakeholders they serve – students. Attention to the organizational and structural location of DEI centers, such as QT resource centers, has become a recurring conversation in research and practice (Duran et al. 2022). If policymaking is to be more inclusive of QT students and other stakeholders, both in its

development and impact, it's worth considering, then, who gets the final say for when and how these policies are developed, whom they most directly impact, and whether QT resource professionals, or other DEI professionals who understand the unique needs of QT communities are advocating for the most equitable policies possible.

Although the QT resource professionals in this study believed that there was not a homogeneous experience of the campus climate (e.g. it depends on who you ask…) none of the professionals in this study theorized about the ways that policies or practices could be developed in ways that center the needs of queer and trans students and other stakeholders with other marginalized identities; particularly students of color. This may be due, in part, to the way that I asked the question. I asked them about policies that impact QT people and I later asked them who is responsible for forming policies that impact QT people and other stakeholders. I did not specifically ask about policies for QT people with other marginalized identities, as I asked about how their work supports students with multiple marginalized identities. This explanation is unsatisfactory, because I did not ask participants about the campus climate for QT people with other marginalized identities, and many participants noted that the climate was nuanced based on the complexity of one's identity, particularly for QT students of color. This speaks to the enduring challenges of grounding intersectional and social justice praxis into the work of policymaking, and perhaps the ongoing challenges of employing a similar praxis into the everyday work of identity-based centers, especially QT resource centers.

This analysis is not intended to castigate QT resource professionals' policymaking work because, as has been previously noted, QT resource professionals are often situated as policy consultants rather than shapers. From that lens, it seems that the monolithic framing of QT people through QT policies is a condition of the discursive (and imposed) limitations and

domination of policymaking, rather than the commitment of the QT resource professionals who are consulted about their implementation and impact, particularly when instituting policies has been a slow process (as Rosie noted above) and when the material gains seem to outweigh the limitations of policy. Yet this nuance potentially offers a mandate that policymaking should start with the most marginalized – especially trans and non-binary communities of color – in ways that will positively impact the broader community. This same dialectic can be extended to the 'material policies' that I previously mentioned. There is a significant benefit to creating systems in which QT stakeholders can list their lived name and pronouns, even in the face of anti-QT legislation which permits faculty to deadname and misgender students and other stakeholders. It seems then that the latter (e.g. anti-QT legislation, or a lack of grievance policies) becomes the site for policy, practice, cultural, and campus climate changes through which QT resource professionals are expected to employ political acumen to communicate, negotiate and manage power dynamics in pursuit of those changes.

Discussion

Viewing the hegemonic and nuanced challenges of the campus climate and policymaking for QT people through a lens of manageable solutions, runs the risk of mistaking the issues in anachronistic and neoliberal ways. In simpler terms, the challenge in shifting the campus climate for QT people is just that; challenging. The findings from this chapter suggest that QT resource professionals are aware of the nuanced and disparate ways that campus climate and microclimates are experienced by QT students, faculty, and staff. Specifically, QT resource professionals' interface with students who have very different experiences based on their broad involvement, identities, and other roles on campus.

QT resource professionals in this study were aware of the negative microclimates that QT students of color experience on campus. From their perspectives, QT students of color were often framed as the most disenfranchised on campus. Yet, in discussions of policymaking, the policies that were of the gravest concern reverted to discussions of the monolithic QT student, arguably in ways that recenter whiteness, and decenters the experiences of QT students of color. From a structural lens, strategies for policymaking which fail to center the needs of QT students of color, and QT students of color with other marginalized identities, will always and already fail 0its mission of inclusion and equity.

Through a lens of queer futurity, centering the most marginalized on campus begins to imagine queer futures on campus in which the salient issues framed in the previous chapter, and the structural and hegemonic hetereogenderism described in the chapter, are prioritized in policymaking discussions and decisions.

Implications for Campus Climate

QT resource professionals in this study specifically noted that the campus climate and mechanisms of support often framed QT students and stakeholders in totalizing and monolithic ways such that the experiences of QT students of the global majority (e.g. not white), QT students with disabilities, and poor and low-income QT people are not specifically referenced, but are implied to be included in a broad framing of QT people. An entire separate chapter(s) can and should be dedicated to making sense of the ways in which QT resource work is attentive to the unique needs of students at the margins of identity.

Through a lens of queer futurity, the recognition of microclimates may suggest something else about queering the campus climate. Theoretically it suggests that because the utopic campus climate is always just out of reach, efforts to improve the campus climate will be an ongoing

process. However, the recognition that microclimates complicate the notion of a broad climate, perhaps strategic energies could be directed at those microclimates which are the least hospitable for the most marginalized.

Implications for Policymaking

It seems that QT resource professionals in this study often recognized where policymaking was needed to improve the experiences of QT students on campus. However, findings suggested that they were often unaware who was responsible for QT affirming policymaking on their campuses. For some, they believed that they were responsible for initiating those processes. For others, they referred to a central office at their institution with which whom they consulted on QT centered policies. Some consulted directly with departments or other units to updates office policies and practices, and other were not involved in policymaking whatsoever. Of course this could be explained by time, experience, and titled-positioning within the organizational structure, however, it is more interesting to consider that those factors should matter in the first place. Imagine what it would mean to be the sole LGBT professional staff or administrator on a campus; supporting QT students through programming and advocacy; and know that a committee made up of non-QT people were making decisions about QT people. The average QT center has only 1 fulltime professional and is said to support all QT students at an institution. Does it matter that their title is coordinator or assistant dean? At any rate, QT resource professionals need to be institutionally positioned to make QT affirming policy recommendations or positions and those in positions of power should employ that power to elevate these initiatives.

Executive and senior administrators should take seriously the challenges that QT resource professionals and other DEI practitioners articulate on behalf of the communities that they serve.

Continuing to view the role of QT resource centers as programmers and crisis interventionists (1) doesn't attend to their intimate knowledge of strategies that could proactively address heterogendered climates in which crisis intervention for QT students (at the intersections of identity) is necessary, (2) allows majoritarian priorities and politics to supersede the disenfranchisement of the communities that institutions claim to value, and (3) allows concepts like 'safe spaces' to stand in for meaningful structural changes on campus.

The analysis that was offered in this chapter as it relates to policymaking requires far more nuance and interrogation about the ways that QT resource professionals and other administrators and stakeholders on campus are involved in these processes. Specifically, some QT resource professionals described shared governance processes (such as Heron) which were required to even consider policy changes. While shared government has often been framed as a more democratic strategy for ensuring that 'all voices are heard,' it is not clear how the organizational positioning of individuals within a shared governance process can impact QT resource professionals' political acumen. Asked another way, on campuses where QT resource professionals are undervalued in comparison to faculty or senior administrators, what value does their expertise have in a shared governance system where the power and 'opinions' of those other institutional actors are situated alongside their own? And on campuses where QT resource professionals are characterized as 'student facing programmers' how does this position limit their ability to promote positive campus climate changes through policy and practice changes? These, of course, are empirical questions that warrant further critical and interpretive analysis.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to make sense of QT resource professionals understanding of the campus climate for the stakeholders that they serve, and what role do they

play in shifting the campus climate and culture through policymaking. Bazarsky et al. (2020) found deploying political acumen to shift the campus climate and culture through policymaking as being a central competency for QT resource professionals. In this paper, QT resource professionals argued that the social location was dependent on the microclimates of a student, and was influenced by 'a polite conspiracy of silence,' in which *some* QT students report inequity and oppression, while other QT students are unaware of, or feel unimpacted by, direct or passive mechanisms of overlapping systems of domination.

Despite the awareness of microclimates and its impact on the notion of a monolithic campus climate, QT resource professionals were often not situated to directly impact policies, and when they were consulted the processes for instituting policies were either unclear, or positioned them in ways that QT resource professionals were not directly responsible for instituting policies that positively impact QT communities on campus. It seems that more research is needed to make sense of the policymaking process on college and university campuses to substantively improve the experiences and futures of QT people on campus.

CHAPTER 6: QUEER FUTURITY & FUTURE(S) IN HIGHER EDUCATION

If activist politics and knowledge fail to touch in legible and knowable ways, they not only fail the test of equivalence, they in fact represent a certain bad faith. More narratively, if your beloved does not replenish the love you direct at her, you are betrayed and your zany quest for love loses the momentum that Post-Fordism mandates, and you slowly unravel to the point where you find yourself sitting in a bath tub in a vagina outfit holding a laptop over your head (Muñoz 2019:213).

