

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE IMPACT OF CISHETERONORMATIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON THE
EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQIA+ FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CRITICAL
QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

SAGE A. MAULDIN

Norman, Oklahoma

2023

THE IMPACT OF CISHETERONORMATIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON THE
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QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Jenny Sperling, Chair

Dr. Natalie Youngbull

Dr. Shamari Reid

Dr. Marilyn Byrd

ABSTRACT

Scholarly attention on LGBTQIA+ faculty has primarily centered challenges, such as microaggressions and harassment, that they face at the interpersonal level. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that LGBTQIA+ faculty's marginalized experiences extend beyond interpersonal interactions. Policies and practices also contribute to their marginalization. The purpose of this critical qualitative inquiry was to seek a deeper understanding of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Employing queer theory as the analytical framework, this project foregrounds the role of policies and practices in upholding cisheteronormativity. This study was guided by two research questions: (1) How do LGBTQIA+ faculty make meaning of how policies and practices impact their experience in higher education? (2) How do LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction at their institution? Data collected through interviews was analyzed with Dedoose. Following data analysis, three themes emerged, revealing that cisheteronormative policies and practices silence the identities of LGBTQIA+ faculty, expose LGBTQIA+ faculty to risks and consequences when they are visible about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and differentially treat LGBTQIA+ faculty for not conforming to traditional gender roles. It was also found that LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction by employing various coping and resistance strategies. The findings not only offer a deeper insight into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. They also provide valuable recommendations for practice and future research. The study does not merely provide an in-depth exploration of an important phenomenon; it serves as a call to action for higher education institutions to prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Keywords: Higher education policy, LGBTQIA+ faculty, Queer theory

DEDICATION

To LGBTQIA+ faculty

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have achieved this accomplishment without the enduring love and support of my community.

To Dr. Sperling—you are a gift to the College of Education, OU, Norman, and Oklahoma. Thank you for choosing us. Thank you also for chairing my dissertation (you transformed it, and I am proud of it) and improving my writing and critical thinking skills.

To Dr. Byrd—you once told me to carry out research that makes me come alive. I did just that with this dissertation. Thank you for being my academic mother.

To Dr. Reid—your sense of humor, encouraging messages, and support carried me to the finish line. Thank you for everything.

To Dr. Youngbull—thank you for your kindness, support, and generosity. They sustained me.

To Dr. Edwards—thank you for guiding me through the qualifying exam and residency plan. You have been so good to me.

To Dr. Haslerig—thank you for guiding me through the general exam and prospectus. You made an otherwise difficult undertaking manageable and enjoyable. I am grateful to you.

To my participants—we laughed, cried, and dreamed together. You are my source of strength and my why. Thank you for entrusting me with your experiences.

To Stefanie Heinrich—thank you for being my copyeditor. You saved me.

To Mike Jenkins and Lincoln Torrey—thank you for keeping me on track since I started the program. You are outstanding.

To Drs. Henderson and Long—thank you for all you have done for me. Regardless of where I am or what I am doing, the mission of human relations will always be central to my life's work.

To Tosca Lee (AKA Autie Tosca)—thank you for reminding me to be the light. Your love, wisdom, and friendship matter greatly to me.

To Nicole Cunningham—thank you for helping me navigate the IRB process. I speak for many when I say that you are the Queen of OU IRB.

To Rev. Kelley Becker—thank you for teaching me that community work, advocacy, and fighting for justice are all prayerful acts. This dissertation is my prayer for a world that is free from oppression and genocide.

To Rex (AKA T-Rex, Remy Poo, Remy Boy), my fur baby—thank you for being my hiking and cuddle buddy and reminding me that I am never too busy for playing fetch or hide and seek.

To my therapist, Rachel—thank you for teaching me meditation techniques. They kept me grounded and clear-minded throughout this entire process.

To my parents—thank you for cheering me on, supporting me, and motivating me to get PhiniseD. I know I have made you proud.

To my late brother and grandparents—I know you are celebrating with me in some way, even though you are no longer here in the physical world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On October 5th, 2016, the University of Oklahoma's Gender and Equality Center hosted a candlelight vigil called Keep the Pulse. The vigil was held in memory of the 49 people who were senselessly murdered during "Latin Night" at Pulse, a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on June 12th of that same year. In the long history of violence targeting LGBTQIA+ people, especially racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ individuals, the Orlando Pulse shooting stands out as the most tragic episode (Valcore & Buckler, 2020).

I attended the vigil. Amid a crowd of approximately one hundred individuals, I held a candle and listened to more than 20 people, including university administrators, give statements on the mass shooting. While many of the comments were moving, one statement provided by a university administrator caused me to reflect deeply on higher education institutions (HEIs), both past and present. The administrator said,

It really helps me understand ... why I do what I do ... And that's really to give the opportunities for our community — not so much the individuals who shared their stories, but our broader community, to begin to understand what it means when you are identified as underrepresented on this campus. And what our work is, be it the community, is to make sure that everybody feels like they have their fit here and like they have their place here. (Bauman, 2016, n.p.)

As I listened to their statement, I thought about how a university administrator in the early days of the 20th century would have never shared that they wanted LGBTQIA+ people to feel like they had a place on campus. After all, HEIs are historically hostile places for LGBTQIA+ people

(Graves, 2018). Back then, the notion of fostering an inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ people was almost inconceivable.

Fast forward to the 21st century, university administrators have become adept at giving statements that promote so-called diversity and inclusion. However, beneath these seemingly progressive declarations lies a somber truth: HEIs continue to uphold “imperialist white-supremacist capitalistic patriarchal” logic (hooks, 2000, p. 118). This paradox reveals how deeply ingrained these structural inequities are, persisting even as institutions claim to embrace diversity. Yet, even in this contemporary landscape, we witness politicians shamefully target LGBTQIA+ educators and students (Giroux, 2022)—all because they have dared to embrace authenticity over conformity. This violent political agenda reflects the persistence of oppressive tactics, even in supposedly enlightened times.

In the upcoming sections, I connect historical contexts to the heart of the present research project, which explores the impact of cisheteronormative¹ policies and practices on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. To drive this inquiry, I revisit the 2020 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) case—an epochal moment in the ongoing struggle against discrimination rooted in sexual orientation and gender identity. Subsequently, I explore the historical purging of LGBTQIA+ faculty from HEIs, shedding light on the role of institutional policies and practices entrenched in cisheteronormativity.

It is important to draw a clear distinction between policies and practices in higher education, recognizing them as distinct mechanisms that impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Within this project, I employ Birnbaum's (1989) framework to describe policies as formalized guidelines and regulations to ensure adherence to relevant laws, ethical norms, the

¹ Vasquez (2022) explained that cisheteronormativity denotes the systemic normalization of bodies, identities, and subjectivities that conform to expectations of cisgender and heterosexual norms.

university's mission, and/or the mitigation of institutional risks. Moreover, I turn to the insights provided by Kezar and Eckel (2002) to define practices as tangible, action-oriented strategies and/or procedures undertaken by HEIs to realize their objectives while navigating established policies. In this work, I distinguish between policies and practices, rather than using them interchangeably. However, I often group them together when discussing how they impact LGBTQIA+ faculty. Making this distinction allowed me to uncover the impact of cisheteronormative policies and practices on LGBTQIA+ faculty.

The Bostock v. Clayton County Case

When Gerald Bostock joined a recreational softball league during his employment in child welfare services for Clayton County, Georgia, he endured violent homophobic verbal attacks about his sexual orientation. Paralleling this, he was also confronted with allegations of mismanaging public funds, which were seemingly employed as a smokescreen to conceal the actual reason for his dismissal: his sexual orientation. Despite consistently receiving high-performance evaluations throughout his 20-year tenure in child welfare services, he was fired. Clayton County said the reason for firing Bostock was “conduct unbecoming of a county employee” (Valenti, 2021, p. 8). Bostock argued that the derogatory remarks and the accusation of mismanaging public funds were wielded as instruments to justify his termination, while the actual underlying reason was his sexual orientation. As a result, Bostock filed a lawsuit, alleging that his employer took discriminatory action against his sexual orientation. After a district court ruled that Bostock was not protected from discrimination under Title VII, his case was combined with *Altitude Express, Inc. v. Zarda* (n.d.), a similar case regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation, and *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (n.d.), a case regarding discrimination based on gender identity.

In June 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court reached a 6 to 3 ruling on their combined case, establishing that discriminating against individuals due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity constitutes a violation of Title VII's prohibition of sex-based discrimination. The Court explained that discrimination rooted in homophobia or transphobia inherently involves discrimination based on sex; the occurrence of the former is intrinsically linked to the latter (*Bostock v. Clayton County*, n.d.). In other words, if an employer fires a person because their gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth but would not have done the same to a person because their gender identity does align with their assigned sex at birth, the employer has taken discriminatory action against the person's gender identity and violated Title VII's prohibition of discrimination because of sex.

