

“Bumpin’ Up Against People and Their Beliefs”: Narratives of Student Affairs Administrators Creating Change for LGBTQ Students in the South

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Despite recent improvements for the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) students in higher education, marginalizing policies and climates for members of that community are still very present on our campuses. This narrative qualitative study, guided by the tempered radicals framework, explores how student affairs administrator in the southern United States have worked to effect change for LGBTQ student populations on their campuses. Grassroots activism by faculty, staff, and administrators can provide powerful mechanisms for change within higher education. Participants were interviewed to gain in-depth narratives of their experiences working within higher-education institutions to improve the college policies and practices toward LGBTQ students. Overall, participants shared inspiring and frustrating stories of how they worked to navigate institutional bureaucracies to create inclusive campus environments.

Keywords: campus activism, tempered radicals, narrative inquiry, LGBTQ activism

Over the past few decades, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community have witnessed the gradual improvement in the organizational cultures and climates of American higher education.¹ As the Gay Rights Movement emerged in the late 1960s, propelled by the events at Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969, attention to discrim-

inatory practices and policies in higher education received greater attention (Hall, 2010; McRuer, 2002). When once marginalizing de jure policies dominated colleges and universities, advocates for the LGBTQ population in higher education, both members of the community and allies, have diligently worked for the gradual reduction and elimination of such policies (Beemyn, 2003; Dilley, 2002; Githens, 2012; Rhoads, 1998). The outcomes and successes of their creating change in higher education include the creation of LGBTQ Centers (Rankin, 2005; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005), greater inclusion of LGBTQ issues in the curriculum and student affairs programming (Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997; Mayo, 2009; McRee

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¹ We use the term *LGBTQ* to represent the wide continuum of individuals who have been historically marginalized because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This abbreviated term is not all inclusive and, as educators, we understand the importance of not limiting how an individual chooses to identify. This term also represents the language used by participants in this study.

& Cooper, 1998; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005), the creation of student organizations based on LGBTQ identity (Beemyn, 2003; Dilley, 2002; Hall, 2010; McRee & Cooper, 1998), same-sex domestic partner benefits (Githens, 2012; Rhoads, 1998), and adding sexual and gender identity to nondiscrimination clauses (Githens, 2012; Rankin, 2005; Rhoads, 1998). Illustrating the continuing change in the organizational culture of colleges and universities for the LGBTQ community, in 1997 only 49.8% of college freshman agreed that same-sex couples should have the right to legally marry (Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 1997); by 2014, that number had increased to 81.5% (Eagan et al., 2014).

Despite these advances, marginalizing policies and climates still exist for LGBTQ students. While 81.5% of college freshman in 2014 believed that same-sex couples should have the right to legally marry, an increase since 1997, 18.5% of that group still did not support such a right (Eagan et al., 2014). Attempts to create more LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices are mired by anti-LGTBQ campaigns, often originating in religious fundamentalist arguments that reinforce a heterosexual hegemony (Sanabria, 2012). LGBTQ students can feel less accepted on campus compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Waldo, 1998), endure derogatory comments and harassment (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; D'Augelli, 1992; Malaney et al., 1997; Rankin, 2005, 2006), and even physical intimidation and violence (D'Augelli, 1992; Dilley, 2002). Such negative experiences can create perceptions of an exclusionary campus climate, inhibit LGBTQ students from reaching their full academic potential, and prevent them from becoming invested in their campus community (D'Augelli, 1992; Rankin, 2005, 2006). Students are not alone, as faculty and staff who identify as LGBTQ have reported similar experiences and perceptions (Messinger, 2011). Given the connection of homophobia with religious fundamentalism (Sanabria, 2012), the negative experiences and perceptions are likely more prevalent in the American South.² For example, only 44 LGBTQ resource centers exist on southern campuses and five states in the South contain no centers; only six states in the rest of the nation can make that claim (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, n.d.).

Despite the importance and growing support of advocating for change for LGBTQ students, the research tends to focus on the contributions of students for changing policies for the LGBTQ community in higher education. This is not surprising, as student activism has been instrumental in creating change in higher education (Broadhurst, 2014). Often overlooked, though, is the role faculty and staff have in not only facilitating change with students, but themselves working as change agents (Kezar, Gallant, & Lester, 2011). Grassroots activism by faculty and staff can be powerful mechanisms for change (Kezar, 2010, 2012; Kezar et al., 2011). Grounded in narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005), our study was guided by the tempered radicals framework (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) and our research question: What are the experiences of student affairs administrators working for change on college campuses in the South for LGBTQ students?

Creating Change for LGBTQ Students in Higher Education

To provide context for our study, we explored the literature on both the organizational climate for the LGBTQ community in higher education and methods of organizational change. In particular, we sought to ground our study in the use of activism, especially by faculty and staff, as a method for organizational change.

Organizational Climate for LGBTQ Students in Higher Education

Students who identified as LGBTQ, at one time, faced expulsion and counseling because of their sexual identity (Dilley, 2002). Though discriminatory policies and practices have declined over the past few decades, LGBTQ students still face exclusionary campus climates and environments and often experience higher education in more hostile ways than their heterosexual counterparts (Brown et al., 2004; McKinney, 2005;

² For this study, we utilize the definition of the American South by the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) to include Washington, D.C., and the following states: Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware.

Rankin, 2006; Waldo, 1998). LGBTQ students, due to a lack of understanding about LGBTQ issues from non-LGBTQ individuals, face unique challenges because of how they are perceived and treated as a result of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Hill, 2006; Rankin, 2005). This can impede LGBTQ students from reaching their full academic potential, create feelings of invisibility and silence within their organizations, developing both personally and professionally, or becoming invested in their campus community (D'Augelli, 1992; Hill, 2006; Rankin, 2005).