Around the same time that I was drafting the early ideas for this chapter, I had lunch with a trans graduate student who had been navigating what she referred to as the 'normal academic hazing' of graduate school and the disorienting side-effects of imposter syndrome, made more difficult by the traumatic task of disclosing – to her major advisor – her experience(s)'as a transwoman on campus.' It would be a breach of trust and ethics to disclose the details of those conversations, but I can share that what she has experienced are the types of inequities and violence that campus climate surveys and cultural humility trainings are ill-equipped to redress. Further, these are the types of experiences that were not fully captured in the empirical chapters of this dissertation. As I have had the experience of faculty and staff mentors treating me as a colleague, I mirrored this practice by sharing my experience writing my dissertation and trying to make sense – theoretically – of 'queer futures' in higher education; those futures where QT people can pursue scholarship and community without or with-less interactional and systemic challenges. I shared that I wanted to write something akin to an academic manifesto which theoretically and practically reflected on the past and present, to co-imagine 'better' futures on campus and in the world. Yet, as I shared my musings, she interrupted me to say, "there are no queer futures on college campuses." I responded by stating that 'because there aren't queer futures on campuses, opens up possibilities for the queer (of color) futures that could be.' In

truth, I am still working to believe this, and this chapter helped me to theoretically make sense of this hunch.

In this chapter, I attend to Munoz's notion of queer futurity through referencing the earlier chapters of this dissertation, incorporating autoethnographic accounts of my experiences as a QT student and professional on campuses, and placed it in conversation the extant literature about QT people in higher education. This chapter departs from the structure of the previous chapters in several ways. First, the purpose here is not to draw upon meaning-making for (other) QT resource professionals; that is the work of the earlier chapters. Differently, this chapter returns to the findings and implications from chapters four and five to theoretically make sense of the logics that prevent livable and thrivable futures for queer and trans people at the margins in higher education. Locating these theoretical (and also material) barriers assists in co-imagining what living and thriving on campus could look like and the impact that QT resource professionals can have in promoting queer futures. In that vein, it reads more theoretical and ideological, and intentionally leans away from the totalizing and objectivist character that even the most critical of interpretive projects often emulate. Rather than seek out meaning to discern theories of inequity and oppression, readers should start with the assumption that inequity and oppression exist for QT people at the margins on college campuses; this is the spirit of critical ontologies. There is a broad literature that has attended to and affirms this assumption as it relates to QT people in higher education (Duran 2018, Duran et al. 2022, Garvey and Dolan 2021, Garvey et al. 2019b, Legg, Cofino and Sanlo 2020, Miller, Wynn and Webb 2019, Rankin, Garvey and Duran 2019, Renn 2020, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021), and the former chapters attended to the issues QT resource professionals are most-often called to address, as well as the campus climates within which those issues take place.

Second, I work to implicate the rose-tinged framework which plagues scholarship about QT resource professionals and QT resource centers in higher education. Specifically, the over-reliance on trite descriptions of QT resource professionals' work has not fully characterized the lived experience and barriers of *doing* this work on college campuses – as is evidenced by the findings from the earlier chapters. It opens the opportunity for past, current, and aspiring QT resource professionals to glean a different account of the tensions inherent in this work. Yet, I do not claim that this theoretical analysis fully attends to the lived experiences of those of us doing this work. Ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically, I contend that it is not possible to fully characterize this work because context, experience, oppression, and social location differentially shape this work. Thus, to extend the former metaphor, this chapter employs prism-tinted lenses in the hopes of someday materializing a variety of spectacles in many shades through which QT resource professionals (and the stakeholders we serve) can discern and live thrivable futures; futures that can be critiqued to co-imagine and co-materialize other futures, and on-and-on. It is from that position, that I claim that because there are currently no thrivable queer futures on college campuses, that there are in fact many, and QT resource professionals are situated to critique and move towards them.

Third, I do not revisit the methods, procedures, analysis, and traditional findings readers identified in the earlier chapters that are germane to interpretive and empirical research. This is because this is not an empirical chapter. Instead, this chapter likens queer theoretical traditions by fusing the ephemeral experiences and positions of the researcher (me) with the extant literature about QT people in higher education and queer and queer of color theorizing. Therefore, the former sentence is the last in which I will deploy a third-person framing. I am/was here, writing this chapter and doing this work. I also do not offer yet another exposition of why I

came to use the language 'QT' – queer and trans people are those whose gender, sexuality, and other social statuses are non-normative. However, I later articulate to whom 'we' and 'our' refers, in ways that are not only identitarian, but also in ways that imagines a future 'we.' I attend to collective terms such as these after the queer theory section below. Throughout this chapter I discern when I am writing about my own experiences or those theoretical and empirical findings of other scholars or earlier chapters of this dissertation. I do, however, attend to the theories that I draw on – specifically the queer of color theories of the 'late' Jose Estaban Muñoz (2019) and his contemporaries including Lee Edelman (2004). I also discuss the queering strategies for which quantitative criticalists and queer theorists in higher education have advocated, including Jay Garvey (2020), Z Nicolazzo (2021), and Michael Denton (2020).

Fourth, I claimed to frame the previous chapters through Muñoz's (2019) lens of queer futurity in ways that allowed me to find hope in the disappointments. As I further explain in the queer theory section below, this approach is too formulaic for the queer of color theory that Muñoz articulated. In the empirical chapters, I unpacked the interactional and systemic issues that QT resource professionals were called to address and located hope (or queer futures) in the antithesis of those challenges. Reading those moments of hope as the only solutions misunderstands queer futurity in ways that are not as easily rectified in empirical work; what Muñoz might have described as 'uncritical optimism,' and what sociologists might describe as a 'black box theory of organizations' (Chen 2017). In short, black box theories are those that are uncritically over deterministic and fallaciously formulaic. Yet, it's fair to say that my theorizing pales in comparison to the learned and masterful theorizing that Muñoz and others drafted. I imagine that the chapter I have imagined here will later develop into more thoughtful queer(ed) and race(d) critiques that incorporates other interlocutors and thinkers. I imagine it will become

bolder in its theorizing about queering campus. To that end, this chapter works to further open possibilities for queer futures on campus that are less of a recipe, and more of a pissed-off and hopeful clusterfuck of imagination. This is not 'polite, civil,' or conventional discourse, but neither is queer theory and it certainly reflects my current position.

Fifth, in the earlier chapters, I allowed moments of my own positioning to be observed by the reader in ways that attended to a morsel of my politic and positionality. In this chapter, I allow what has festered into outright rage for the problematic treatment of diversity, equity, and inclusion work (or whichever terms *des jours* are being embraced) in higher education to be situated front and center. This serves at least three purposes – the first of which allows me to incorporate my own experiences in imagining queer futures on campus and offer first-person illustrations of experiences that cannot be gleaned from the derived and meaning-making findings of the earlier chapters. The second, as was previously noted, resists the objectivist urge to dislocate the researcher from the social world(s) under examination, e.g. I do this work and I now research and theorize about it. And finally, it personally offered me catharsis at a time when I was reading about, writing for, and leading two very different QT resource centers on two very different campuses, during a global pandemic which ravaged the most marginalized communities in the social world. On innumerable occasions, I found institutional actions, responses, and (lack of) commitments to be fundamentally at odds with my work, writing, and understanding of QT resources centers and with social justice epistemology and equity praxis. I saw hollow words in service of performative and neoliberal institutional 'inclusion.' The former empirical chapters, and my dissent through queer theorizing, opened an opportunity to locate hope in the overwhelming and now quotidian disappointments of enacting DEI strategies in higher education.

The final way that this chapter departs from the previous empirical chapters is that it came to be a love letter to QT resource center practitioners, and diversity, equity, inclusion administrators in higher education. During the in-depth interviews that I conducted for this project, my colleagues discussed the very 'real' and felt challenges they experienced in enacting this work. Sometimes this looked like gaslighting. Sometimes this looked like processing the death of a student from suicide. Sometimes this looked like being called and consulted to shape policy without the power to shape policy. Sometimes (and often) this looked like being underpaid and overworked. Sometimes this looked like leaving QT resource center work in higher education altogether; burning out and leaving the field for dust. This latter point was certainly the case for several of the participants in this project, who – since our interview – have left the field completely. And yet, sometimes my colleagues discussed hope and joy. This could look like pride in 'resilient' students despite the absence of institutional change. This could look like survival. This could look like moments of leveraging and enacting institutional power in service of thrivable futures. This could look like affirming physical and social structures. This could look like systemic change. Muñoz's theorizing about queer futurity helps to make sense of the tensions between these overwhelming disappointments and felt joy. This chapter theorizes about the possibilities for Queer, Black, Brown, Disabled, and Poor futures (among others) on college and university campuses. In this way, and to lift up Muñoz's (2019) framing, this chapter became a love letter to my colleagues who are seeking "hope in the face of heartbreak" (207).