Since 2020, the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) ruling has had significant ramifications for colleges and universities in the United States. For instance, LGBTQIA+ faculty at public HEIs have gained enhanced legal avenues to address discrimination based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) ruling has raised considerations regarding the distinction between public HEIs and non-affirming religious universities (NARUs). NARUs enforce specific policies that view minoritized sexual and gender identities as deviant (Craig et al., 2017) and teach that minoritized sexual and gender identities are sinful (Kay & Wolff, 2022). In instances where these religiously tied doctrinal beliefs conflict with the acceptance or employment of LGBTQIA+ faculty, these institutions may find safeguards under religious freedom laws (Kay & Wolff, 2022). This emphasizes the complexity that the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) ruling introduces when considering its effects on both public HEIs and NARUs.

While the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) ruling undeniably acts as a protective shield against discrimination rooted in sexual orientation and gender identity, its influence has not prevented public HEIs and NARUs from upholding heterosexuality and gender conformity through policies and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006 Matthyse, 2017; Seal, 2019). The significance of the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) ruling becomes even more pronounced when examining the history of LGBTQIA+ faculty who were targeted, pursued, and purged at a time when they had no legal safeguards whatsoever.

Tracing the Purge of LGBTQIA+ Faculty from HEIs

In the 1940s, LGBTQIA+ faculty grappled with discriminatory policies that left an enduring impact on their lives, particularly through systematic purging from HEIs. These policies, deeply rooted in cisheteronormativity, held considerable sway over the behavior and identity of LGBTQIA+ faculty. A prime example was the moral clause policy at Baylor University, a NARU. This policy functioned as a coercive mechanism, pressuring LGBTQIA+ faculty to maintain silence regarding their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Dilley, 2013). Per policy, LGBTQIA+ faculty who either made their sexual orientation and/or gender identity known or were suspected of being LGBTQIA+, were dismissed.

In institutions like Baylor University, policies served as mechanisms for enforcing heterosexuality and gender conformity as the sole and “normative” sexual orientation and gender identity. Deviation from these societal norms carried harsh penalties, leading to expulsion from the academic community (Graves, 2018). The looming specter of punitive measures fostered an environment rife with fear and concealment. LGBTQIA+ faculty felt compelled to conceal their true selves, dreading potential professional consequences (Graves, 2015). Consequently, these

policies subjected LGBTQIA+ faculty to harsh and hostile environments marked not only by discrimination but also by violence and harm (Loughery, 1998).

Further, specific instances at various public HEIs, such as the University of Missouri (Dilley, 2002) and the University of Texas at Austin (Moretta, 2022), make evident that LGBTQIA+ faculty were not insulated from the harms of institutional purges rooted in cisheteronormativity. In numerous cases, university administrators employed these policies as tools to uphold societal norms, such as heterosexuality and gender conformity, resulting in harsh measures taken to expel LGBTQIA+ faculty. LGBTQIA+ faculty, even if more discreet about their identities, were still haunted by the looming threat of discovery and subsequent dismissal (Blount, 2006; Hutcheson & Kidder, 2011).

Moreover, while the intentional erasure of LGBTQIA+ faculty in the 1940s was terrible, it only intensified after the Second World War. In 1953, after a few years of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy spreading a false conspiracy theory that LGBTQIA+ people were a national security threat (Johnson, 2023), the rooting out of LGBTQIA+ employees in the federal workforce became policy when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed Executive Order 10450, titled “Security Requirements for Government Employees,” into law (Owens, 2020). As a result, thousands of LGBTQIA+ people were interrogated and bullied and then quietly terminated due to perceived deviant homosexual behavior or affiliating with individuals suspected of said behavior (Dilley, 2002). Although the focus of Executive Order 10450 was on purging LGBTQIA+ people from the federal workforce, the (un)intended consequences of said order were widespread:

The objective and accompanying tactics trickled down to state and local government. The 1950s landscape quickly became one of police raids, undercover surveillance, witch

hunts, employment purges, forced hospitalizations, and physical attacks against LGBTQ people. (Graves, 2018, p. 26)

LGBTQIA+ faculty were not immune to the White House's executive branch codifying cisheteronormativity into law. University administrators based the removal of LGBTQIA+ faculty on the same criteria the U.S. Government used to purge LGBTQIA+ employees from the federal workforce (Johnson, 2000), thus revealing the influence society has on higher education (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). These expulsions occurred at many universities, most notably at the University of Kansas (Bailey, 1999), Florida State University (Sears, 1997), the University of Michigan (Bailey, 1999), and the University of Miami (D'Emilio, 1992). In certain instances, university administrators, who were "unbendingly committed to 'straightening' all homosexuals" (Hechinger & Hechinger, 1978, p. 38), chose to implement a treatment policy as an alternative to expulsion, as exemplified by the American Psychiatric Association's designation of homosexuality as a mental illness in 1953. Although framed as a form of support, this mandatory treatment, often taking the form of conversion therapy, a medically discredited practice that attempts to change a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Mauldin & Churchill, *in press*), perpetuated discrimination and silenced LGBTQIA+ identities. LGBTQIA+ faculty found themselves subjected to these treatments, offering a clear illustration of how deeply entrenched cisheteronormativity had become in HEIs.

The policies of expulsion and dehumanization of conversion therapy enacted on LGBTQIA+ faculty during the 1950s were just a fraction of universities' attempts to exercise control over LGBTQIA+ faculty. Seven decades later, this history of LGBTQIA+ subjugation in higher education continues to impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Although there have been notable strides, the persistence of cisheteronormativity is evident in current higher

education policies and practices, thus perpetuating the lasting impact of this historical oppression. Given this, it necessitates a thorough investigation, which serves as the primary purpose of this study.

Purpose of the Study

Scholarly attention has been directed towards the marginalized experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty (Lange et al., 2019; Nadal, 2019; Renn, 2017). Specifically, studies have primarily centered the interpersonal challenges LGBTQIA+ faculty encounter, which include heterosexist microaggressions² (Vacarro et al., 2019), cissexist microaggressions³ (McKenzie, 2020; Pitcher, 2017), discrimination (Nadal, 2019), verbal harassment (Barnett et al., 2013), exclusion (Cech et al., 2021), and lack of full affirmation in the departments in which they work (Linley & Nguyen, 2015). However, it is important to acknowledge that the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ faculty goes beyond mere interpersonal interactions. Policies and practices in higher education also contribute to their marginalization, leaving them vulnerable to the clutches of cisheteronormativity and cultivating a sense of being “unwelcome[d] guests in somebody else’s house” (y Blasco, 2020, p. 16).⁴ The purpose of this study seeks a deeper understanding of how cisheteronormative policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Employing the framework of queer theory, a powerful analytic that resists normative regimes (Davies & Joy, 2023), this project foregrounds the roles of higher education as institutional forces upholding cisheteronormativity.

² Heterosexist microaggressions refer to subtle, often unconscious, behaviors, attitudes, and comments that reinforce assumptions that heterosexuality is the norm and imply that queerness is inferior or abnormal (Sue, 2010).

³ Cissexist microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional, actions or comments that communicate prejudiced beliefs and biases against transgender or gender-diverse individuals (Nordmarken, 2014).

⁴ I also acknowledge the intricate interplay between the interpersonal and institutional levels. While it may appear that a distinct demarcation exists between these levels, it is far more convoluted. The dehumanizing encounters experienced by LGBTQIA+ faculty are housed in higher education policies and practices (Lincoln & Stanley, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Queer theory traces its origins back to 1991, when the famed film theorist Teresa de Lauretis coined it. In that year, de Lauretis edited a special issue of *Differences*, published by Duke University Press, titled “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Studies.” Within the introduction to the issue, de Lauretis (1991) made the case that it was high time to shift away from the conventional view of homosexuality as the mere counterpart to heterosexuality. Instead, they urged for an entirely new perspective, one that would cast homosexuality as an independent concept, untethered from the normative constraints of heterosexuality. This moment marked the “birth” of queer theory, an analytical framework characterized by a dual focus: first, the acknowledgment of the labor involved in constructing discourse; and second, the critical examination of our own discourses to unveil hidden gaps and biases (de Lauretis, 1991). Central to this was the challenge it posed to fixed social identity distinctions that had long defined social identities, such as male/female, masculine/feminine, homosexual/heterosexual. Queer theory aimed to destabilize these rigid categories in favor of a more fluid understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity (de Lauretis, 1991). Though, it is important to recognize that the concept that sexual orientation and gender identity are fluid is far from novel; it finds precedent in the practices of over 140 Indigenous societies that have recognized third and fourth genders for centuries (Picq & Tikuna, 2019). Yet, the imposition of a “binary imagination” (Picq & Tikuna, 2019, p. 61) by colonizers, who sought to suppress the fluidity of sexual orientation and gender identity in Indigenous communities, set the stage for Western society’s entrenched adherence to fixed distinctions (Picq & Tikuna, 2019; Roscoe, 1998). This adherence has resulted in contemporary debates surrounding issues like gay marriage (Leonard, 2022) and same-sex attraction (Fernández & Parsa, 2022). As such, it becomes increasingly vital to engage

in conversations about how institutions, especially higher education, contribute to perpetuating these rigid divides.