LGBTQ students are forced to endure a variety of harassment and face homoprejudiced attitudes and messages (Rankin, 2006), particularly from those from religious fundamentalist backgrounds (Sanabria, 2012). D'Augelli (1992) found that 77% of LGBTQ students had been verbally insulted, 22% had reported being chased or followed, and 99% had overheard derogatory comments. A national study by Rankin (2005) illustrates that negative climates persisted into the 21st century: 36% of LGBTQ students had experienced harassment, 20% feared for their physical safety because of sexual orientation or gender identity, 41% stated that their college or university did not address issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity, and 74% described their campuses as homophobic.

The exclusion of LGBTQ topics in the curriculum contributes to negative climates for LGBTQ students (Mayo, 2009). Even when included in the curriculum, LGBTQ topics are "a low priority compared to other diversity topics" (Jennings, 2012, p. 9). Challenges to incorporating LGBTQ topics into the curriculum can include faculty and student disinterest and discomfort, faculty lack of knowledge in the subject area, overcoming LGBTQ stereotypes, the need for administrative approval to include such topics, and opposition from university administrators and the community (Jennings, 2012; Skelton, 2000). Those LGBTQ faculty and staff who do incorporate such topics into the curriculum and programming can be labeled as having a political agenda, face exclusion from personal and professional networks, endure personal attacks from colleagues because of their outness, and encounter a "lavender ceiling" in career advancement, all further marginalizing them on campus (Anderson & Kanner,

2011; Hill, 2006; Jones & Calafell, 2012; Mayo, 2009; Messinger, 2011). To its credit, higher education has created LGBTQ centers to help students develop their identity as it relates to sexual orientation (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012), but such organizational change can be difficult, as illustrated by the fact that the vast majority of colleges and universities in the United States still lack such centers.

Activism as a Method for Organizational Change

Changing the culture and climate of an organization is no easy task. Cultures are always in a state of flux due to changes in the human composition of an environment and change is a slow and lengthy process involving a shift in an organization's values, rituals, beliefs, and traditions (Kezar, 2014). Change agents must be "familiar with the history and context of the campus where they work, particularly as it relates to understanding the underlying values that are not always apparent through examining various artifacts and symbols" (Kezar, 2014, p. 33). Despite this need to fully understand the culture of their organization, professionals need to become "cultural outsiders" to best observe and explore their institution's practices, norms, and patterns (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Kotter (1985) suggested that other skills needed to effect change in an organization include agenda setting, forming coalitions, and negotiation. In higher education, educators working for change can build coalitions through identifying key players who will help affect change and those individuals who might resist change efforts (Kezar, 2014). As one of the primary reasons change fails to occur is the lack of understanding for the reason or substance of the proposed change, educating those within an organization is essential (Kezar, 2014). Grassroots activists among faculty and staff are positioned to act as change agents: They often have an understanding of their campus culture and are in the role of "cultural outsider" as activists.

Student activism has been a prominent part of American higher education since the 18th century (Broadhurst, 2014; Rhoads, 1998) and can be an important aspect of the educational process, as it has been linked to student engagement on campus, civic engagement, and shown to have positive developmental effects on stu-

dents (Biddix, Somers, & Polman, 2009). A student activist's goal is often to influence campus administrators to enact or change a policy that they feel will benefit campus or society; they act as agents for social and organizational change (Barnett, Ropers-Huilman, & Aaron, 2008). The tactics student activists utilize to create change include sit-ins, marches, boycotts, strikes, legal action, picketing, pamphlets, hunger strikes, blocking traffic, refusal to pay fees, educational workshops, teach-ins, puppet shows, street theater, use of social media, and using student government, meetings with campus administrators, and serving on committees to work within the system (Barnett et al., 2008; Biddix et al., 2009; Bose, 2008; Corruner, 2012; Grossman, 2010; Hallward & Shaver, 2012; Maira & Sze, 2012). Students have engaged in activism over a range of causes in the 21st century, such as advocating for workers' rights and opposing sweatshops (Bose, 2008), immigration reform and the rights of undocumented students (Corruner, 2012), the rising costs of higher education (Maira & Sze, 2012), and campus divestment in businesses that support the Israeli government (Hallward & Shaver, 2012). A prevalent, and continuously growing cause, centers on LGBTQ rights.

The Gay Rights Movement developed in higher education in late 1960s as student groups emerged on campus that fought for rights of the LGBTQ community and end the systemic marginalization they faced within the government, legal system, health care system, and religion (Marine, 2011; McRuer, 2002). The Student Homophile League, formed at Columbia University in 1967, became the first LGBTQ student organization. This pioneering group formed around gay identity and sought allies with nongay students to help LGBTQ rights become a cause supported by students (Bee-myn, 2003). After Stonewall in 1969, students carried much of the burden of changing collegiate policies and practices until institutions began implementing policies and recognizing them as citizens (Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). The number of campus organizations proliferated and, by 1978, nearly 200 LGBTQ student organizations existed; that number had increased to over 2,000 by 1996 (Dilley, 2002). These student organizations fought for LGBTQ rights, such as adding sexual orientation to campus nondiscrimination clauses or domestic partner

benefits for LGBTQ staff and faculty, by distributing literature, rallies, teach-ins, marches, picketing businesses, and holding gay pride events on campus (Hall, 2010; Rhoads, 1998).