Queer Theory, Queer Futurity, and Queer Futures on Campus

In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I presented first an interactional analysis of the issues that QT resource professionals most often address, followed by a critical structural analysis of the campus climate, policymaking, and a critique of who 'slips through the cracks.'

Because this chapter moves towards a queer and queer of color theorizing of QT futures on campus, it is necessary to make sense of the extant queer and queer of color theories that I apply to this context of higher education. To do this, I briefly dive into the highly conceptual and epistemological landscape of queer and queer of color theories, before providing an overview of the ongoing an unresolved debate that queer futurity has sparked over the last 25 years. This exposition does not specifically refer to the context of higher education, yet it is necessary to make sense of the epistemological arguments to apply them to the context of queer futures on campus and their impact on, or importance to, the work of QT resource professionals. I conclude with an exposition for the ways that queer and queer of color theories have already been applied to the context of QT life in higher education, before introducing my interventions for QT resource professionals who are 'hoping in the face of heartbreak.'

Queer theory is a field of post-structural and critical theories stemming from LGBT studies and women's studies and presents an epistemic critique of objectivist and essentialist views of gender and sexuality. As Spargo (1999) contends "[q]ueer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender, and sexual relations" (9). Queer theory is understood as "a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities" (Sullivan 2003:43-44). Often linked to Foucault's notion of 'genealogical analysis of sexuality,' queer theorists "examine the random, provisional, and often discontinuous ways in which power has functioned or been deployed to analyse [sic] the forms of subjectivity that have been discursively constructed as a result" (Sullivan 2003:1-2). Beyond Michel Foucault's writing (1984, 1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Alan McKee, Annamarie Jagose, and Lisa Duggan – among

others – are often cited as early queer thinkers who worked to define and (dis)articulate the field. For the sake of brevity, I will turn to the more specific discussion of queer futurity.

The notion of queer futures is theoretically linked to Sedgwick's (1991) concerns about the ways that the social world vis-à-vis education, medicine/mental health, and the military were employing 'reparative interventions' to prevent children from 'becoming gay.' Edelman (2004), Halberstam (2011), and Muñoz (1999, 2019) theorized and debated about the possibilities of queer futures and queer futurity. The central concern was whether queer – as a theory of social organization – can or should be political, collective, social, and relational. A grounded explanation of these debates centers whether queer futures are possible, which has produced a false dialectic between hope and hopelessness (see their writing on antisocial theory and queer negativity). Edelman's argument adopts what has become the tagline of queer theory: chaos. He calls for the rejection of 'reproductive futurity' in which dominant ideologies are predicated on the image of an innocent child (Dyer 2017) who should be protected from queerness and queer politics. "It is in the rejection of the future… [that he] discovers the possibility of fundamentally undoing the dominant social order" (Bliss 2015:84). In simpler terms, Edelman makes the widely accepted case that queer futures cannot and will not be institutionalized, and should therefore be rejected, because notions of queer futurity are doomed to reproduce the dominant social order in which QT people and queer politics cannot be absorbed.[14] In an interview about his rejection of queer futurity, he stated:

> "If there were simply the possibility of attaining some utopian endpoint then one would live in a world where fundamentally one were resistant to difference in politics. Politics is dissensus. It's not agreement. Politics is oppositional. It's not oppositionality for its own

[14] Edelman would not theorize QT people as an identity. I use it in this case for consistency. In his writing, and writing about his polemics, scholars have often written 'queer' or 'queers.'

> sake, but it's recognition that every attempt to totalize; to construct a closed, idealized political system will always exclude something. And the exclusion will be then the locus of queerness, which is why there can be no queer utopia; that queer utopia would be, itself, a space in which queerness would be excluded" (Edelman 2015).

Edelman argues against theories of queer futurity stating that queer futurity reconstruct utopian notions of queerness as a point of arrival which is fundamentally at odds with the epistemic grounding of queer theory.

Halberstam (2011) and Muñoz took/take issue with Edelman's position for deploying epistemological self-destruction (e.g. deconstruct; nothing matters and is organized chaos), which Edelman believes is politically necessary to conceive an altogether different social order. Halberstam and Muñoz specifically take up the historical materialist critique that only some have the privilege of theorizing, imagining, and enacting absolute rejections of the dominant social order, while other collectivities have clung to queer collectivity for survival and hope. Their arguments suggest that the antirelational theory which Edelman advocates is predicated on a white and queer politic with the limited privilege of being hopeless through a narrow and vacuous understanding of identity. This extended passage attends to Muñoz's position:

> "… I nonetheless contend that most of the work with which I disagree under the provisional title of 'antirelational thesis' moves to imagine an escape and denouncement of relationality as first and foremost a distancing of queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as the contamination of race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference. In other words, antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference. [I]… argue against

> antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity. I respond to Edelman's assertion that the future is the province of the child and therefore not of the queers by arguing that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always in the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it but be viewed as being visible only in the horizon. My argument is therefore interested in critiquing the ontological certitude that I understand to be partnered with the politics of presentist and pragmatic contemporary gay identity." (Muñoz 2019:11)

To that end, Muñoz imagines that queer futurity is not a place that 'we' arrive at, yet is the location of a hopeful distant queerness that is juxtaposed with critiques of the material and theoretical challenges of the past and present. It is through those critiques that it is necessary for collectivities to consider a 'being-with in difference.' This theorizing does not suggest that 'identities' epistemologically exist, or that they are necessary only for political organizing, but that they point towards hope on the horizon. It suggests that collective identities are useful for producing worlds in which people – regardless of ascribed or achieved identities – can be together in difference in a social order that has historically been built for some, and organized against others. Drawing on that juxtaposition helps to rebuild, reimagine, and hope for a world where the messiness of queer can be different than the messiness of 'queer' today. Muñoz's (2019) quote, which introduces this chapter, is a humorous yet tangible example of his concern with the material. He argues that we cannot only theorize in the abstract, that there must be some connection between the material and the discursive, otherwise we enter a stalemate of theorizing hopelessness (or negativity) against a world with material consequences. In that way, you theorize in ways that cannot imagine a world in which queer collectivities can at least continue,

or at most, thrive. It is in this hopelessness that you become aware that you are working against some 'thing' that is not quite there, and "you slowly unravel to the point where you find yourself sitting in a bathtub in a vagina outfit holding a latop over your head" (Muñoz 2019:213). It is through Muñoz's theorizing that I hold that the disappointments that are located in 'failure' (Halberstam 2011), become the horizon for queer futures on college campuses. It tells 'us' that queer futures aren't 'this issue, challenge, or campus climate,' so we can therefore imagine futures without those circumstances. It offers 'hope in the face of heartbreak.'

There are but a few scholars in higher education who have effectively employed queer theoretical frameworks to understanding or critiquing the context of colleges and universities for queer and trans people on campus, these include Jay Garvey (2020), Michael Denton (2020), and Z Nicolazzo (2021). Epistemologically, Nicolazzo's (2021) research and writing about the experiences of trans college students, has advocated for the formulation of a specific trans epistemology which – among other goals – takes seriously knowledge produced by and for trans collegians and scholars, and advocates for trickle-up activism which centers the needs of the most marginalized in advocacy, activism, and policy work in higher education.

Differently, Garvey (2020) who epistemologically identifies as a quantitative criticalist, has argued that there is an intentional effort to obscure outcomes for QT students as it relates to college student retention. He stated, "[r]esource allocation and policy (re)formation are driven by data-informed decision-making, and the intentional exclusion of QT students from institutional data collection systematically removes administrator responsibility from serving these students" (436). In leveraging this critical, and arguably queer critique, Garvey (2020) advocates for better strategies to collect data about QT students in ways that can draw attention to the material realities of QT students on campus. In other words, he points to the issue, to rearticulate a better

future. Denton (2020) has further complicated the conversation about queering retention data, and has also advocated for employing queer futurity in service of improving the experiences of QT students on campus, he stated: “Rethinking retention through queer futurity could mean abandoning the current framing of retention as hopeful or beneficial for queer students. Queer futurity asks in what ways does retention promote the interests of the corporate institution at the cost of queer students” (Denton 2020:551).