Within this project, I think through queer theory, particularly cisheteronormativity, which is a combination of heteronormativity and cisnormativity⁵. Heteronormativity is understood as a social regulatory system predicated on the belief in two distinct sexes, male and female. Within this construct, heterosexuality—denoting romantic and sexual attraction between individuals of opposite sexes—is upheld as the norm, the preferred mode to which all social relations should adhere. As Berlant and Warner (1998) write,

a whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this private sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just in sex—is what we call heteronormativity. (p. 554)

Heteronormativity, then, is understood as a pervasive and powerful societal construct that shapes not only our understanding of sexual relationships but also influences broader social relations and structures.

Simultaneously, cisnormativity enforces alignment between a person's sex, sexual orientation, gender roles, and gender identity (Browne, 2019). As such, if a person is assigned male or female at birth based on their biology, cisnormativity expects them to perform traits and characteristics associated with masculinity or femininity and align their gender identity with their assigned sex at birth (Habarth, 2015; Jacobsen, 2022). Both heteronormativity and cisnormativity combine to construct a binary understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality.

⁵ Acknowledging the distinct power dynamics of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, I refrain from conflating these terms throughout this research project, except when a particular context calls for it. In such cases, I use the concept cisheteronormativity, which combines heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

The power inherent in cisheteronormativity as discourse is that it operationalizes heterosexuality and gender conformity as the only intelligible (and expected) modes in politics, institutions, cultures, and social relations. As a system, cisheteronormativity privileges ideas, behaviors, choices, practices, beliefs, and relationships that align with heterosexuality and gender conformity, and renders unintelligible or invisible anything that deviates from them (Graves, 2019). Given this, cisheteronormativity forces LGBTQIA+ people into the closet, a space that facilitates the compulsory order of sex, gender, or desire (Butler, 1990).

Seal (2019) argues that sexual orientation and gender identity should not be seen as inherent, binary traits. Instead, they emphasize that the idea of “normality” is a social construct designed to advance the interests of the dominant society, with the primary goal being the normalization of heterosexuality and gender conformity. They also provide a deeper insight by explaining that cisheteronormativity is a particular manifestation of heterosexuality and gender conformity deliberately fashioned to serve the interests of the dominant societal group that benefits from the societal norms and structures that uphold and normalize heterosexuality and gender conformity. In this research, I adopt Seal's (2019) interpretation to investigate how HEIs entrench heterosexuality and gender conformity into policies and practices, which impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Building on the work of scholars who have contributed valuable insights into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty, my research places emphasis on the role of policies and practices in perpetuating heterosexuality and gender conformity as the status quo in higher education. By doing so, my work broadens the focus from individual experiences to the institutional structures underpinning cisheteronormative systems like HEIs. This approach highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing the institutional aspects of LGBTQIA+ faculty experiences in higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this qualitative study:

1. How do LGBTQIA+ faculty make meaning of how policies and practices impact their experiences in higher education?
2. How do LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction⁶ at their institution?

Significance of the Study

The present project carries broad scholarly significance, serving as a catalyst for unraveling the mechanisms through which policies and practices uphold cisheteronormativity, and subsequently, the implications this has for LGBTQIA+ faculty. Centering LGBTQIA+ faculty and how their experiences in higher education are impacted by cisheteronormative policies and practices represents a resounding call to action. Therefore, this project offers several important and timely contributions. First, it aims to expand the body of knowledge surrounding the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty who encounter discrimination and oppression in HEIs. Second, it seeks to play a role in dismantling the culture of cisheteronormativity that persists in higher education. Lastly, the project advocates for humanizing changes to higher education. I hope the project will prompt readers to think more intentionally about how policies and practices uphold cisheteronormativity and how this impacts the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty.

LGBTQIA+ faculty, like other minoritized faculty, should have the freedom to be their authentic

⁶ “Points of friction” refer to situations where LGBTQIA+ faculty respond or object to negative impacts resulting from cisheteronormative policies and practices. In this work, “harm” means normalized inequity while “violence” denotes targeted attacks. Therefore, when I describe cisheteronormative policies as “harmful,” this means they assume all faculty identify as heterosexual and cisgender. For example, providing health insurance that excludes transgender care or planning social events around heterosexual relationship models. These create disparities. In contrast, when I describe cisheteronormative practices as “violent,” this signifies they enable deliberate discrimination or failure to act. For instance, not investigating threats or harassment against LGBTQIA+ faculty would be a violent practice by allowing bigotry to persist. Similarly, barring promotion of openly LGBTQIA+ faculty would be a violent policy by attacking their very being and intentionally impeding their careers.

selves at work without being differentially treated based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Summary

Chapter 1 explored the historical repercussions of cisheteronormative policies on LGBTQIA+ faculty. While the 2020 *Bostock v. Clayton County* (n.d.) ruling marked an important milestone in progress, this chapter unearthed the enduring historical oppression experienced by LGBTQIA+ faculty. It painted a picture of the use of expulsion, conversion therapy, and discrimination as tools to harm LGBTQIA+ faculty. Despite forward progress, this chapter emphasized that cisheteronormative policies remain a contemporary challenge in higher education. The chapter also presented the purpose of the study and queer theory as the analytical framework. It also provided research questions and discussed the significance of the study.

Overview of Chapters

The following chapter provides an overview of the existing literature regarding the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. This review shines a light on the violence and harm resulting from cisheteronormative expectations on LGBTQIA+ faculty. Highlighted are how cisheteronormative expectations impact the career and well-being of LGBTQIA+ faculty and lead LGBTQIA+ faculty to feel isolated and like they do not belong. Also spotlighted are the experiences of transgender faculty and racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty. The review concludes by emphasizing the shared experiences with oppression across marginalized groups, highlighting how systems of oppression are mutually constitutive.

Chapter 3 delves into the research design, providing a comprehensive rationale for the chosen methodology. It also highlights my positionality as a researcher, wherein I acknowledge potential biases associated with my perspective. The chapter also offers insights into participant

recruitment strategies and the measures taken to ensure research trustworthiness. It concludes by outlining the research methodology, encompassing participant engagement, recruitment methods, and the data analysis plan, which incorporates both inductive and deductive approaches.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the research findings, with a focus on three overarching themes that illuminate the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. The first theme elucidates how heteronormative policies and practices compel LGBTQIA+ faculty to conceal their sexual orientation. The second theme explores how LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate the process of coming out in response to cisheteronormative policies and practices. The third theme highlights how cisheteronormative policies and practices demand LGBTQIA+ faculty to conform to the gender binary. The chapter also explores how LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction produced by cisheteronormative policies and practices. Based on the findings, LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction by employing various coping and resistance strategies, including self-advocating and hiding to protect their careers.

The final chapter discusses the findings and their significance. It also provides recommendations for practice, emphasizing the need for improving discrimination, harassment, and bias reporting processes, establishing name and gender marker change clinics, partnerships with healthcare institutions that provide humanizing care, and providing benefits that include gender-affirming surgical procedures. It also presents recommendations for research, including the need for climate studies that focus on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. It concludes with a call to action for HEIs to prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I explore the violence and harm that LGBTQIA+ faculty often experience because of cisheteronormative expectations. These expectations, which are rooted in the ideology that heterosexuality and gender conformity are normative, not only impact the well-being and career paths of LGBTQIA+ faculty but also contribute to their feelings of isolation and exclusion. Drawing from a diverse body of research, I explore the various dimensions of this harm, including the impact on well-being and career prospects and experiences of isolation and lack of belongingness faced by LGBTQIA+ faculty. I also highlight the experiences of transgender faculty and racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty, shedding light on the unique challenges they encounter. I also draw parallels between the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty and those of other marginalized groups in higher education to emphasize that all marginalized faculty struggle with various forms of violence and harm and interconnected systems of discrimination.