Higher education scholarship tends to focus on the campus changes that students or upper-level administrators make. Faculty and midlevel administrators, as grassroots leaders often without formal power in higher education, can be powerful agents of change (Kezar et al., 2011). Grassroots activism takes place locally, as groups or individuals within an organization, particularly those who feel marginalized, work to enact changes on campus (Grossman, 2010). These grassroots activists are drawn from various groups on campus, including faculty and staff. While some grassroots change agents utilize traditional forms of activism, such as protesting, many work for change within their organization: they work within the system (Grossman, 2010; Kezar et al., 2011; Kezar, 2012). This tactic can stem from concerns that very overt tactics would galvanize the position of those in charge, such as the campus leaders or board members (Githens, 2012; Harrison, 2014; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Kezar, Galant, and Lester (2011) noted that, as upper-level administrators are increasingly forced to focus more on increasing enrollment and revenues, "grassroots leaders on campus act as the conscience for the organization—often bringing up ethical issues. Many of the change initiatives championed by faculty and staff relate to underlying ethical dilemmas found broadly in society and campus life" (p. 131).

Faculty and staff activists are not alone in their efforts working for change on their campuses. As grassroots activists, they often work alongside students to help assist them make changes on campuses and express their voice; students have unique insights into campus climates and any actions to improve that climate should include their voice (Harrison, 2014; Quayle, 2007). By working with students, these faculty and staff activists cannot only create a coalition that is stronger together than had they worked separately, but foster student development (Kezar, 2010; Renn, 2007). Faculty and staff activists work with students to create change in a variety of ways, including mediating between administrators and students, protecting students from unjust punishments, mentoring students behind the scenes, teaching them

how to negotiate with administrators and be open to other views, promoting participation in organizations oriented toward change, and serving as advisors to student organizations (Kezar, 2010; Renn, 2007; Soria, Fink, Lepkowski, & Snyder, 2014). As campus administrators are often viewed by student activists as representatives of the greater power system of higher education, a hierarchal system that they are attempting to change, knowing they have allies and advocates among faculty and staff can help overcome feelings of disenfranchisement (Roppers-Huilmann, Carwile, & Barnett, 2005). In particular, student affairs professionals are poised to fulfill this role as some of the core purposes within the student affairs field include “advocating for students, securing their place at the table where decisions that affect them are made, and ensuring they receive the support they need to be successful” (Harrison, 2014, p. 167).

Student Affairs Administrators as Change Agents

The tempered radicals framework, developed by Meyerson and Scully (1995) and based on their empirical research of leadership in the corporate world, helps illustrate how faculty and staff can quietly bring about change for students (Kezar, 2010, 2012; Kezar et al., 2011). Tempered radicals are individuals who are both committed to their organization and a cause or ideology; as such they “act as vital sources of resistance, alternative ideas, and transformation within their organization” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586). This cause is often in opposition to the dominant organizational culture, causing tempered radicals to be loyal to both a cause and their organization. Because of this, tempered radicals play the roles of both insiders whose roles within an organization provide them with knowledge and outsiders who possess ideas that conflict with the organizational policies and practices (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). These tempered radicals, often drawn from marginalized groups, usually have little formal top-down power, but instead attempt to create change from the bottom up: grassroots activism (Kezar, 2010; Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

Tempered radicals, because they often lack formal power, create change by using incremental actions to challenge their organizational cul-

ture (Kezar, 2010, 2012; Kezar et al., 2011; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Through incremental changes, small victories can lessen larger problems and lead tempered radicals to allies, resources, and possible resistance to future changes (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). There are multiple approaches used by tempered radicals on campuses: They can quietly resist, such as decorating their offices in a way that illustrates support for a cause; use educational programs to both educate others and bring like-minded individuals together; mentoring students outside of their formal roles as employees to form coalitions; use personal threats against them to confront discriminatory policies within the organization; negotiate to find solutions to conflicts, both personal and organizational; advocate for the hiring of individuals with similar beliefs; create networks with external stakeholders, such as alumni or community leaders, to propel change; build upon small victories to achieve greater changes within the organization; and take a lead in organizing collective dialogue and action around a volatile issue on campus (Kezar, 2010, 2012; Kezar et al., 2011; Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Though initially created to explain organizational change within the corporate world, the tempered radicals framework has recently been used to provide insights into how the grassroots activism of faculty and staff has created change within higher education (Kezar, 2010, 2012; Kezar et al., 2011).

Research Design and Methods

To explore how student affairs administrators affect change on college campuses in the South for LGBTQ students, we utilized a narrative qualitative research design (Chase, 2005; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Chase (2005) described narrative inquiry as “a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (p. 656). Storytelling is a common human trait and when individuals tell stories, they are constructing their experiences and realities and their narratives explain, entertain, inform, defend, and can confirm or challenge the status quo (Chase, 2005). Though each individual’s story is unique, as they are also shaped by a number of factors for the narrators, including their organi-

zational and social memberships, researchers can look for similarities and differences across narratives and examine patterns in the stories (Bold, 2012; Chase, 2005). When used to examine stories within an organization, narrative inquiry can help us understand the nature of organizational power and resistance (Czarniawska, 2007) and “have the potential to influence policy makers so that their decisions will be more supportive of the goals and equities of social justice” (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 167).

Data Collection

We established two criteria for participation in this narrative qualitative research study. First, we sought individuals who have worked in higher education for more than 8 years, not including time as graduate assistants or completing internships. The research team was intentional in choosing this time frame as they sought to explore the generational differences between LGBTQ culture, policies, and public opinion. We felt that individuals with those years of employment would be both of sufficient age to have experienced the societal changes for the LGBTQ community over the past decade and have achieved a position/title in higher education to actually affect change themselves. In addition, participants needed to be employed, or previously been employed, at an institution of higher education located in the southern region of the United States. We did not intentionally seek out those that identified as LGBTQ; instead, we opted to recruit anyone that actively worked to improve climates and policies for the LGBTQ community in higher education, regardless of identity.