This paper builds on Denton’s (2020) argument that “[q]ueering retention involves economic and racial justice on campus, shifting cultural norms and values away from hetero- and homonormative ideals, involvement with public education, creating changes in business culture and society, and providing students the ability to self-identify and self-determine across the university” (558). Here I point to contemporary strategies that we, QT resource professionals, have employed to ‘support’ QT students and other stakeholders, and complicate as well as implicate those strategies as often falling short of their goal. In alignment with the project that Denton (2020) outlined, I make the claim that because there are no thrivable queer futures on college campuses, that there are many, and QT resource professionals are situated to critique and move towards them. Because, as Muñoz (2019) has argued, queerness is on the horizon, this chapter theorizes what those queer futures might look like through a queer and historical materialist critique of my own autoethnographic accounts, the previous empirical chapters, and the extant literature. I offer practical examples of how QT resource professionals can pragmatically employ these queer considerations. Pragmatism was not the express concern of Muñoz (2020), yet I locate practical implications to theorize and overcome the inherent tensions that QT resource professionals experience in enacting impossible labor; impossible because

queer futures are always on the horizon and 'our' present labor can only get 'us' closer, yet never 'there.'

Theorizing 'Our,' 'We,' and 'Us'

Muñoz (2019) attempted to move beyond the logic of identity labels for the sake of identity labels, yet he did not deliver a wholesale condemnation of queer-as-identitys as he worked to theorize a "being-with in the world." In his words:

> "How can we inhabit the politics of incommensurability, contestation, challenge, the not-lining-up of meaning, the persistence of inconsistency, and the melee at the center of our tumultuous being-with in the world and in thought, as something other than a ruse, a faulty foundation, willful bad faith, or a set of illusory traps? What if we instead think about hope, the necessity of hope, in the face of identity knowledges, including but not limited to feminism, queer studies, and ethnic studies and their various infelicities, breakdowns, and falterings as a need to achieve that "we," that essential being-with, the commitment to a making common that is a necessity in the face of all the troubling parsing out of life that obstructs the necessary being-with in difference that allows us to know the potentiality of our commons?" (Muñoz 2019:209)

I argue that Muñoz was talking about a utopian understanding of humanity; that there are inevitable and innumerable differences between 'us' and that it is the fact of being together, in difference, that locates hope in the commonality of shared humanity.

From that vantage, I employ the collective terms 'we, us, and our' throughout this chapter, often to refer to the commonality and shared experiences of QT resource professionals. Not because our experiences are homogenous, but because we have the shared experience of working and hoping to advance the status of QT people – often students – and QT people at the

margins on campus. If there is to be no 'we,' then it becomes difficult to imagine how 'our work' and 'our place on campus' can ever be collectively understood as moving the needle for QT lives in higher education. I would further argue that the 'we' on campus is not limited to QT resource professionals, but all QT people, and all equity-minded people, especially and including students. Indeed, to be denied this use of 'we' would contradict the very premise of our work around a collective 'being-with' logic (e.g. QT resource centers would not make sense). It becomes more challenging to do coalition-building on campus and in the social world in the absence of this 'we.' In this way, the hope for queer futures is rooted in 'us' despite our inevitable and queer differences and futures.

Queer Futures on Campus

The historical tensions that materialize in the discourse of Pride on campus offers an illustrative overarching example of what queer futures on campus could look like, and the role that QT resource professionals can, and inevitably will play in those futures. In a 2021 blogpost, reflecting about the tensions of Pride, I wrote:

> "[F]or those of us who work in QT Resource Centers at colleges and universities, each day on campus (virtual or otherwise) can somehow feel like, both, a never-ending pride parade, and the riots and protests that precipitate(d) them. And recently our communities have been under attack in many localities through anti-trans legislation and racist policies and practices. Therein lies the tension of Pride; the space between celebrating the ways that QT people have overcome discrimination and violence, and the unending reminder and reflection that hate and systemic barriers always and already limit our ability to be affirmed in our humanity. Pride is cyclical in that way. From fun and engaging events that celebrate and uplift the successes of our communities, to 'town halls,' committee

meetings, and community organizing to 'address' entrenched racism, transphobia, and [cis]heteronormativity – this work is dynamic" (Oliveira 2021)

These tensions were apparent in the stories of the QT resource professionals who participated in the interviews that I analyzed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. This included the tension of having access to sharing one's real name, and the right of faculty to circumvent that morsel of humanity. Another example is the tension between hosting education and training sessions to promote cultural competency and humility, and the absence of those who regularly espouse and enact anti-QT attitudes and values. And from a more critical lens, the tension between advancing policies and practices that can mitigate the negative impact of cisheterogenderism, and the lack of nuance for how those policies underserve Poor, Working-class (Brim 2020), Black, Brown (Duran 2018, Duran 2020, Duran and Jones 2020), and/or Disabled QT people (Miller 2018).

Those tensions – the idea that 'something is not quite working' in our efforts to support QT students and other stakeholders, is precisely the location and launchpad of queer futures at colleges and universities. In this analysis of queer futurity on campus, I explore three 'disappointments' or tensions to theoretically imagine what queer futures on campus could look like, and offer practical considerations that might (not) be useful for QT resource professionals leading QT resource centers and similar spaces on college and university campuses. At the root of this imagining and enacting, I argue if there are to be queer futures on campus that they will decenter safety, challenge broader cisheterogendered logics, and recenter trans people of color,.

Queer Futurity on Campus is Not Safe

There is a rich literature for, and critique against, the notion of safe spaces both in terms of physical places in education and the concept itself (Arao and Clemens 2013, Bonner-

Thompson, Mearns and Hopkins 2021, Byron 2017, Flensner and Von der Lippe 2019). Broadly speaking, safe spaces describe educational settings in which "students can speak freely, without being afraid of their peers" or faculty (Flensner and Von der Lippe 2019) and this arguably extends to 'just being' in certain places on campus, such that QT resource centers are often framed as the exemplar of safety for QT people in higher education. Yet, the concept of safety, for any given space or place, will always hang in the balance; kinetically drawn towards the pinnacle of 'unsafety.' Safety operates in constant referent to that which is not safe. As a thought experiment, imagine being in a QT resource center and hearing students use the term 'queer,' or 'faggot.' Consider how it felt to read those words. For some, both terms have been reclaimed as a community or umbrella term, or term of endearment. For some, these terms function historically and presently as a pejorative term. And for others, the intent and impact of the term are dependent on the speaker and listener. Regardless of the position one takes in these examples, the point is that some inevitably will not perceive, experience, or feel safety. Based on one's social location and positionality, these terms will be understood or felt in disparate ways. The liminal, referential, and subject positionality of safety suggests, like queer futurity, that safety is on the horizon – it is approachable, or aspirational, yet always just out of reach. In other terms, safety cannot be a point of arrival, yet the extant strategies to promote equity may appear 'safer.' These are the type of strategies (e.g. programming, policy consultation, advocacy, education and training initiatives, etc.) that QT resource professionals and 'allies' employ, and QT resource centers are often the site or backdrop for these strategies.

Here, my concern is not with whether safety can or cannot be accomplished through allies or places. I lean away from that discussion as it is largely situated in the realm of the discursive (Bonner-Thompson, Mearns and Hopkins 2021). Here I instead attend to the material

outcome of safe space rhetoric and what it can reveal about queer futures on campus. Preston and Hoffman (2015) have argued, that articulating and creating 'safe spaces' on campus allows for other parts of campus to perpetuate heterogendered logics that are not 'safe.' We arrive at the question, then, safe for whom? This was evident in the earlier chapters in which QT resource professionals stated that the campus climate and microclimates (Vaccaro 2012) were dependent on the social location of the stakeholder. It seems that attempting to articulate or institute 'safety' as an outcome is at best a moving target, and at worst a futile endeavor. It is also an endeavor which QT resource professionals often frame as 'preaching to the choir'; as not reaching the intended audience. It is, therefore, worth considering whether the creation of safe spaces such as QT resource centers, or situating institutional actors who expressly support QT people (such as QT resource professionals) accomplishes safety? I argue that the necessity of QT affirming spaces juxtaposed with those places on campus that are not QT affirming, reveals the ways in which colleges and universities are not fully invested in promoting queer futures on and across campuses. Queer futures in higher education cannot rely on the discursive safe space as a stand-in for institutional equity, otherwise we are always and already limited on campus and fail to address the ways that institutions foster cisheterogendered climates (Preston and Hoffman 2015), cultures, policies, and practices. Through this lens, 'safety' operates as a mechanism of capitalist inclusion (Conrad 2014) which risks the body and limits the horizon of queer futures by articulating which sectors of campus or the social world are and are not intended for queer and queer of color bodies.