Cisheteronormative Expectations on LGBTQIA+ Faculty

Though limited research has been conducted on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty (Fabbi, 2021), cisheteronormative expectations in higher education have been identified as significant contributors to the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ faculty. Scholarly discourse reveals that these expectations perpetuate environments wherein LGBTQIA+ faculty are continuously harmed and dehumanized.

Well-Being and Career

Several research studies have highlighted the impact of cisheteronormative expectations on the well-being and careers of LGBTQIA+ faculty (Davies & Neustifter, 2021; Prock et al., 2019). Davies and Neustifter's (2021) explored the harmful repercussions of cisheteronormative

expectations, employing a queer life narratives approach. By centering their own experiences as queer faculty, they scrutinized and challenged cisheteronormative expectations that regulate and surveil queer faculty. They argued that cisheteronormativity polices queer faculty by enforcing a politics of respectability, pressuring queer faculty to abandon aspects of who they are to conform to normative standards of appearance and behavior. They asserted that failure to adhere to these normative standards results in the exclusion of queer faculty, illustrating how heteroprofessionalism, which demands a standardized professional identity devoid of same-sex desire or gender non-conformity, not only renders queer faculty invisible but also functions as a controlling mechanism by which all queer faculty are continuously harmed.

In a similar vein, Prock et al.'s (2019) qualitative study explored the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ social work faculty who chose to be open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in academic settings. This decision often exposed them to professional risks. The study, involving 17 LGBTQIA+ social work faculty, revealed that while faculty acknowledged these risks, they also felt a sense of duty towards their students, colleagues, and the social work field itself, motivating them to be openly proud of their identities. This research suggests that the decision to be visible about one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity is, on the one hand, not without consequences but, on the other, can be seen as an act of resistance against societal norms. However, Barnett et al.'s (2013) grounded theory study examined how 21 LGBTQIA+ faculty felt about their professional development in terms of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The study highlighted how LGBTQIA+ faculty feared disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity would negatively impact their current or future positions. Speaking directly to this, one of the respondents feared the impact of disclosure on their student evaluations. At the same time, another expressed discomfort for fear of their promotion and

tenure case being affected. The fear of negative student evaluations and its potential impact on their positions speaks to the vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ faculty when they are open about their identities. Similarly, the fear of their promotion and tenure case being affected suggests that the consequences of visibility extend to long-term career prospects. Like Barnett et al. (2013), Vaccaro's (2021) ethnographic study of campus microclimates revealed that LGBTQIA+ faculty members' perceptions, attitudes, and emotions about campus climate were significantly shaped by the environment of their academic department, with some participants sharing instances of receiving queerphobic comments from students upon discovering their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. One participant shared that students were homophobic towards her when they learned that she is a lesbian. Another participant shared that when students with queerphobic attitudes became aware of their queer identity, they submitted negative evaluations about their teaching. The instances of receiving queerphobic comments and experiencing homophobia or negative evaluations upon disclosure highlight the potential negative consequences of visibility. When LGBTQIA+ faculty openly share their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, they may face discrimination, prejudice, or hostility from some students, which can impact their well-being and career. Like these findings, research conducted by Patridge et al. (2014) explored the influences affecting the academic environment for LGBQ faculty in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Their research revealed a grave statistic: LGBQ faculty members who openly identify as such were 14 times more likely to experience discomfort in their professional environment. Their study also pointed out that LGBQ faculty who encountered exclusionary behavior from their peers had a higher likelihood of contemplating leaving their academic positions. The research highlights the detrimental impact

of a non-inclusive environment on the sense of comfort and retention of openly identifying LGBTQ faculty, particularly within STEM disciplines.

Further, Garvey and Rankin's (2018) study examined LGBTQIA+ faculty members' intent to leave their institutions, linking their intentions with the cisheteronormative campus climate. The research highlights that a campus climate entrenched in cisheteronormative expectations, significantly increases the likelihood of LGBTQIA+ faculty seeking employment elsewhere. One participant in the study highlighted the impact of heteronormativity on their academic journey. The disclosure of their sexual orientation precipitated a shift in their status and opportunities. Examples of exclusion from committee work under the pretext of objectivity and students exploiting their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as grounds for complaints exemplify how cisheteronormativity fosters an environment where LGBTQIA+ faculty, despite occupying positions of authority, frequently contend with feelings of insecurity and lack of protection (Garvey & Rankin, 2018). The participant's experience highlights the power dynamics at play, where visibility does not necessarily guarantee protection or a sense of security in the face of cisheteronormative expectations.

Garvey and Rankin's (2018) study also highlighted the disconcerting sentiment among some participants that their institutions would not shield them if a student raised a complaint about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This perception is further exacerbated by the conservative nature of academic settings, where it is often challenging for LGBTQIA+ faculty to be open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The participants' narratives revealed a "don't ask, don't tell" (Garvey & Rankin, 2018, p. 74) atmosphere on campuses. To give an example, a participant shared their reluctance to display personal photos, such as those of their partners, on their desks due to the fear of prompting inquiries, which

emphasizes the pervasive and inhibiting presence of cisheteronormativity in academic environments. These experiences highlight the fear among some LGBTQIA+ faculty that visibility, even in personal spaces, becomes restricted due to the fear of judgment or discrimination. The experiences mentioned reveal the violence and harm of cisheteronormative expectations. Cisheteronormativity imposes a normative framework that excludes and discriminates against LGBTQIA+ individuals. These experiences highlight the emotional and psychological harm that results from these expectations.

Isolation and Lack of Belonginess

Other studies have revealed the pervasive impact of cisheteronormativity in higher education, leading to isolation and a sense of exclusion experienced by LGBTQIA+ faculty. This isolation and lack of belongingness manifest in distinct ways. Dirks' (2016) study, for example, highlighted the unique challenges encountered by transgender faculty. One central issue was the lack of understanding among institutional leaders regarding the experiences of transgender faculty. This deficiency in comprehension perpetuated cisnormative practices that further marginalized transgender faculty, contributing to the perpetuation of genderism⁷. Participants in Dirks' (2016) study articulated their struggle with the absence of gender-inclusive spaces, compounding feelings of isolation among transgender faculty seeking support and recognition for their gender identity. The lack of such spaces not only hindered their ability to engage authentically but also restricted their access to resources. Moreover, participants raised concerns about the challenges faced by underfunded and understaffed LGBTQIA+ Resource Centers. These centers are typically viewed as crucial mechanisms for educating the broader campus

⁷ Genderism is a set of beliefs rooted in a binary view of gender, which results in bias and discrimination against those who do not conform to traditional gender roles and is embedded within policies, practices, and norms (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014).

community and providing support to transgender faculty, staff, and students. However, their ability to effectively fulfill their mission is hampered by severe resource limitations. Importantly, these resource constraints highlighted a critical issue that Iosefo (2016) highlighted. It is essential to recognize that even when LGBTQIA+ Resource Centers are established on college campuses, their mere presence may give the impression of a warm and welcoming campus environment. However, the reality remains that LGBTQIA+ faculty continue to grapple with discrimination, revealing the disconnect between the institutional image and the actual experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty.

Dozier (2015) revealed the isolating experiences of lesbian and gay faculty, as participants recounted instances of exclusion from social gatherings and departmental events, attributing this exclusion to their sexual orientation. This exclusionary treatment not only hampered their ability to forge meaningful connections within their academic settings but also contributed to feelings of marginalization and isolation. Moreover, academic isolation emerged as another dimension of their experience. In this context, some participants reported a distinct lack of recognition for their professional accomplishments, particularly within LGBTQIA+-related fields. This lack of acknowledgment not only undermined their contributions but also exacerbated feelings of isolation and invisibility.

Transgender Faculty Experiences

The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality, shed light on the extent of job-related discrimination faced by transgender individuals (James et al., 2016). This discrimination encompassed job loss, promotion denials, and initial hiring rejections due to their gender identity. A significant number of respondents also reported incidents of verbal harassment, sexual assault, or physical attacks in their workplaces, all linked

to their gender identity (James et al., 2016). The challenges faced by transgender faculty extended to various areas: restroom requirements that did not align with their gender identity (Beemyn, 2005), instances of being addressed using incorrect pronouns or gender references (Pitcher, 2017), the pressure to present as a gender that did not align with their gender identity (Catalano, 2015), and the nonconsensual sharing of private information about their gender identity (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). These challenges often forced transgender faculty to hide their gender identity or leave their positions and institutions altogether.