In order to draw from the largest population possible, multiple methods for recruitment were utilized. First, the research team began by e-mailing colleagues at institutions in the South asking them if they would be willing to forward our call for participants via e-mail. In addition, the research team utilized multiple higher education Listservs, social media outlets such as Facebook, contacting administrators of LGBTQ resource centers, and announcements at national conferences for professionals working in higher education and student affairs. The researchers also heavily relied on snowball sampling, a technique where existing study participants re-

cruit future participants who meet participant criteria (Creswell, 2007). Interested individuals were able to contact a member of the research team directly to ensure confidentiality. In total, eight individuals both expressed interest and met the criteria for the study (see Table 1). Their experience working in higher education ranged from 12 to 33 years and included a variety of functional areas: residence life, student conduct, fraternity and sorority life, orientation, leadership development and programs, service learning, student engagement, multicultural programs and services, and college unions. Of the eight participants, six identified as growing up in the South and three held doctoral degrees. We limited our study to only eight participants, as narrative inquiry focuses on the stories of a small number of individuals (Chase, 2005). Though saturation grew out of grounded theory, it is a useful methodological tool for narrative inquiry as it helped us more completely draw patterns across participants' stories and positioned us to better capture common experiences and grand narratives (Bold, 2012). Upon our initial analysis of the data, we felt that we had reached saturation with our eight participants and no further recruitment was needed for this initial study.

To collect the narratives of participants, we conducted a single interview as the primary method of data collection. In addition, participants completed a demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire provided the researchers with information regarding the participants' salient identities, professional work history, years working in the profession, and area of upbringing. While unstructured interviews are often utilized to conduct stories, the use of semistructured interview questions are better when trying to collect narratives to influence policy (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). The researchers used semistructured interview questions that asked participants to describe their undergraduate experiences and how that influenced their work with LGBTQ students; how they have viewed the changes in perceptions of LGBTQ individuals in their time working; the challenges they see facing LGBTQ students today and in the future; and the ways they go about advocating for LGBTQ students on their campus. The researchers had a specific list of interview questions and many of the participants

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Years of experience in education	Position	Functional area/areas of responsibility	Region raised	Institutional setting	Salient identities
Darryl	14	Dean of Students	University housing, student activities, fraternity and sorority life, student conduct	Southeast	Public	Male, African American, heterosexual
Audrey	14	Academic advisor	University housing and academic advising	Midwest	Public	Woman, Black, lesbian, activist
Sieve	19	Associate Dean of Students	Student union, facility management, service learning, fraternity and sorority life, student activities, housing and residence life	Southeast	Private	White, male, heterosexual
Ron	12	Associate Dean of Students	Residence life, student conduct, student activities, fraternity and sorority life, orientation, multicultural programs and services	Southeast	Public	Gay, White, male, activist
Gwen	25	Associate Dean of Students	Orientation, multicultural affairs, volunteer services and service learning, student conduct, fraternity and sorority life, student activities	Southeast	Public	African American, female, heterosexual, activist
Carter	33	Vice President and Dean of Students	Student conduct, fraternity and sorority life, student activities, housing and residence life, Title IX, athletics, counseling services, career services, orientation, intercultural programs	Southeast	Private	White, gay, male
Jenny	15	Associate Dean of Students	Housing and residence life, student conduct, academic advising, multicultural programs	Northeast	Public	White, heterosexual, female
Dean	25	Director of the student union	Student union, student activities and programs, campus publications, event services and management	Southeast	Public	White, gay, male

shared experiences that highlighted or enhanced the original questions. Confidentiality is important in all qualitative research, but the lower number of participants often found in narrative inquiry increases the need to ensure as much anonymity as possible (Bold, 2012). To protect participant identities, each individual was given a pseudonym and all institutional identifiers, such as the names and locations of campuses, were removed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed in multiple steps. Initially, each researcher used open coding to analyze four interviews, with two different researchers analyzing each interview (Bold, 2012). One researcher was responsible for managing the codebook, an important step on projects involving multiple researchers (Saldana, 2013). After initial individual open coding, we conferred on preliminary codes and themes. We followed Saldana's (2013) recommendation that research team members harmonize their individual coding and recoded and recategorized our initial analysis. To incorporate narrative data analysis, we used the problem-solution approach of restorying (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Restorying is an integral part of narrative analysis and involves the "process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of a story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332). As we restoried the narratives, we sought out the key elements of the plot structure, such as the characters, setting, problems, actions, and resolution. Restorying is important for this study, as placing the narratives into chronological order showed the key characters within the narratives, the problems our participants faced, and how they attempted to overcome those problems. The recoding and recategorizing yielded three broader themes within the narratives: the path participants took in becoming a change agent, how they navigated the system at their institutions, and how they worked to create inclusive communities. Due to the richness of data collected and space limitations, we only focus on the second theme in this article.

Trustworthiness

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) posited that the trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In conducting this study, the researchers utilized peer debriefing and member checking as methods for ensuring trustworthiness. After each transcription, the researcher transcribed the interview and sent it back to the participants to ensure accuracy. Points of clarification and comments could be made to clarify any misinterpretation. This helped the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the data. Furthermore, peer debriefing was utilized throughout the research study. As a research team, a collaborative and team based approach was utilized, thus allowing the opportunity for more discussions to take place. This method proved to be especially helpful during the coding process as four different researchers had the opportunity to analyze, code the data, and reconcile themes.