Individual institutional actors have also been framed through safety discourse; often called 'allies.' Much like safe spaces, the ongoing necessity of allyship reflects the perpetual oppression of QT people on campus and in the social world. This is not intended to demean or

disparage the value that 'allies' (or safe spaces for that matter) play in collective political organizing against anti-QT practices, policies, and legislation (DeVita and Anders 2018). Organizing alongside 'allies' is implied in the communication and negotiation strategies that Bazarsky et al. (2020) named as a core competency for successful QT resource professionals. The role that 'allies' play in advancing positive shifts in the campus climate is also implied in the "political acumen" (Bazarsky et al. 2020) that QT resource professionals should employ to advance change. In this way, allies become not only 'safe people,' but are often enmeshed in a critical mass of professionals on campus who can advance change around anti-QT politics, policies, and practices.

Edelman (2004) philosophically argued that politics implies dissensus (or disagreement). This suggests that the role that politics play in the social world is to advance a divided position or opinion. This dissensus is at the core of the role of the 'ally' on campus. Allies – through an identarian lens – represent embodied dissensus and politics as it posits at least two different types of 'others,' the first of which are those who deny the full participation and future of QT people. The second of which are QT people themselves. In everyday terms, allyship projects the idea that "I am not anti-QT, but my gender identity or sexual identity may be the same or similar as anti-QT people. And I am not QT, but I share a commitment to equity alongside QT people." The point is that 'allyship' discourse reflects the ongoing *need* for 'allyship.' In other words, the necessity of allyship reflects the endurance of QT struggles against anti-QT policies and practices which require non-QT support to mitigate those struggles. It also reifies the negative case that there are people and places that are not allies or allied with QT liberation. With that logic in mind, campuses will continue to not be safe for QT people, so long as there is a need for safe spaces and allies on campus. Thus, safe spaces and allyship are evidence of the enduring

struggle. This is not intended to imply that the need for safe spaces reproduces QT oppression. Rather, I suggest that safe spaces and allyship are evidence of the enduring struggle, and may illuminate possibilities for queer futures on campus.

If allies represent embodied dissensus, and safe spaces reify hegemonic cisheterogendered institutions that deny– as Muñoz imagined – 'being-with in difference,' it also then leaves scholars very little room to imagine a college or university campus which could embrace QT people, including students. This critique also posits the perpetual "issues" (as framed in chapter 4) that QT resource professionals will be called to address in the absence of those structural changes. So, what does this have to do with queer futurity, and how does theorizing about the role of safe spaces and allyship through the lens of queer futurity help to imagine queer futures? I am reminded of the brief time I spent interning with the Human Rights Campaign. During orientation, my supervisor described the organization as "I work at an organization that I hope one day need not have to exist." Her position reflects the belief that the HRC exists because anti-QT laws and policies exist. What I suggest here is queer futures on campus are not safe, precisely because we reproduce the notion of, and need for, safe spaces and allies. That we must continually identify places within the institution that (better) affirm (some) QT people, reifies the bifurcation of campus into people and places that are (not) for QT people (Preston and Hoffman 2015). It seems that one anticipation of queer futurity would be absent of 'safe spaces' and allyship, in which the institution is not continually prefaced on cisheterogendered logics; a campus which has no need for safe spaces or allies because there is less to organize safety and allyship against.

Current movement towards queer futurity has resulted in, what my colleagues have called, "preaching to the choir." Although we are preaching to the choir today, the present

represents the struggle towards past hopes for queer futures. Courses, places, presentations, and people who publicly name affirmations about QT people were not always there. That we have the today is the material realization of past queer futures. For QT resource professionals today, creating safe spaces on college campuses has continued to center cultural competency and cultural humility trainings that engages participants into rudimentary discussions of gender and sexuality to more advanced topics like 'anti-racist' social justice advocacy workshops within QT communities. Yet, despite the potential for engaging dialogue and perhaps cultural shifts to promote equity for QT people, the participants are often those who are already displaying visible 'support' in other ways; e.g. 'preaching to the choir.' In the absence of the discursive limitations that safe spaces and allyship present this strategy continues to miss those anti-QT actors on college campuses.

This is not to suggest that the cultural training programs are not useful. The research has well documented the value that it plays for students, faculty, and staff (Coleman 2016) who are committed to continue learning about the ongoing struggle to become better advocates for policies and laws which support QT people on and off campus. There continues to be value in learning about the histories and experiences of QT people inside and outside of higher education. In fact, it is imperative that we continue to learn about the vast experiences of QT experiences as (de)situated forms of knowledge and knowledge production. It seems necessary then that we be much more critical about what these trainings do (not) accomplish, and reflect further on the liminality of safety. Yet, without material institutional support it becomes nearly impossible to shift the climate and culture, when laws and policies permit some institutional actors to enact cisheterogenderism (implicitly and explicitly) without consequence. It seems then that rather than continue to promote safe spaces within microclimates, QT resource professionals should

continue to direct energy and attention at the root of the problem (institutional policies and state and federal legislation) to address the problems. Without an institutional commitment to challenge and even condemn anti-QT policies, practices, and actions on campus, the need for safe spaces and allyship will persist. This persistence suggests that queer futures on college and university campuses will not be safe.

It is in recognizing possibilities for queer futurity – the flexible space located between the disappointments of the present and the unknowable but compellingly possible queer futures – that activism strategies are composed. Through the lens of queer futurity it seems that greater attention is needed to more fully address entrenched and hegemonic cisheterogenderism on campus. What would it look like for college and universities and their institutional actors to identify *unsafe* spaces, in the way that we already publicly identify safe spaces? This might critically transform the role of QT resource professionals, who would be central to that discussion, not as gatekeepers of safety, but as knowers of violence, discrimination, and exclusion. QT resource professionals could offer up, in community with QT students, faculty, staff, and 'allies,' recommendations for holding the institutional authorities accountable not only for the more nebulous campus climate, but the microclimates which denigrate the broader climate. I propose that because queer futures on campus cannot be safe, then queer futures on campus must be perpetually insistent. And QT resource professionals can continue to advocate for insistent spaces which require the institutional authorities to take action against insidious anti-QT actions, practices, and policies on and off campus.

Queer Futurity on Campus is Not Isolated to Campus

If we are to imagine queer futures on college and university campuses in which allyship and safe spaces are not necessary, it is imperative to locate institutions of higher education within

the broader social order. Educational sociologists have asserted that as social institutions, schools often reproduce systems of inequality and inequity within schools through correspondence theories (Bowles and Gintis 1976) and through the hidden curriculum (Apple 1980). Historically, "correspondence theories imply that there are specific characteristics, behavioral traits, skills, and dispositions that an economy requires of its workers. These economic needs are so powerful as to 'determine' what goes on in other sectors of a society particularly in…. educational institutions" (Apple 1980:47). Relevant to queer futurity, the evidence suggests that cisheteronormativity is reproduced through colleges and universities (Preston and Hoffman 2015).

This history of QT resource centers on college and university campuses was borne out of a legacy of activism (Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002:22). In fact, many of the QT resource professionals who appeared in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, stated that their centers were formed by a coalition of QT and allied people on campus, and often led by ardent and outspoken student advocates and activists. As I noted in the former section of this chapter, this elicited safer places on campus, yet more equitable policies and practices are needed to better and more fully address the accrued disenfranchisement (and now debt) of QT people, especially QT people of color (Duran et al. 2022, Rankin, Garvey and Duran 2019). It seems that the recognition of this continued disenfranchisement, as a thorn in the side of contemporary QT people, also function as a site of queer futures on campus; through advocating for change in the broader social world. In this way, QT resource professionals must be concerned and engaged with the broader social movement towards the liberation of QT people in ways that directly impacts and influences our work.

While the example of deadnaming and misgendering through the federal courts was reviewed in the previous chapter, in this section, I offer another example of the ways that the broader social order has continued to disenfranchise QT people on campus: the lack of data about QT people in higher education (Denton 2020). The work towards collecting more inclusive data bout QT people is rooted in campus activism, and some QT resource professionals have worked to directly impact policies and laws to improve the experiences of QT people on campus. For example, Campus Pride's (whose mission is to create safer campuses environments for QT students) recent work (Pride 2022) lobbying the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics to improve gendered terms on federally mandated reporting tools for institutions of higher education. In a letter authored by campus pride, they "urge the [NCES] to incorporate nonbinary students into all categories of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)" (Pride 2022:1).