Other studies have explored the experiences of transgender faculty with cissexist microaggressions, influenced by a culture of cisnormativity. Pitcher (2017) employed minority stress theory to better understand the experiences of ten transgender faculty, whose experiences with minority stress ranged from tokenization and misgendering to misrecognition. One of the participants described feeling “like an unwelcomed, (mis)recognized guest within someone else’s academy, bathroom, workshop, or meeting” (Pitcher, 2017, p. 699). This feeling relates to visibility in that their gender identity and the gender identity of other transgender faculty is often rendered invisible within a culture that presumes gender conformity as the norm. This study also highlights the risks and consequences when transgender faculty choose to be visible about their gender identity. McKenzie’s (2020) qualitative, multiple case study, which drew on minority stress theory, aimed to better understand the experiences of transgender faculty with cissexist microaggressions from various HEIs in the United States. Like Pitcher (2017), McKenzie’s (2020) study found that transgender faculty had negative experiences due to their gender identity. These experiences ranged from being misgendered and struggling with coming out to others, such as colleagues, students, and administrators, to being assaulted by cissexist microaggressions. This demonstrates how their visibility placed their gender identity at risk from

cisnormativity. One participant, a genderqueer faculty, shared their involvement in a hiring committee where a human resources representative asserted that the committee lacked “diversity” because they presumed all the committee members were cisgender women. Their narrative points to an issue of visibility—that transgender, non-binary, and genderqueer identities are frequently misunderstood. It also demonstrates how a remark from the human resources representative revealed the subtle erasure of their non-binary identity and emphasizes the common occurrence of such microaggressions and the assumption that gender conformity is the norm in HEIs. In addition, even well-intentioned advocacy for diversity can reinforce cisnormativity if it fails to incorporate visibility for transgender, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals.

Another participant shared their struggle with coming out as transgender in their academic field. Their experience revealed the growing pressure to disclose their identity in scholarly work, even though safety concerns persisted. This dilemma highlighted the evolving dynamics of LGBTQIA+ representation in academia. They shared, “I think it's becoming more and more difficult to conduct research in this area and not be openly trans... I've started to feel more pressure to do that” (McKenzie, 2020, p. 80). Their observation highlights the importance of problematizing the pressure of visibility rather than taking it as wholly progressive. When material and psychological risks remain, visibility should be a choice, not an obligation. Their observation also highlights how cisnormativity makes visibility dangerous for transgender faculty, limiting their agency in self-representation. Their observation also prompts questions about the ethics and politics of visibility. Who benefits from marginalized visibility? How can institutions foster truly safe visibility? Queer theory helps problematize visibility and coming out processes by showing visibility is not universally safe or accessible and questions assumed links

between visibility, authenticity, and pride. One can be proud and authentic while not visible if unsafe (Rosiek, 2016). Collectively, the experiences of these participants speak directly to the potency of cisnormativity and its influence on campus culture, and how that influence directly impacts the experiences of transgender faculty. It also highlights how the presence of cisnormative expectations plays a direct role in creating hostile climates, adversely affecting the experiences of transgender faculty.

Racially Minoritized LGBTQIA+ Faculty Experiences

It is worth noting that there is a significant dearth of research addressing the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty in predominately white spaces (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017; Cyrus, 2017). Despite this, scholars like Nadal (2019) appropriately highlighted the white-centric nature of existing studies on LGBTQIA+ faculty. Consequently, these studies are ill-suited for comprehending or validating the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty. A limited body of research that specifically explores the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty unveils various forms of violence and harm, including tokenization (Morales-Díaz, 2014; Wright-Mair, 2023), being denied tenure (Osei-Kofi, 2012), navigating multiple systems of oppression (Misawa, 2015; Wright-Mair, 2023), discriminatory policies (D'Augelli, 1992), isolation (Stanley, 2006), and being told that their research lacks rigor and objectivity (Gardner et al., 2017).

Misawa's (2015) study, for example, revealed the risks and vulnerability that accompany visibility for faculty holding multiple marginalized identities. One respondent's narrative served as an illustration of the challenges faced by African American LGBTQIA+ faculty. In their account, their early years within academia were marred by a sense of vulnerability, being constantly singled out, and characterized by a metaphorical "target on [their] back" (p. 9). Their

experience highlights how visibility exponentially heightens vulnerability for individuals navigating multiple interlocking systems of oppression. Their experience also reveals how visibility is fraught with risk and demands tremendous mental, emotional, and physical labor to endure increased exposure to racism and queerphobia.

Morales-Díaz's (2014) study also revealed that the stress of being out harms racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty. This study's findings indicated that racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty struggle to come out due to the genuine possibility that they may face additional challenges, including tokenization, marginalization, and surveillance for making their sexual orientation and/or gender identity visible. These potential social ills compound the oppressive experiences they already encounter due to their race, especially when dealing with individuals in positions of authority.

Wright-Mair's (2023) study, like Morales-Díaz's (2014), highlighted the tokenization that racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty experience. All the participants in the study shared that they were tokenized because of their identities. Consequently, the extra labor placed on them resulted in exhaustion and not being rewarded proportionally for their work. This highlights how visibility does not automatically equal meaningful inclusion. The participants also reported that they must navigate multiple forms of oppression, such as racism and queerphobia. A participant shared their experience of how racism and queerphobia persisted within institutional settings, where white, cisgender, heterosexual colleagues had predetermined expectations for racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty based on their racial, sexual, and/or gender identity, regardless of the focus of their work. This indicates that racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty feel compelled to be visible representatives, but this demand is never placed on dominant groups. Another participant discussed the pressure they faced to juggle different work responsibilities,

including being asked to teach diversity and inclusion courses solely because of their racial, sexual, and/or gender identity, which made them feel tokenized by their white, cisgender, heterosexual colleagues. This shows that visibility alone is not enough for equity. HEIs must move beyond numerical representation and work to disrupt systemic inequalities.

Moreover, scholars have focused on how racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty experience isolation. Scharrón-Del Río's (2018) study, for instance, highlighted how racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty encountered resistance in their scholarship and academic environments, leading to a pervasive feeling of exclusion. Similarly, Thakur's (2021) study, which explored the dynamics of insider/outsider identities, revealed how faculty bearing multiple marginalized identities—e.g., Black, queer, disabled—often found themselves unseen and undervalued in academic fields and environments due to the prioritization of their insider identities, such as their academic qualifications (e.g., their Ph.D.).

Collectively, these studies emphasize the pervasive issue of violence and harm experienced by racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty, leading to exhaustion and unrewarded additional labor, while also highlighting the interplay of racism and queerphobia in HEIs.

Shared Experiences Across Marginalized Groups

The presence of violent and dehumanizing academic environments is by no means exclusive to LGBTQIA+ faculty. It is important to acknowledge that marginalized faculty across various identity dimensions contend with many challenges in higher education. This phenomenon is not limited to one group; it is a systemic issue that transcends individual identities. For example, Black faculty have become increasingly vocal in addressing systemic racism (Barber et al., 2020). Their advocacy efforts shed light on the pervasive inequalities and injustices faced by Black faculty. Simultaneously, they navigate complex power dynamics,

particularly concerning interactions with white students (Thomas, 2020). These challenges highlight the urgency of addressing racial disparities in higher education.

Similarly, white women faculty find themselves confronting issues related to sexism, particularly in athletics departments or programs (Taylor et al., 2018). Despite advancements in gender equity, gender-based discrimination and biases persist, impacting the professional experiences of these faculty. Women of color scholars, on the other hand, experience both sexism and racism simultaneously due to their gender and race. These dual forms of discrimination affect their overall well-being, sense of belonging, and opportunities for success (Turner & González, 2011), necessitating comprehensive support.

Faculty with disabilities also confront and actively resist ableist notions of performance. Even when accommodations are granted, they often encounter a lack of institutional support (Cepeda, 2021). The need for accessibility and inclusion within academic settings remains a pressing issue, and faculty members with disabilities play a significant role in advocating for change. Amid these collective experiences of faculty with diverse marginalized identities, a common thread emerges. As bell hooks (2000) articulates, there exists an overarching system that perpetuates discrimination and inequity. This system is characterized by “imperialist white-supremacist capitalistic patriarchal” logic (p. 118), which negatively impacts faculty across various marginalized identities. As such, it is imperative for HEIs to proactively address these systemic issues not in isolation from one another but simultaneously.