Bold (2012) noted that closeness to topics of the narratives might affect analysis and Merriam (2009) concurred, stating that reflexivity, or researchers understanding their positions, enhances trustworthiness. Researchers need to be conscious of how their own biases and experiences might impact their research design and interpretations. All four team members of the research team have research agendas that focus on improving conditions for marginalized groups in higher education. Additionally, each member of the research team either mentors LGBTQ students or infuses LGBTQ issues into the curriculum. Each researcher has a unique positionality in regards to the focus of this study. Christopher identifies as a heterosexual, White male who has spent his entire adult life living in the South. He has worked as a faculty member at various southern campuses since 2000. Georgianna identifies as a White, cisgendered, queer/pansexual, Catholic female. She was raised in the Deep South and has previously spent 3 years working as a student affairs professional in the South. She moved back to the South in 2012 and currently serves as a faculty member. Michael is currently a midlevel student affairs professional at an urban research university in the South. He openly identifies as a White, able-bodied gay male and has worked

in the South since 2012. His research interests surround queer identity development, career development, and first-year student success. William openly identifies as a White, able-bodied gay male. He has worked in the South since 2012 and is currently a midlevel student affairs professional at a liberal arts college in the South. His research interests include queer identity development, fraternity and sorority life outcomes, and the impact of student affairs professionals on developmental college outcomes.

Limitations

As with any research, there are a few limitations to note in this study. First, all participants in this study self-selected to participate in the study indicating that they were particularly interested and willing to speak with researchers about their experiences. There is no way to account for the ways in which those who participated might be different than individuals who did not respond to the call for participants. Furthermore, although the researchers made a concerted effort to solicit participants who served as staff for LGBTQ resource centers on college campuses, none of them expressed interest in participating in the study. While staff members for LGBTQ resources centers were thought to be information-rich individuals, we felt we were able to obtain thick description from the rich experiences the individuals who participated shared with us. Another limitation worth considering relates to the generational differences among some of the participants. Two of our participants had 30 or more years of experience in the field and each of them had substantially different experiences growing up and in the field than their younger and less experienced counterparts. Future qualitative research in this area would benefit from a focused exploration with participants of the same generational status.

Findings

The tempered radicals framework used to guide this study became an effective tool for capturing the stories of how these higher education professionals in the South worked for change on their campuses for LGBTQ individuals. Using the tempered radicals framework, we looked for evidence and examples from our

participants that both confirmed elements of the original framework (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) and discover parallels to the findings of other research that utilized the framework (Kezar, 2010, 2012; Kezar et al., 2011). We found that our participants exhibited many traits of tempered radicals, such as using education as a tool for change, creating coalitions with like-minded individuals, and using incremental changes to improve policies for LGBTQ students on their campuses. Overall, participants' stories about affecting change centered around three overarching themes including how professionals became change agents, how they navigated the system at their institutions, and how they worked to create inclusive communities. Due to space limitations, this article focuses solely on participants' stories of how they navigated the system at their institutions.

Navigating the System

In terms of navigating the system, we identified five subthemes that described the narrative accounts of these participants including dealing with a lack of knowledge from colleagues and administrators; their work to build coalitions; the influence of culture, religion, and southern mentality; their encounters with institutional barriers; and receiving resistance from the LGBTQ community on campus.

Dealing with “a true lack of knowledge”. The first theme we identified about how participants navigated the system when working for change for LGBTQ students dealt with a lack of knowledge they perceived from many of their constituent groups. Jenny clearly articulated this sentiment when comparing her experience at her current institution to a previous experience she had in the Midwest. She explained,

This [is] the first institution I've been at that I have experienced higher level administrators who demonstrate a lack of knowledge—a true lack of knowledge—and have actually demonstrated a lack of care for the inclusion of [LGBTQ] individuals. . . . I'm trying to think of the best way to say this—I have actually had an administrator say to me, “I just do not understand why transgenders cannot just stay in the closet. . . . It's much better for them and it's much safer.” . . . I would have never have heard that at [my previous institution].

Similarly, Steve saw a lack of knowledge in general about members of the LGBTQ commu-

nity as a barrier to his work navigating the change process. He explained,

The biggest [barrier] for me has always been data . . . we do not know how many LGBT students we have, as that's not a question that over the years anyone's felt comfortable asking on admissions applications or other things. We've never been able to fully identify that population. So you know I was literally running around saying this population needs help, needs our support, and people would say, 'well, how many are there.' And I could tell them how many African American students we had. I could tell them how many Jewish students we had, but I couldn't tell them how many [LGBTQ] students we had.

This lack of knowledge was further manifest by those who did not understand the need to create a safe space for one group of students. When working to create a safe space program on a former campus, Ron received pushback because of a lack of knowledge from others about the needs of LGBTQ students. The general sentiment was that safe spaces were needed for all students. Although Ron agreed, he felt his colleagues and upper-level administrators did not understand the specific needs of LGBTQ students. He explained,

We're really wanting to educate the community about LGBTQ-specific issues and how to build safe, inclusive environments for LGBTQ students. And certainly, yes, we need to have safe space programs for different groups or a larger conversation about how to create safe spaces for all students. At the time it was like no, LGBT students really need the support here and this program needs to be for them. And it needs to say it. It doesn't need to be afraid to say this is a program that supports our LGBTQ students.

“Find champions on campus”: Coalition building. Many participants in this study talked about the importance of building coalitions and identifying allies on campus to aid them in working for change for LGBTQ individuals. Ron summed up this sentiment well and stressed the need to find champions on campus to help facilitate working for change:

I think [it's] really helpful to find those people on campus who are champions for . . . inclusion in general, but specifically LGBTQ students. . . . [Our Vice President for Student Life] really supports the work we do for LGBTQ students. She made a charge to all of our campus life staff that by the end of this year that everyone had been safe outlet trained. . . . I think it's finding [people] like that . . . or our director of athletics, who does identify in the LGBTQ spectrum; she made a commitment to offer the training to all of our coaches. So I think sometimes I do the work by trying to find champions on campus for this and work with

them to find opportunities to get the message of equality out there on campus.