Importantly, the argument is not 'data for the sake of data,' but is undergirded by the general understanding that absence from data has manifest limited resources and allowed unclear, if not also discouraging retention rates and other measures of success or 'failure' (Denton 2020, Garvey 2020, Legg, Cofino and Sanlo 2020) to go unchecked. In the IPEDS letter that Campus Pride (2022) wrote, the authors argue that "[e]xpecting all colleges to collect and report data on their nonbinary students will require institutions to acknowledge this population, provide more accurate information, and recognize that gender is not a binary" (2). In this example, the authors draw on the historical materialist observation that their work to support QT people on campus has been thwarted by claims that institutions are beholden only to collect data about stakeholders as it is mandated by the state or federal government; in this case they IPEDS and the NCES only requires the reporting of sex assigned at birth in binary terms (e.g. female or

male). Imagining a queer futurity on campus through data seems to be antithetical a post-modern queer epistemology. This is because data takes a snapshot of 'the way things are' at a given moment. In this case, it stabilizes identity-based terms in ways that often struggle to accommodate nuance and fluidity.

Recognizing the dialectic between data collection and destabilizing notions of gender and sexuality terms imagines campuses and a broader social world in which QT data can be fluid. For QT resource professionals who appeared in the earlier chapters this looked like creating IT systems and other data collection processes which allow campus stakeholders to report their identities frequently in ways that can record not only identity in the moment, but identity across time. Campus Pride's letter draws out the contradictions between campuses being unmoved by altruistic efforts to queer data collection strategies, and the broader claim that data is limited by state-sanctioned data collection practices (in this case IPEDS). It seems that in order to effectively convince institutional authorities to engage in this work, QT resource professionals and other institutional actors must engage the work on campus as well as be engaged with, or at least knowledgeable of, the broader debate about QT data collection as it directly impacts this effort on campus.

From an intersectional perspective, we cannot begin to imagine futures for QT people at the margins on campus when the data about QT people is not captured in the same way that data about other social statuses are 'optionally' captured (e.g. race, ethnicity, household income, parents' education, veteran status, disability status, citizenship, etc.). This example and other examples suggest that cisheterogendered logics, through correspondence theory and hegemony, are reproduced on and off campus. Thus, isolating and addressing challenges such as data to campus risks underaddressing the impact of the broader social order on campus.

As I noted in Chapter 5, QT resource professionals often felt like they were not appropriately positioned to inform policy and practice shifts on campus, and this may well be because some of those challenges – like the data challenge described here – are not beholden only to the campus. QT resource professionals can recognize presenting issues, can make sense of the contextualized impact of state and federal laws and politics on their campuses and their influence on campus climates and microclimates, and work to deploy political acumen to inform shifts in policy and practice. When those challenges are informed beyond the halls of the institution, what role do QT resource professionals play in advancing changes? Although this is an empirical question, it seems imperative in making sense of the future of QT resource professionals' role on campus; particularly when the challenges we address are informed by policies and laws that shape the broader social order.

The primary goal of queer futurity is to imagine a 'being-with in difference' and the absence of QT people in the data seems to deny the representation of that 'being' for QT people. Like queer futurity, QT data collection will necessarily always be on the horizon. Butler (2011b)argued that queer can never "fully describe those it purports to represent" (230). In this way, our work in overhauling data collection processes for and about QT people, will fall short of its goal, but a historical materialist critique (which queer futurity attends to) suggests that failing to attend to this issue will mean the continued accrual of educational debt stacked against QT people at the margins.

Queer Futurity on Campus is Not White

> "Laura, the graduate assistant for the Office of Black Excellence (OBE), walked into the QT center looking for graduating students who had planned to participate in the upcoming cultural graduation celebrations. The QT center was nestled in between the

OBE, Veteran's Affairs, and the Women's Center. It was a vibrant room with a large abstract rainbow carpet, and littered with pamphlets, forgotten lunches, and flyers for upcoming events. After entering the Center, Laura said to me, 'My supervisor wants to know if you want the kente cloth stole or if you want the rainbow stole?' Laura was asking for my 'preference' for an identity-based stole that I could wear with my regalia at commencement. I paused for a moment, thinking before asking her if I had to choose or if there was an option that incorporated both Back and Queer identities. At this point, the Philadelphia and Progress Pride Flag were not yet on the scene. At the time, I identified as a queer person of color and I had been connected to the OBE and the QT center; surely there was a way to honor both experiences. There seemed to be a glimmer of hope in the graduation regalia catalogue that Laura had brought with her. Near the center of the catalog, the company advertised their latest iteration of capitalist inclusion: you could purchase a hybrid stole with the more traditional kente cloth on one side, and a rainbow and pink triangle on the other. Unsurprisingly, the 'more comprehensive' option was marked-up $10, as compared to the 'single-identity' stoles. I asked Laura if they could honor this request, and she said, 'I'll have to ask my supervisor.' When she returned two days later with the verdict, she looked quite uncomfortable. She said, 'I'm sorry… the director said you'll have to choose one or the other just like everyone else'." (Oliveira. Forthcoming.)

This vignette is quoted from a forthcoming chapter in an edited volume about queer praxis on campus. In that chapter, I reflected on the ways that 'intersectional praxis' are constrained by material realities. Muñoz (2019) advanced the argument that "[t]he aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning

futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness" (Muñoz 2019:1). Much of my work in this chapter and in this dissertation to make sense of queer futurity on campus has directed attention at the negative to imagine utopia. While the vignette that I describe above follows this similar pattern of negativity, it is in theorizing 'what is missing' that utopias form. It is in the imagining what being-with in difference, both symbolically and materially, that we can point towards queer futures on campus.

When I initially described my experience, I did not yet have the epistemological or theoretical insight to articulate what I *felt.* I had the ephemeral and embodied experience of knowing that something was 'wrong.' As I later wrote:

The hybrid stole that I had hoped to receive was symbolic of my experience on campus; it represented the time I split between QT center programming and events hosted by the [Office of Black Excellence]. This was not a stole on which the imagery and symbols of the different identities were blended and merged in an explosion of color and icons. No, it was as though a kente stole and rainbow stole had been cut in half and the different cloths were joined by a centrally-located hidden seam. [The split-stole] could individually appear on either side of the graduate's chest; unblended, unchanged, separated, and yet 'together.' This diluted symbol of the depth and breadth of identity perfectly characterized my time on campus and would go on to illustrate a central challenge that cultural and affinity centers navigate.

This experience illuminates the horizon of queer futures on campus, illustrating the ways in which identity-based centers, and QT centers in particular, have struggled to ground an intersectional praxis into the broad work of a center. Arguably the challenge in this contemporary example is impacted by the compounding influence of racism, among other systems of oppression, in ways that make identifying the challenges difficult to articulate, and

unsafe to voice. Imagine being a BlackAndQueer student, faculty, and/or staff who feels drawn to be engaged with both places, but are metaphysically unable to be in two places at once. Do you feel safer from racism in the QT Center, or safer from cisheteronormativity in the OBE? And for QT resource professionals, how do we foster social justice efforts that are attentive to the issue of compounding systems of oppression? These are empirical questions, but the very question themselves articulates the tension embedded into solo-identity centers, which offers a glimpse at queer of color futurity on college and university campuses. Findings from the earlier chapters of this dissertation revealed that many QT resource professionals believed it wasn't useful to frame the campus climate for QT students without commenting on the experiences of QT students with historically marginalized identities. Indeed, research has found that QT students of color (Duran and Jones 2020), QT students with Disabilities (Miller, Wynn and Webb 2019), and Poor and Working-class QT students (Brim 2020) are disparately impacted by unsupportive cultures and climates.

Theoretically, higher education scholars such as Nicolazzo (2021) have begun to imagine a trans epistemology than can locate queer futures on the horizon in ways that centers the most marginalized on campus. Specifically, Nicolazzo (2021) argues that "it is incumbent upon educators to center those who are most marginalized throughout their thinking and praxis in educational contexts. Simply put, one must unlearn the gender binary assumptions on which one's praxis may very well be based. This means radically reshifting one's mind to who education is for, how education is constructed to keep certain bodies and experiences out of the (co-)curriculum, and how unnecessary the ubiquity of gender's dispersal and enforcement is across postsecondary educational contexts" (529). Because QT identities, movements, research, and praxis have historically been manifest through white, able-bodied, and ruling class logics,

queer futures on campus can be imagined as decentering white supremacy, and recentering the most marginalized on campus through "trickle-up activism" (Spade 2015). Through trickle-up activism "any rights won would invariably 'trickle up' to those populations and peoples who have greater access, have more privilege, are less vulnerable, and face lesser amounts of threat and violence" (Nicolazzo 2021:525). Thus, the political acumen (Bazarsky et al. 2020) required to further advance change should center the philosophy of trickle-up activism to resist reifying white supremacist and ableist systems that disparately impact Black, Brown, Disabled, Poor, and Working-Class QT people. In this way, we can imagine queer futures on campus that are not white, able-bodied, or wealthy.