Summary

This chapter reveals the extensive violence and harm inflicted on LGBTQIA+ faculty due to cisheteronormative expectations. These expectations, which stem from the ideologies that heterosexuality and gender conformity are normative, impact the well-being, career trajectories,

and overall sense of inclusion of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Through a comprehensive review of research, this chapter illuminates the nature of this harm, encompassing its toll on well-being and professional advancement and the sense of isolation and exclusion experienced and endured by LGBTQIA+ faculty. It also highlights the challenges faced by transgender faculty and racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty, drawing attention to the imperative to recognize their unique challenges. Drawing parallels to the struggles of other marginalized groups in higher education, this chapter highlights the overlapping nature of systems of oppression and the need for HEIs to confront them simultaneously.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To achieve the research aims of the study, I adopted a critical qualitative research methodology, specifically focused on exploring people's lived experiences – where they interact with, and are impacted by, the broader cultural context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Like any research methodology, qualitative research holds certain foundational beliefs. Merriam (1998) pointed out a key assumption inherent to qualitative research: the recognition of reality as holistic, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. This stands in contrast to the notion of a singular, unchanging, and objectively measurable phenomenon commonly associated with quantitative research (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994).

My Philosophical Orientation

Given my limited understanding of how cisheteronormative policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty, I adopted a social constructivist epistemological stance instead of a positivist one. While I am personally part of the LGBTQIA+ community, an instructor, and have felt the impact of heteronormative practices, I recognized that the participants I interviewed had different experiences from mine. Thus, I refrained from imposing my own “Truth” upon them. As emphasized by Crotty (1998), this is crucial: “[...] meaning is not an outcome of the interplay between subject and object, but rather, it is imposed by the subject on the object” (p. 9). This highlights the idea that meaning is not a product of the interaction between a perceiver and an external reality but is instead constructed and projected onto the external world by the perceiver. Considering my unfamiliarity with the ways cisheteronormative policies and practices impact LGBTQIA+ faculty experiences, a social constructivist epistemological stance aligned most appropriately. As noted by Crotty (1998), this stance acknowledges that “...meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this understanding of

knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even about the same phenomenon” (p. 9). Consequently, I was attuned to the likelihood of the varying experiences LGBTQIA+ faculty have with cisheteronormative policies and practices at their respective institutions. This is where the utility of a social constructivist epistemological stance came to the fore—enabling the nuances of experience to become known.

Further, such a stance mitigates researcher bias. According to Crotty (1998), a social constructivist epistemological stance maintains that there is not an objective truth awaiting revelation. Rather, truth comes to fruition through a person’s engagement with the realities that surround them. I was conscious of the significance attached to how LGBTQIA+ faculty experience cisheteronormative policies and practices and how LGBTQIA+ faculty come to construct their meanings as valid. This understanding also helped me realize that, through this study, I was not trying to arrive at a singular “Truth,” but rather, to unearth multiple truths. It is also clear that the ways LGBTQIA+ faculty interact with the world and attribute to their experiences have explanatory value. Thus, the adoption of a social constructivist epistemological stance not only precluded me from imposing my “Truth” onto participants and their experiences, but it also mandated a continuous interrogation of the way I have forged meaning regarding the phenomenon at the heart of the study. Such a stance ensured that the data analysis process remained untainted by my own subjective engagement with the realities of my world.

The critical paradigm adopted in this study aligns with the emancipatory function of knowledge, seeking to address issues of social justice and marginalization. By grounding the research in critical methodology, the study aimed to interrogate underlying values, expose hegemony and injustice, and challenge conventional social structures (Scotland, 2012).

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

To assist me with interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions, I used critical qualitative inquiry. Denzin (2017) described critical qualitative inquiry as closely linked to the pursuit of social justice within a transformative framework. This approach challenges existing inequalities, poverty, oppression, and injustice and is deeply grounded in a human rights perspective, demanding social justice. The paradigm also promotes the utilization of qualitative research for social justice aims, making such research available for and applicable to public education, policy and practice formulation, and community empowerment (Denzin, 2017).

In this project, critical discourse served as a methodological tool to scrutinize the nuanced manifestations of power, privilege, and oppression within the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Emphasis was placed on the interplay between power, privilege, and oppression and the identities of LGBTQIA+ faculty. This analytical process illuminated the reality that the inequities confronted by LGBTQIA+ faculty are not random occurrences but deliberate and embedded within the structural fabric of HEIs (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Given this, critical qualitative inquiry was chosen over other qualitative paradigms for its social justice agenda, which focuses on addressing social injustices by centering the voices and experiences of the most marginalized groups in society (Denzin, 2018). Critical qualitative inquiry calls on researchers to commit—and remain committed—to revealing, critiquing, and opposing social injustices that impact people's everyday lives (Denzin, 2017). To answer this call, researchers must center the voices of marginalized individuals. They must also uncover and highlight areas within existing frameworks where change is both possible and necessary. Their inquiry should also seek to understand and actively contribute to societal transformation, pushing tirelessly for equity and inclusion. Finally, they should leverage their investigative efforts to

recommend and advocate for humane adjustments to policies and practices (Harding & Norberg, 2005). In the present study, I centered the voices of LGBTQIA+ faculty—a marginalized group—to understand how cisheteronormative policies and practices impact their experiences, how they understand any friction(s) between their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and their institution, and how they navigate points of friction produced by cisheteronormative policies and practices at their respective institutions.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How do LGBTQIA+ faculty make meaning of how policies and practices impact their experience in higher education?
2. How do LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction at their institution?

Method

Population and Recruitment

The study's sampling criteria included 10 individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, are at least 18 years of age, and are faculty at HEIs.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Sexuality	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Region
Sarah	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	White	Midwest
Flax	Gay	Cisgender man	Latino	Midwest
Bryan	Gay	Cisgender man	White	Midwest
Angela	Bisexual	Cisgender woman	White	Midwest
Leah	Queer	Non-trans woman	White	Southwest

Jade	Attracted to females/female presenting persons	Non-binary	White	Southwest
Joseph	Queer	Transgender man	White	Northeast
James	Gay	Cisgender man	Asian	Midwest
Cyril	Gay	Cisgender man	White	Midwest
Elena	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	White	Midwest

For recruitment, I employed both snowball sampling (Naderifar et al., 2017) and criterion sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015). In applying this to my study, I asked participants to refer the study to LGBTQIA+ faculty they know who meet the sampling criteria. The goal here was to include as large and diverse a group of participants as possible (Creswell, 2007), which allowed me to “document diverse variations and identify important common patterns” (Creswell, 2007, p. 127).

Criterion sampling was used for selecting participants who provided information-rich data based on a predetermined set of criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sandelowski, 2000). Therefore, I recruited participants based on the previously stated sampling criteria. Then, to gauge participants’ fit in the study, they filled out a 3-minute Qualtrics survey (Appendix B) consisting of questions and statements regarding the previously stated criteria. I chose Qualtrics for a few reasons. First, it came at no cost. Moreover, its user-friendly interface simplified the survey creation process, enabling smoother navigation for both me and the participants. It also allowed potential participants to pause their survey progress and resume later. Also, it offered a diverse array of questions and survey templates, which gave me flexibility in survey design. Lastly, it served as an effective recruitment tool, aiding me in identifying eligible participants for the study.

Invitation

I shared a tweet and a LinkedIn post inviting LGBTQIA+ faculty to participate (Appendix F). In the tweet and LinkedIn post, I asked potential participants if they would be interested in participating in the study. The tweet and LinkedIn post also contained the study's purpose, the interview's duration, and a link to the Qualtrics survey. Embedded in the Qualtrics survey was the consent form (Appendix A), which was written using comprehensible language and included the nature of the study, potential risks associated with participation, how the results would be published and used, and eligibility questions and statements for participation. I used the Qualtrics survey to gauge whether the potential participants met the criteria for participation in the study. If the potential participants met the criteria, I scheduled a Zoom interview around our mutual availability. After each interview, I asked the participant to share the study with LGBTQIA+ faculty they knew in their networks.

Data Collection

The data were collected via Zoom, a “collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing service offering features including online meetings, group messaging services, and secure recording of sessions” (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 2). I chose Zoom because it offered real-time communication, facilitating interactions with participants across varying geographical locations. It also provided a conducive environment for building rapport with participants, a crucial aspect for fostering trust and openness. Its capability to record and securely store participants’ interviews and the virtual nature of the interviews offered the unique advantage of granting insights into participants’ personal and professional lives that might not have been achievable through in-person interviews. Last, I chose Zoom out of great care for my and the participants' health due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure a successful Zoom experience for my participants and me, I followed the steps outlined by Gray et al. (2020) and Archibald et al. (2019). First, as soon as a Zoom interview was scheduled, I sent instructions on how to use Zoom and the Zoom interview link to the participant. Second, I took Gray et al.'s (2020) recommendation to have a pre-created backup plan that I shared with the participant. If the Zoom connection became faulty or lost, the Zoom interview continued on a phone call. Third, Zoom allowed me, the host, to record and save recordings. For this study, I saved the recordings to my desktop computer hard drive. Last, expectations concerning consent and privacy for in-person interviews apply to Zoom interviews to “invite questions and ensure participants understand the research processes” (Gray et al., 2020, p. 1297).