Gwen shared a similar sentiment by recognizing the importance of building coalitions so that she was no longer working alone as an individual voice. She explained,

I've learned that allies are very important for me in order for me to be successful in doin' the work . . . some of my difficulties have been trying to . . . educate on an issue as an individual. I have to surround myself with colleagues who are well versed in the area. Faculty members have been key for me.

Gwen was not alone in finding campus champions in faculty members. Half of the participants in this study mentioned faculty members as key members in their efforts to build a coalition of allies across campus. Some participants highlighted the challenges they faced in finding champions on campus. Audrey stressed the need for marginalized groups to work together, particularly in the South:

There's also a lot of racism . . . and segregation still in the South. And so trying to get different groups to work together has been very challenging because people have tunnel vision . . . they only can see their issue and they do not see the connections of how we're all being mistreated. And if we work together, we might be able to make it better.

Audrey's statement above is illustrative of a tension in the data between needing to find allies to effect change for LGBTQ individuals on campus and encountering individuals with “tunnel vision” who are focused only on the ways in which they are personally marginalized. At first glance this tension may be surprising, however, against the backdrop of the infamous history of racism and mistreatment of people of color in the Deep South, this tension makes sense.

“Bumpin' up against people and their beliefs”: Culture, religion, and southern mentality. Every participant in this study commented on the uniqueness of working for change for LGBTQ students in the southern United States. Steve talked about the cultural barriers of being part of the LGBTQ community and his observations on how southern mentality has shifted some over the last 25 years. He explained,

Growing up [southern] . . . if I had come home and said mom, I'm gay, I do not think that would have gone well. . . . I think nowadays that is much more of a

reality for families to deal with—not that all of them deal with it well. . . . In the past, [being LGBTQ] was more of a subculture; now it is actually part of the culture. . . . I do not know that everyone understands it, but I think at a minimum, everyone [in the South] knows that it exists and that this is reality. Whether you like it or not, this is a reality and it is a population. I think back in early '90s, it was very much a subculture and now it is part of who we are and what we are.

Similarly, Audrey spoke in great detail about the cultural barriers in the South, particularly those related to religion and values. She said,

The difficulties largely surround religion . . . the use of religion for hateful purposes, we have to stop that. . . . It's important for me . . . in my work . . . to always let LGBT people know you have a right to have a relationship with God just like anybody else. Nobody can lock you out of a relationship with God. . . . It's a lot of that kind of work . . . bumpin' up against people and their religious beliefs that say or somebody has told them that LGBT people aren't worthy.

Although most of the participants were able to clearly articulate ways in which they had “bumped up against” southern culture and values, Carter expressed his gratitude that being exposed to antigay rhetoric helped him understand the climate in which he was working. He explained,

I have been at enough alumni gatherings wearing a coat and tie and those alumni didn't know anything about me; I've heard some *pretty* uncomfortable antigay and lesbian statements and I was grateful to hear them because it tells me what I'm working within and how I've got to respond to protect my college and at the same time provide an environment where LGBTQ youth can flourish. . . . I have been in this field long enough to know how to balance both ends of that see-saw in a way that I allow my students to feel they're heard and nurtured and at the same time to make certain that I have donors and alums who feel like they are also part of [this college] and that we haven't changed so much they cannot relate to the college and give money anymore.

Carter went on to talk about his efforts to be an activist for LGBTQ individuals in a way that is tempered and with the overarching priorities of the college in mind. His sentiments truly capture the complex organizational, political, and cultural nuances of working for change as a student affairs administrator in higher education in the southern United States:

I put the cause of the college before my own activism. I have to. We depend on trustee and alumni donor dollars. If we take too many steps to . . . be pronounced on any issue of controversy . . . [that] would cause older [individuals in the state] to be uncomfortable—

and they do not get angry; they simply walk away. At this time in the college's development we cannot afford for people to walk away. . . . I do my best to create events with the leadership of students and faculty and staff in such a way that the trustees do not have to make themselves visible. All we ask [the Board of Trustees] to do is be quietly supportive and they are.

Carter's experiences truly highlight the intense personal and professional dilemmas faced by tempered radicals who identify as a member of the LGBTQ community. On one hand, Carter expresses a moral imperative to treat all students with fairness and dignity and he has made a particular commitment to champion the needs of LGBTQ identified students. On the other hand, Carter places a high priority on his loyalty to the institution and is careful not to draw attention to the cause (whatever the cause according to Carter) or his own identity as a gay man for fear of losing the support of students, alumni, or other donors or even worse for fear of losing his job.

Darryl offered insight into the cultural barriers for LGBTQ students in the South:

We believe in the South, and I do say we because I was born here and was a product of it. . . . We believe that everything we think is right . . . nothing else can be right and everyone else is wrong if they think [differently]. It is just the mentality of the South . . . And yes, you can say that [LGBTQ issues and equity] are systemic . . . nationally or globally, but I think that [anti-LGBTQ mentality] is much more deeply rooted in the South than it is in other places. . . . As a result, [students are] constantly fighting against individuals who feel as passionate, who feel as strongly about an issue, [but] on the opposite side.

Overall, participants were keenly aware of social and cultural values in their community and saw them as being part of the fabric of living and working in the South. In other words, participants accepted the social, cultural, and religious values as a part of everyday life and even though they recognized these values as a barrier to working for change for LGBTQ individuals, they found ways to work within this value system to effect change on campus.