In terms of the practical considerations of this theorizing for QT resource professionals, and institutional authorities who are invested in institutional equity, I offer one final anecdote. At one institution where I served as a QT resource professional, the QT resource center was located approximately 30-feet away from the entrance to the Office of Black Excellence. When I would attempt to explain the experience of QT students of color, from the perspective of a QT resource professional of color, I would state: 'I guess the institutionalized space for QT students of color is the hallway between?' The significance of this thinking is that people in positions of power have institutionally (and perhaps even unintentionally) bifurcated identities in ways that have obscured the experiences of students at the margins of the margins. It suggests that more research and praxis is needed to make sense of different affinity-space structures on college and university campuses. The logics of trickle-up activism would argue that centering the most marginalized within physical affinity spaces will ultimately benefit everyone.

Revisiting Safe Spaces

I struggle to make overarching claims, because like many other theories, when decontextualized, they become overly deterministic and acritical. This includes a claim that I made in this chapter: queer futurity is not safe. I wasn't convinced of this theoretical assertion, because of an epistemological misalignment. Largely, the tension centered my theorizing that if inequities exist and queer futures result in the resolution of past inequities, that then move us towards addressing present and future inequities, then 'safe spaces' might always be necessary. The same would then be true for allies who are reified in reference to future anti-QT people, policies, and practices. For example, allies in the 1980s underlined the impact of HIV and AIDS, and in the 90s they, too, dissented to *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* and the *Defense of Marriage Act*. In 2015 allies co-signed marriage equality, and in 2020, are echoing the movements chant-de-jour; 'say gay!' If queer futurity takes the assumption that inequity exists, and also that queer futurity is always on the horizon, then the role of the ally will also, always be on the horizon as the work to ensure queer futures persists. In other words, allies were there, 'gains' were made, other inequities took precedent, and allies were still there because new problems resurfaced or reformed.

This bothered me for the better part of a month, in which I returned to *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Muñoz 2019) and was reminded of Munoz's framing of queer futurity as movement towards a "being-with in difference." He wrote, "[t]he field of utopian possibility is one in which multiple forms of belonging in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity" (Muñoz 2019:20). So after countless hours thinking and reading, it occurred me that I was deploying the antirelational strategy, germane to Edelman. Muñoz emphasized belonging in collectivity *with,* not *against.* In other words, I had pitted the role of allies and safe spaces as against anti-QT people, policies, and practices, rather than *with* QT

affirming people, places, and policies. It is from that resolution that I would suggest that allies and safe spaces are likely omnipresent in the face of ongoing inequities, but when we no longer articulate a need for these spaces and identities, we have either achieved utopia, or demise. Yet, it is more likely that the role of the ally is a product of queer futures on the horizon.

Finding Hope in the Face of Heartbreak

In this chapter, I theorized about the ways in which queer futures are denied on college and university campuses, to ensure the possibility of queer futures. Each of the sections of this chapter could become their own chapters or papers. Evidence of this struggle is embedded in my discussion and return to the conversation about safe spaces and allyship. It is my hope that these sections will become their own chapters of a book, or publications for peer-reviewed theory and practice journals.

In articulating the contradiction of allyship and safe spaces, I suggest that queer futures are possible when allyship and safe spaces are no longer necessary. Yet, it is also possible and likely that allyship and safe spaces will continue to be discursively reproduced as queer futures on the horizon. In articulating the disappointment of anti-QT policies and laws, I hold that QT resource professionals must – as is our history – continue to engage with activism and the struggle outside of campus as it is reproduced on our campuses. In decentering white queer futures, I suggest that trickle-up activism and trans epistemologies must be evoked in order to promote queer futurity in higher education.

After reading this chapter, it would be reasonable to ask the epistemological question: Does this imagine a distinct place of arrival for a queer future utopia (singular tense)? The best response is maybe not, but definitely, yes. This overarching question is made up of at least three elements: epistemology, discourse, and praxis. Attention to each seems to suggest that queer

futurity, when deployed as an activist strategy, leaves open the possibility of futures and actions.

In terms of epistemology, we began with the premise that 'inequities exist, not 'inequities exist and can be eliminated.' For example, correspondence theory in education articulates the ways that oppressive mechanisms are reformed and reshaped to reproduce systems of oppression (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Additionally social movements are not progressively linear because even as they act they are acted upon and reacted to. Consider Roe v. Wade; same-sex adoptions; state-sanctioned anti-black racism in the absence of lynching laws and sundown towns; laws limiting transgirls' and transwomens' participation in athletics; laws and practices that placed limitations on transgender access to healthcare, employment, education, housing, and – yes – restrooms. Each of these social movements has experienced backlash and each of these social movements will arguably show up on campus. Thus, as social movements on and off campus work to materialize queer futures, evidence suggests that those movements will be impeded in ways that require continued and ongoing imagining of queer futures.

Although this may appear to be a trite explanation, this question could be rooted in the limits of language and discourse. That is to ask, does the articulation of one imagining of a queer future run the risk unintentionally framing that queer future as a point of arrival? It seems that a better, albeit unconventional discursive form of writing about queer futures would be to leave open those phrases which articulate what queer futures could be. In other words, "queer futures are not safe, bounded to campus, white, and…". This is the spirit of the analysis provided in this chapter, yet this unconventional discursive form can be jarring to read.

In considering this question from a pragmatic framework, colleges and universities did not really begin to offer demarcated safe spaces until the 1990s. And the foundational literature articulates that hostility towards LGB collegians produced hostile campus climates. In this

example, the recognition that colleges are not safe for LGB students (disappoint; issue) became the mandate for safe spaces (a queer future).

Evoking visions of queer futurity is a form of consciousness raising or critical consciousness. Indeed, these terms are not unrelated. As Muñoz (2019) noted, "Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (1). And Freire (2018) claimed, critical consciousness "leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation" (36). When taken together, and applied to the context of higher education, queer futurity aides in articulating the disappointments of the here and now to produce a critical consciousness and strategies to overcome those disappointments.

These disappointments have brought about burn-out, burn-through, and heartbreak for QT resource professionals who are working to establish queer futures for the students and other stakeholders that they serve on their respective campuses. We – QT resource professionals – have felt it. Queer futurity as a mechanism of consciousness raising implores us to views those disappointments as barriers towards guaranteeing those futures. In true Marxist fashion, out of which both consciousness raising and queer futurity find a epistemological and theoretical lineage, QT resource professionals should consider directing the sum out of our political acumen (Bazarsky et al. 2020) at the tensions and contradictions identified in the space between the past, queer(ed) present, and queer futures. This form of consciousness raising and awareness raising can be the source of our hope in the face of heartbreak.

CHAPTER 7: HOPING ON CAMPUS IN THE FACE OF QT HEARBREAK

I began this dissertation project by reviewing the extant literature in the sociology of education and higher education as it related to QT people in higher education generally, and QT resource professionals specifically. While there is a burgeoning literature about QT identity development (D'Augelli 1994, Fassinger and Miller 1996, Miller, Wynn and Webb 2018, Renn and Bilodeau 2005, Rhoads 1997); the role of cultural and affinity centers at-risk discourse and safe spaces (Duran et al. 2022, Mayberry, Chenneville and Currie 2013, Rachmilovitz 2017), QT people of color (Duran 2018, Garvey et al. 2019a, Johnson and Javier 2017, Pritchard 2013, Vaccaro and Mena 2011), and the campus climate for QT people in higher education (Garvey and Rankin 2018, Patridge, Barthelemy and Rankin 2014, Pitcher 2017); less than a dozen (Bazarsky et al. 2020, Catalano and Tillapaugh 2020, Fine 2012, Nguyen et al. 2018, Pryor and Hoffman 2021, Sanlo, Rankin and Schoenberg 2002, Sanlo 2000, Self 2015, Self and Hudson 2015, Simms, Nicolazzo and Jones 2021, Tillapaugh and Catalano 2019) articles have attended to the experiences and context of QT resource professional work in higher education. In terms of queer theory, scholars have recently begun to consider the role that queer theory and a trans epistemology can have in improving the experiences of QT people in higher education, work that is often materialized through QT resource professionals. Despite this body of literature, much less attention has been paid to the contexts, experiences, motivations, challenges, failures, and successes of the higher education and student affairs professionals who manage QT resource centers in higher education, and the connection between those experiences and the impulses of neoliberalism in higher education.