Though Zoom provides the option to record interviews automatically, Grey et al. (2020) and Archibald et al. (2019) recommended that the researcher refrain from selecting “Start Recording” until the participant has given their consent. Grey et al. (2020) also recommended that the researcher have two separate recordings: one to capture the researcher reading the consent form and each participant’s verbal consent and the second to capture the interview. The researcher can do this by selecting “Start Recording” before they read the consent form and “Stop Recording” after they read it, then repeating these steps before and after the interview. Finally, Grey et al. (2020) shared that by creating two separate recordings, the researcher can save them to their hard drive and then share the interview recording with transcription services if they choose to use them.

Using the interview protocol (Appendix C), I informed the participant that the discussion would last between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview duration was determined based on the expected time it would take the participants to share rich data based on their personal experiences (Bearman, 2019). Also, at the beginning of each interview, the participant was

reminded that the questions could elicit an emotional response. If they needed to speak to someone for emotional and mental health support, they could contact the National LGBT Hotline at (888) 843-4564. I also told each participant that they could leave the interview or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Exit and Debriefing

At the end of each interview, I expressed my deepest gratitude to the participant for participating in the study and their willingness to share their personal experiences. I then asked, “Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is important for this research?” as the final question to signal the completion of the interview. Finally, the participant was told that a summary of their discussion would be emailed (or, if they preferred, a hard copy mailed) with an invitation to revise, provide feedback, and suggest any changes. I did this to ensure the accuracy of the data and the full resonance of their experiences was truthfully captured.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1997) described data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the...materials that you accumulate to increase your understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (p 157). To achieve this in the study, I employed thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used for “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I employed thematic analysis to explore how cisheteronormative policies and practices impacted the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty by deriving themes from the participants' responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) described themes as “something about the data in relation to the assignment aim and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). As a method, thematic analysis identifies recurring themes in the data. This method

provided findings based on rich data and served as the interpretive arm for the study's aims. In doing so, a rich description of the data assisted me with deriving “predominant and important themes” (Blacker, 2009, p. 83).

Additionally, thematic analysis is independent of any theoretical framework, paradigm, or epistemological position for its applicability. As Braun and Clarke (2006) put it, thematic analysis “matches what the researcher wants to know” (p. 80). As such, thematic analysis can be paired with critical qualitative inquiry and queer theory. To conduct the queer analysis, a process that, according to Plummer (2005), does not have a fixed approach, I reread the transcripts of the participants’ interviews to understand how queer notions such as cisheteronormativity, the closet, visibility, and coming out were presented in the participants’ stories.

Considering the flexibility of thematic analysis, themes can be determined inductively (i.e., the data determines the themes), deductively (i.e., the data is interpreted using predetermined themes), or both. In my qualitative data analysis, I drew on inductive and deductive approaches to ensure a more rigorous and sound study (see Appendix D for a list of predetermined, i.e., deductive, themes based on the literature review and queer theory, which suggested I talk about the previous queer notions, and see Appendix E for the alignment between the research questions and predetermined themes; Greco et al., 2001).

I used Dedoose, a web-based application, to analyze and manage the data. Dedoose was chosen because it is easy to learn and use, secure, cloud-based, and inexpensive. Moreover, Dedoose allowed me to import and analyze text, place data into themes, code information, and export information to make notations and memos. Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase model guided the coding and analysis of the transcripts. Initially, I immersed myself in the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading it, making notes as I went. Next, I generated initial codes by

using descriptive codes, enabling me to systematically organize the data. Subsequently, I compiled these codes into lists to identify broader themes, comparing and analyzing data extracts for each theme. Then, to enhance the quality of the analysis, I refined these themes through a dual assessment process. First, I evaluated whether the themes formed a coherent pattern in relation to the overarching theme. Then, I verified if the candidate themes aligned with the entire dataset. Afterward, I defined and assigned names to the refined themes. Finally, this process led to the creation of a comprehensive report. Utilizing data extracts, I crafted a narrative inherent in the data. Altogether, this process helped me summarize the data and answer the research questions.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure trustworthiness, I used an established theory, queer theory, and a credible research method: thematic analysis. I also took time to develop rapport with the participants. In addition, I used two essential techniques to ensure trustworthiness: triangulation and member checking. Regarding the former, I established confidence by involving a peer, another doctoral candidate, to assist me with coding the participants' transcripts. After which, my peer and I compared our codes, and I made a final determination based on the similarity of our codes. As for the latter, I also established confidence by employing member checking, a “technique for exploring the credibility of results” (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802). Understanding that knowledge is co-constructed (Ghaffar et al., 2020) and that qualitative research is highly interpretive (Ellingsen et al., 2015), a few months after the semi-structured interviews concluded, I returned the transcripts and summary of the results to the participants so they could engage with the(ir) data (Birt et al., 2016).

Transferability

To establish the transferability of the study, I followed the five strategies as delineated by Eisenhart and Howe (1992). First, I asked interview questions that aligned with the research questions. Second, I effectively collected and analyzed data. Third, I understood what the limitations of the study were. Fourth, I applied knowledge from previous research to the study. Last, I ensured that the study's findings were easily understood so they could be applied to other contexts, populations, and times.

Dependability

The study's dependability was ensured using a credible research design and detailed data collection. However, equally important, the study's dependability was provided by setting up the study in a way that would allow future research studies to explore a similar phenomenon that yield similar results.

Confirmability

The study explored how cisheteronormative policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. To increase confirmability, the study reported on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty as they shared them. Though researcher bias is inevitable, as Shenton (2004) discussed, the study's results aligned with the research questions, method, and measurements. To ensure that my interpretation of the results would be as value-free as possible, I utilized audit trails (Lincoln & Guba, 1982), member checking (Candela, 2019), and peer review (Klein & Olbrecht, 2011).

The Role of the Researcher

As Lincoln and Denzin (2003) described, in qualitative studies, the researcher is an instrument of data collection. In other words, the data is mediated through a human instrument:

the researcher. Because of this, consumers of qualitative studies desire to know more about the researcher who possesses biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions (Greenbank, 2003). Therefore, in following Rasmussen's (2006) recommendation, I maintained skepticism of positionality and deconstructed my own identities to “directly 'touch/interact/connect' with [my participants], in ways which are less exploitative, less objectifying, and more politically relevant” (Haritaworn, 2008, p. 3).

As a gay instructor who interviewed participants who are LGBTQIA+ faculty, I potentially subverted the cisheteronormative gaze by fostering an intragroup dynamic that centers LGBTQIA+ experiences. To help me understand subversion, I drew on Portelli and Konecny's (2013) historical perspective, and Portelli and Eizadirad's (2018) expansion of the aforementioned perspective. The first definition highlights subversion as change from the foundation, not inherently negative but potentially undoing harmful aspects. Effective subversion can yield positive outcomes, particularly in challenging oppressive structures (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). The second definition by Portelli and Eizadirad (2018) characterizes subversion as subtle resistance against injustice and abusive power, creating new possibilities. With a queer perspective, I employed the latter definition to uncover/challenge – subvert – how higher education policies and practices uphold cisheteronormativity.

My role in the study was to ask LGBTQIA+ faculty open-ended interview questions about their experiences navigating and being impacted by cisheteronormative policies and practices in higher education. Also, my role was more emic than etic (Punch, 1998), as I am both part of the LGBTQIA+ community and an instructor. Though my visual appearance as white and cisgender would suggest that I have only privilege, hidden is the personal, lived experience I have had with marginalization as a sexual minority. Nevertheless, I fully acknowledge that my

visual appearance has afforded me access to resources and support that have lessened the impact of the marginalization I have experienced. I am also out to colleagues with whom I work, the students I teach, the department chair for whom I work, and administrators. Unfortunately, because I am “out” in all my professional roles, I have been impacted by heteronormative practices. Given this, I was conscious of how my positionality could affect my engagement with the study.

Recognizing this, I did the following to mitigate this impact. While I collected and then analyzed the data, I examined my own experiences. This helped me distinguish my experiences from the participants' experiences (Fink, 2000). I also employed member checking to address any self-reported biases that could influence the data collection and analysis process (Carlson, 2012; Harper & Cole, 2012). To achieve this, the participants read a summary of their transcripts to check for accuracy. Lastly, to ensure my interview questions did not lead participants (Creswell, 2007), hamper me from listening to the participants, or trigger emotional responses from me, I engaged them with an outside source (Flick, 2004): another doctoral candidate.