“We got stonewalled at every level”: Institutional barriers. All eight participants in this study mentioned being faced with institutional barriers as they sought to improve their campus communities for LGBTQ students. Participants' stories of working through and within institutional barriers illustrated the resilience that this group of student affairs professionals

shared. Some professionals, such as Ron, talked about barriers to advertising events sponsored by the LGBTQ student organization on his campus. He explained,

[At my previous institution], they had never had a drag show before . . . the student organization was working on that and was going to put it on . . . before [the show] we got pushback from the vice president . . . we wanted to post it on the website and have it on the events calendar . . . there was nervousness about us advertising that and how the alums would react to it. And so I got a group [of] students who were more vocal about it to set up a meeting with the vice president . . . the students were very vocal and explained why this was an important event to them and why it was important that it is advertised and the institution shows a commitment that we're okay with advertising for it . . . he thought about it . . . [and made] a concession . . . it wouldn't be advertised as largely as they would have wanted it to be, but it certainly got to still be on the website, just maybe not in the exact spot that they wanted it.

Audrey, however, discussed engaging in higher risk activism through her efforts to move same sex partner benefits forward on her campus. Ironically, she expressed her frustration working for benefits equality on her campus by using terminology that made reference to a pivotal historical moment for LGBTQ activism: "We got 'stonewalled' at every level. People just, you know, sayin' it will never happen and that battle had been goin' on for a long time." Unfortunately, Audrey and her colleagues are still working to get same sex partner benefits; they were ultimately told to stop making requests by senior administration at the institution. It is important to note that the risk associated with working to affect change for partner benefits at the institutional level likely influenced the slowness of progress in this area. In other words, when senior level administrators communicated messages to participants like Audrey requesting a stop on partner benefit requests, Audrey and her colleagues stopped.

Although a few participants spoke about tangible ways they faced barriers, others expressed subtler barriers that were harder to articulate. For example, Gwen explained,

there was not a direct statement made to me or a letter sent to me where I was getting push back, there was just this knowledge that this is new work in our community. We have to be careful how we do things. I had to proceed with intentionality and with a plan in place.

Gwen's experience being intentional and learning to work within institutional barriers was echoed by others. In Gwen's case, she worked within institutional barriers by identifying campus and community allies and through slow and small changes to her office's programming at the start. Jenny, in particular, spoke about her experiences supervising new student affairs professionals. She said,

They come in and they see this need and they want to enact change. But it's not within their sphere of responsibility to do so . . . they become very frustrated by that and it ultimately impacts the quality of work they end up doing at the end of the day, because they are so frustrated. . . . I think recognizing the small wins that you've got becomes really critical. That doesn't mean you do not push the envelope or push as far as you can, but I think recognizing those things for yourself becomes extremely important so that you do not get burnt out along the way, because you're no good for your students if that happens.

Jenny went on to talk about the importance of using data-driven arguments to work within the system to effect change for LGBTQ students. She explained,

I think that one of the things that sometimes we forget to do as professionals on all levels, is that we forget that we understand in our heads why something needs to happen, but we have got to make sure that we articulate that effectively to others.

It became clear that many of the participants in this study developed political savvy in order to navigate the complicated institutional barriers they faced while maintaining a commitment to improving the campus experience for LGBTQ students.

"I had to build trust": Receiving resistance or acceptance from the LGBTQ community. Beyond the regional, cultural, and institutional barriers participants faced, many also talked about their experiences gaining acceptance from the LGBTQ community on their campuses. Perhaps not surprisingly, participants who identified as part of the LGBTQ community noted that this aspect of their identity helped them gain acceptance. Ron's experience illustrated this idea:

my identity shows up in the work I do . . . because I've, you know, grown up and I've lived this experience, it allows me to have the perspective to be able to really challenge things that I do not think are being inclusive for our community, and I think sometimes it gives me access more to students be-

cause they want to talk to someone who identifies in the LGBTQ spectrum.

Overall, four participants in this study identified as a member of the LGBTQ community and each of them talked about how their LGBTQ identity helped them gain acceptance with LGBTQ students and in many ways legitimized the work they were doing to effect change on campus.

In contrast, however, Gwen expressed a need to prove herself and to earn the trust of LGBTQ individuals on campus. She explained,

I did not feel like the LGBTQ community trusted me to do LGBTQ work. I had to build trust with the community, as well as create a process by which our campus could begin to understand the need to—that this is a marginalized community. . . . I learned that our marginalized communities, understandably so, had trust issues for individuals coming in and doing work on behalf of their community.

In total, four participants in this study did not identify as a member of the LGBTQ community, but did identify themselves as an ally. Two of these four talked about the importance of building trust among LGBTQ students on their campus.

Overall, the tempered radicals framework offered a useful guide with which to explore participants' stories about working for change for LGBTQ students. The participants in this study exhibited great resilience as they learned to navigate the system at their institution through building coalitions, working within the cultural and values structure of the South, navigated institutional barriers, gained trust from the LGBTQ community on campus, and countered the lack of knowledge about LGBTQ students from colleagues and other administrators.

Discussion and Implications

The tempered radicals framework used to guide this study became an effective tool for capturing the stories of how student affairs professionals in the South worked for change on their campuses for LGBTQ students. In particular, the participants not only spoke about the challenges they faced as student affairs administrators engaging in grassroots activism to fight against marginalizing policies for LGBTQ students, but offered strategies for other professionals navigating similar institutional and com-

munity contexts. By working within their organizational structures to change policies and practices, our participants demonstrated the applicability of the tempered radicals framework (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) in explaining how student affairs administrators can and do work as change agents.