Dissertation Summary

To address this gap, this research project was theoretically framed by Muñoz's (2019) notion of queer futurity, which implores a historical materialist critique of past and present disappointments in service of imagining queer futures. Methodologically, I employed constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2003, Charmaz 2016) to conduct in-depth interviews with 41 QT resource professionals working in the context of higher education across the United States. Through structural, descriptive, and axial coding (Saldaña 2021) I offered an interactional analysis of the most pressing issues that QT resource professionals are called to address in their work, and a structural analysis of the campus climates and policywork in which those pressing issues are manifest. Following those interpretive analyses, I shifted to a historical materialist critique of queer futures in higher education, through queer futurity (Muñoz 2019) to offer up theoretical and pragmatic considerations for QT resource professionals working in the context of higher education.

In Chapter 4, I set out to answer the question: I conducted an interpretive analysis of the most pressing issues that QT resource professionals face in their work. My analysis revealed that QT resource professionals were most often called to support students who had experiences deadnaming or misgendering, challenges with residential living on campus, and problems associated with IT and other data systems. Although these finds are perhaps popularly understood, the acknowledgment of this shared experience conversely imagines a higher education where these challenges are not reproduced year after year and in which QT resource professionals are able to address other challenges. Despite many QT resource professionals' awareness of this challenge, they often noted that often these issues were challenging to overcome and that it was not always clear who was responsible for those changes.

In Chapter 5, I offer a structural analysis of campus climate through the lens of the QT resource professionals who participated in this study. This chapter was guided by two questions: How do QT resource professionals understand the campus climate for QT people; and, given their roles, how, if at all, do QT resource professionals influence policies that impact the campus climate? Findings from this chapter revealed that the campus climate for QT people is better framed as microclimates (Vaccaro 2012) that are experienced disparately depending on the social location of the stakeholder, and that microclimates were felt more harshly by those QT people with multiple marginalized identities, or who traverse ultralocal settings on campus which are particularly anti-QT. In terms of policymaking, findings suggested that QT resource professionals were not often positioned to directly influence policy, despite it being framed as a core competency for this professional role (Bazarsky et al. 2020). Additionally, despite the awareness that QT students at the margins were among the least advantaged on campus, policymaking efforts did not apparently center those experiences.

Chapter 6 departed from the interactional and structural analyses offered in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Specifically, I returned to Muñoz notion of queer futurity to theorize about QT people in higher education and the role can QT resource professionals play in supporting and uplifting queer future(s) to college and university campuses. I first argued that the need for safe spaces and allyship exist in reference to anti-QT people, policies, and practices. Because of this referential relationship, I uplifted the argument that queer futures on campus are not safe, yet later held that allyship and safe spaces would likely persist in the face of amorphous educational debts that tax QT people, and students particularly at the margins. I then argued that queer futures on campus were not contained by campus, as state and federal laws and policies impede the experiences of QT people on campus. Finally, I argued that queer futures on campus are not

white, because trickle-up activism (Nicolazzo 2021, Spade 2015) implores activisms and scholars to center the most marginalized among us to benefit all of us. I concluded by noting that the challenges and contradictions offer theoretical considerations and possible pathways forward to aide QT resource professionals in co-imagining and co-materializing QT futures in higher education.

When taken together these three chapters coalesce to offer an interactional, structural, and theoretical analysis of segments of the work of QT resource professionals. They reveal the everyday challenges that QT resource professionals are called to address, the structures in which those issues are reproduced, and the hegemonic and insidious social order that serves as the foundation that stymie queer futures in higher education. As such, this project attempted to reject what Crawley (2018) called 'epistemological encampment.' I did this by attending to a broad research question and interrogating through the lens of three theoretical and epistemological traditions. It suggests that the inequitable systems within which QT resource professionals work can reproduce interactional discrimination and systemic barriers which can be critiqued, challenged, and reimagined through a lens of queer futurity.

In future research, studies written by and for trans communities of color and the ongoing research of quantitative criticalists can contribute to this extended analysis to offer additional insight and tools that QT resource professional can deploy in service of promoting queer futures on college and university campuses. A trans epistemology could analyze – within community – meaning making for trans people of color to inform trickle-up activism. Quantitative criticalists can offer insight into the trends that the broad expanses of QT people face, and strategies that institutional actors, including QT resource professionals, can adopt data-driven practices that are QT-centered and employ a harm reduction model of data collection. The divided camps that

these perspectives, and the ones I employed across this dissertation are in this way embedded into the larger co-imagination of queer futures on campus. To further stretch Muñoz's (2019) theory, this

Findings across the three chapters can be useful to other QT resource professionals who are looking to see their experiences mirrored in the literature, and who, like me, are looking for hope in the face of heartbreak (Muñoz 2019). On campuses in which our advocacy, programming, and educational aspirations do not always align with the climate, values, and commitments of the campus communities we serve, it was can helpful to know we, as I indicated in chapter 6, can use that knowledge to organize our collective work to challenge systems of inequity inside and outside of higher education. In this way understanding making sense of the impact of the labor of QT resource professionals can deploys queer futurity in service of consciousness raising. And consciousness raising is among the first steps towards a (r)evolution.

Limitations and Future Research

This research project was impeded by many limitations including conducting this research during the COVID-19 pandemic and engaging in the research process with QT resource professionals while I was/am serving as a QT resource professional. Yet, I would frame these limitations simultaneously as advantages. Although the global pandemic and other life circumstances shifted the scope of this project from what was originally framed as an institutional ethnography to a national in-depth interview study, I was able to glean a breadth of experiences rather than an intimate depth. Both projects are useful, and the interview study was the project that I could reasonably materialize given the physical constraints of the pandemic, and the time constraints given my professional capacities.

Serving as a QT resource professional while conducting this research proved to be a major limitation on my process. I worked to center the voices of my colleagues who do this work across the United States, to learn new ways of understanding and approaching my raison d'etre on campus, and to articulate the findings in ways that didn't disparage our work while offering honest accounts of the analysis I drew from our conversations. I found that this limitation materialized in the actual writing of this project, where I wanted to provide endless nuance to help readers see that it is the context, undervaluation, and positioning of our work that hinder queer futures on campus, not the work in and of itself.

I would frame myself as a junior queer theorist who is newly dabbling in the realm of epistemology and the sociology of knowledge. My early adoption of queer theoretical epistemology, and queer futurity as consciousness raising, proved to be a limitation. I found myself writing between several apparent contradictions (for example: queer theory and pragmatism) in ways that I am not convinced are fully resolved by me or others. In future theorizing, I hope to further blend the nuances of queer theory and praxis in ways that can further imagine queer futurity through Muñoz (2019), Edelman (2004), Nicolazzo (2021), and Denton (2020) and others. The drive to do this, is as Muñoz (2019) wrote, to resist activist and research strategies that "fail to touch in legible and knowable ways…"(213).

At the outset, I reaffirmed the epistemological belief that we must show up as our full selves – full of emotion – throughout the research process, and attend to it in our analysis (Hordge-Freeman 2018). To that end, it is important for me to once again state that I lost hope in the work of QT resource professionals – like me – and DEI practitioners, broadly, in higher education. I read the findings and found myself asking the timeless question: "can institutions love us?" My colleagues told me stories of tireless and thankless efforts to overcome systemic

barriers through interactional practices. I experienced their and my stories as attempting to bail a sinking ship with a fork. To extend this analogy, I located larger bailing-buckets through queer futurity and in obscured sources of power inside and outside of higher education. To that end, further analysis is needed in politics, sociology, and higher education (among other disciplines) to assess power, politics, and the social organization of higher education to create pathways to materialize queer futures through higher education.

Conclusion

If QT resource professionals are called to co-create QT affirming campus communities, alongside other campus leaders, it seems imperative that we take a more critical look at the structures in which this work is accomplished. As the findings from this study suggest, QT resource professionals are often able to produce microclimates that create instances of affirmation for some QT resource professionals, yet interactional, structural, and even theoretical challenges coalesce in ways that limit their ability to mitigate challenges that QT people, especially students, experiences on campus. This dissertation begins to account for some of those challenges – from interactions to epistemologies of work – to offer a glimpse of what queer futures on campus could look like when we employ trickle-up activism (Nicolazzo 2021, Spade 2015) in service of those futures. Identifying the tensions within this work – exposing it in policy work and practice – offers hope in the face of heartbreak.

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