Our participants' stories can serve as a primer for professionals who both seek positions in the South and who are also interested in working for equitable policies and practices for LGBTQ students. Many participants talked about the nature of the South. Despite national improvements for the LGBTQ community, the South has been slower to embrace change. For example, following the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's recent statement encouraging university members to use gender-neutral pronouns for individuals who prefer pronouns outside of a gender binary, several state lawmakers reacted with "outrage and a promise to action" over the institution's attempt at an inclusive practice (Tamburin, 2015, para 1). Incidents such as this reaffirm the importance of a continued and persistent focus on working to create inclusive campus communities for LGBTQ students in the South. Understanding the unique culture of the South and learning how to work within and through that culture rather than to ignore it or aggressively combat it was essential for our participants' efforts to create organizational change. Such actions also confirm their roles as tempered radicals, who use moderate, incremental tactics to challenge and change dominant cultures (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Through these incremental changes, each small victory can lessen the larger problem and, in doing so, the gradual reduction of cultural barriers in the South can lessen the power differentials between advocates for LGBTQ students and their opponents (Grossman, 2010).

For all of our participants, working for change still came back to recognizing a need for further education on their campuses. Many participants observed what they identified as a "true lack of knowledge" by their colleagues and administrators. One role higher education professionals who want to affect change for LGBTQ students need to play is that of educator for their colleagues who may exhibit a lack of education on terminology, history, and the importance of creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students. Other research on tempered radicals

within higher education have shown that educational programs are a viable method not only to bring about organizational change, but also to facilitate bringing together like-minded individuals and allies (Kezar et al., 2011). Given that upper-level administrators often do not oversee day-to-day classroom practices or student organizations' internal activities (Kezar, 2010), these can be great places for higher education professionals to educate students about LGBTQ issues by integrating inclusive language and practices into the curricular and cocurricular. Student affairs administrators need to create more programs and initiatives to educate their campus about the needs of the LGBTQ community. Such programs would slowly help change the institutional culture and likely improve campus climates for LGBTQ students.

Student affairs administrators can play a pivotal role in actively building coalitions with various stakeholders, including outside organizations, alumni or community leaders, and those within their organization that have similar views and outlooks (Barnett et al., 2008; Kezar et al., 2011; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Ropers-Huilman et al., 2005). In particular, finding LGBTQ allies is essential when building coalitions. Meyerson and Scully (1995) noted that the small victories that tempered radicals achieve when making incremental changes can lead to the discovery of allies for a particular cause. Such findings are corroborated by the research on tempered radicals in higher education (Kezar, 2010; Kezar et al., 2011) and by our participants, who stressed the need for building coalitions with allies to secure greater change for LGBTQ students.

As part of this coalition building, our participants expressed the need to target LGBTQ student groups to help gain their endorsement for the changes they were trying to make. While many of our participants did involve LGBTQ students when enacting change, that inclusion was not always sought at the initiation of an attempt to change policy nor was it found in every stage of the grassroots activism. Meyerson and Scully (1995) found that tempered radicals, if not fully accepted by a group they are advocating for, members of that group, such as LGBTQ individuals, can provide resistance to changes initiated by tempered radicals. From the very onset of any

attempt to change policies for LGBTQ students, tempered radicals should form coalitions with LGBTQ students. Such inclusion would help build trust, overcome any resistance from the LGBTQ community, and strengthen attempts at changing policies. LGBTQ student voices need to be expressed and by including them in the coalitions, student affairs administrators can form a more unified front to create change within their organization (Kezar, 2010). Additionally, it will help those students learn to negotiate the systems themselves and help develop them as change agents (Kezar et al., 2011).

By building coalitions, student affairs administrators can identify key players that might not only support their initiatives, but also discover those who may resist their efforts (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Our participants spoke about the institutional barriers that they faced in creating change for students. Upper administrators and grassroots activists can have dissimilar interests and top-down leaders can resist change if they feel their power is threatened (Kezar, 2012). Even those upper-level administrators who are not hostile toward LGBTQ students can sometimes make decisions without little direct knowledge of how those decisions can impact students (Harrison, 2014). One way to overcome this barrier is for tempered radicals to work within shared governance. Kezar, Gallant, and Lester (2011) found that becoming members of key campus committees, particular hiring committees, could assist in creating coalitions of like-minded individuals: those committed to social justice for LGBTQ students. As with many midlevel student affairs professionals, seven of our eight participants occupied campus positions that allowed some control over the hiring of new staff. Hiring staff with similar goals and beliefs can "create a critical mass or network of individuals with a commitment and passion for the issues on which grassroots leaders hope to make change" (Kezar et al., 2011, p. 143). This would not only help strengthen coalitions and create key players that will support initiatives, but also slowly change the institutional culture.

Overall, participants' narratives about their experiences working for change for LGBTQ students in the South illustrated the complex, nuanced, and deeply entrenched structures at play in higher education in the southern United

States. As Audrey discussed, working for change for LGBTQ students in the South meant plenty of occasions of “bumpin’ up against people and their beliefs.” Moving forward, it is paramount that educators who find themselves in a position as tempered radicals in the South learn to navigate and negotiate the religious, cultural, and ideological systems they are likely to experience while working for change.

Conclusions

The stories shared by participants illustrate how student affairs professionals can advocate for LGBTQ students in the South. The distinctiveness of the southern mentality and the uniqueness of working as a student affairs administrator in the South meant that our participants often felt stretched as professionals as they engaged in activism. Advocating for students in a region of the nation with a strong cultural heritage prompted our participants to learn to work within a system that has been, historically, slower to change. Characteristic of tempered radicals within other organizations, our participants were forced to develop strategies to affect change and push for the eradication of policies that marginalize LGBTQ students (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Regardless of the political climate, LGBTQ students need advocates and supportive environments. By engaging in grassroots activism and sharing their stories, our participants can serve as exemplars for those who currently working as change agents in any geographic region. That they achieved success in the South, an area that continues to exhibit resistance to improving policies for the LGBTQ community, is a testament that tempered radicals can instill change within their organizations.

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