Limitations

One limitation of my research study was the lack of racial diversity in the population pool. The overwhelming majority of participants in my study were white. This homogeneity in the sample restricted the generalizability of the findings to more racially diverse populations. As such, it potentially led to bias in the results (Nadal, 2019). To address this limitation, future studies should include a more representative and racially diverse population to ensure that the findings are more applicable and not disproportionately influenced by a single demographic group.

The other limitation of my research study was the overrepresentation of participants who were cisgender, which meant that the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals were not adequately represented. As such, this limitation possibly led to an incomplete understanding of the issues related to gender, as it did not sufficiently account for the unique challenges and experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.

Ethical Assurances

I provided participants with the consent form in the Qualtrics survey, which allowed them to review it. By reviewing it, they understood that the interview questions could elicit an emotional response. This enabled them to choose whether they desired to participate in or completely withdraw from the study. I also explained the data collection and analysis process, and I clarified how the data would be used.

I conducted the interviews via Zoom, with the participants' consent, and strongly encouraged the participants to interview in a neutral location where they could share their thoughts, stories, experiences, etc., in confidence (Surmiak, 2020). The interviews were then kept in Dedoose, where I transcribed and coded them. I also kept the audit trails and the typed notes I took during each interview safe in a password-protected folder on my desktop until the study was finished. Further, material that included the participants' email addresses and the universities at which they are employed, as well as all raw data, were filed away in another password-secured folder on my desktop to be reserved for five years.

Lastly, to protect the participants' identity and minimize any potentially harmful consequences of participating in the study, I implemented a two-fold approach. First, I allowed the participants to select pseudonyms of their choice, which served as their study identities. Second, I anonymized their personal biographical information, including details such as their

place of employment and the names of their colleagues (following the approach outlined by Aldridge, 2014). This combination of pseudonyms and anonymization helped to ensure the participants' confidentiality and protect them from any unintended harm stemming from participation.

Summary

This chapter thoroughly explores the research design, offering a detailed justification for the research design. It also emphasizes my positionality as a researcher, acknowledging and addressing potential biases inherent in my perspective. In addition, insights into participant recruitment strategies and measures to ensure research trustworthiness are provided. It concludes by delineating the research methodology, encompassing participant engagement, recruitment methods, and a comprehensive data analysis plan that incorporates both inductive and deductive approaches.

Chapter 4: Findings

This research study focuses on understanding the impact of cisheteronormative policies and practices on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. The study involved in-depth interviews with 10 LGBTQIA+ faculty from different institutions across the contiguous United States. The findings of these interviews led to the identification of three themes that highlight the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. The first theme conveys how heteronormative policies and practices force LGBTQIA+ faculty to hide their sexual orientation. The second highlights the risks and consequences when LGBTQIA+ are visible⁸ about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the face of cisheteronormative policies and practices. The third theme highlights how LGBTQIA+ faculty are differentially treated by cisheteronormative policies and practices for not conforming to traditionalized expectations. The findings also encompass an examination of how LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction produced by cisheteronormative policies and practices at their institutions, which are recurring phenomena observed across all three themes. Based on the findings, LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction by employing various coping and resistance strategies including self-advocating and concealing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to protect their careers.

Silencing Identities

This section highlights the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty in navigating disclosure, with a focus on how heteronormative policies and practices compel them to conceal their sexual orientation. The participants' narratives reveal the challenges they face and the context-

⁸ There are many ways an individual can be “visible” about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. They include (but are not limited to): directly stating one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity through words (e.g., “I am gay/trans/non-binary”), displaying symbols associated with LGBTQIA+ identities (e.g., stickers), including one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity in resumes, professional profiles, etc., and referring to one’s same-sex partner in conversation.

dependent nature of the coming out process as they negotiate fears, overcompensation, and selective disclosure to protect themselves from potential harm and discrimination. Elena, a white cisgender lesbian woman, for example, shared that part of her duties as a pre-tenure faculty member are to visit public schools to oversee student-teachers. However, the professional settings she navigates are tainted by a pervasive atmosphere of heteronormativity, exacerbated by the risks associated with living in a right-to-work state⁹. In the Midwest, where Elena resides, attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ individuals can vary, as is the case in any region. Particularly, the Midwest is known for its conservative political ideologies and as such, certain areas may exhibit hostility towards LGBTQIA+ individuals. Consequently, in these professional settings, she does not disclose her sexual orientation for fear of violating her institution's policy on professional conduct. The policy, ostensibly neutral, enforces a subtle yet rigid adherence to heteronormativity. The very nature of this policy perpetuates oppression, compelling Elena to conceal her sexual orientation. She shared,

So, I have to enter public schools often to oversee student-teachers and so I don't carry my rainbow flag and I don't announce my sexual orientation...a lot of [LGBTQIA+] teachers fear for their jobs, because this is a right to work state. So, when I go out to the schools, [my sexual orientation] is not something that comes up.

To navigate this point of friction, where she feels compelled to keep her sexual orientation a secret driven by the fear of potentially losing her job, Elena makes the choice to refrain from carrying her rainbow flag and discussing her personal life. Her choices highlight the systemic silencing and erasure perpetuated by cisheteronormative policies against LGBTQIA+ faculty. Elena's decision to foreground her professional identity at the expense of her sexual orientation is

⁹ In a right-to-work state, employees can be terminated without just cause (Ellwood & Fine, 1987).

a survival strategy born out of the very real and detrimental repercussions she might encounter should she bring her authentic self to the fore in these professional settings. This decision could also be linked to the closeting impact of “heterop professionalism,” which, as Davies and Neustifter's (2021) study illuminates, compels queer faculty to hide the most personal aspects of who they are to conform to heteronormative standards of professionalism, which are often understood as code for heterosexuality, which silence same-sex desire. Despite facing marginalization related to her sexual orientation, Elena's racial and gender identity may grant her a level of proximity to power not afforded to more marginalized individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community. This privilege may enable her to exercise more caution when discussing her sexual orientation.

Other participants touched on how policies and practices at their respective institutions treat heterosexuality as the expected sexual orientation, which has caused them to hide their true selves. Bryan, a white gay cisgender man, for example, shared that to his knowledge “There are no other openly queer tenured line faculty at the College of Law.” He continued:

Of the 100-plus staff, there is one staff member who identifies as part of the community. My sense is that the number is larger than that, but that there are probably some who do not feel comfortable identifying as such.

When I asked why other LGBTQIA+ faculty might feel reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation, he explained that the college historically has treated heterosexuality as the normal mode and, therefore, silences sexualities that the college perceives as deviant. Their reluctance could also be caused by the conservative political climate of the Midwest, where Bryan is located. This conservatism could contribute to an environment wherein LGBTQIA+ individuals feel hesitant disclosing their sexual and/or gender identity. Nonetheless, this institutional silence

reflects a form of power that positions heterosexuality as the norm. The college's historic treatment of heterosexuality as the default mode establishes a power dynamic where sexual orientations perceived as deviant are marginalized. He shared, “We do not ask in our application if someone identifies as LGBTQ+... It tells me something about the [college] that we don't value [these identities].” Moreover, he shared that the college has employed certain heteronormative practices to marginalize him. These practices include not encouraging him to visit his out-of-state partner, in contrast to the encouragement given to his heterosexual colleagues to do the same. He shared, “I have colleagues who are heterosexual, whose spouses do not live in the area, and they are, you know, encouraged to go and spend time with their significant other, and I've never been encouraged to do that.” Bryan's claim that certain practices in the college marginalize him highlights how institutional practices actively harm LGBTQIA+ faculty. The differential treatment concerning visiting partners, exemplifying a power structure that reinforces normative standards, creates a palpable sense of marginalization, as Bryan is treated differently than his heterosexual colleagues, indicating that his identity is not deserving of the same support. Bryan explained that he navigates the aforementioned practices by “overcompensating.” He remarked, “I think I probably overcompensate by being everything to everyone all the time.” He described how he tends to agree to every request, aiming to divert attention away from his sexual orientation,

So, I'm always saying yes to every single opportunity every time I'm asked to speak at a conference or to do a presentation. I always feel like I need to say yes for fear that I will be deemed as sort of, you know, not being a team player...I attend every single event that students have....I want them to see me as a person and not as a queer faculty member, and so again, I've had comments in the past that have been negative towards me, or at

least I perceive them as such, and so the way I handle that is just by doing everything possible, trying to be everything to everyone in part so they won't focus on [my sexual orientation].

Bryan's strategy of overcompensation, reflected in his tendency to accept every opportunity, even if it leads to potential overload, arises from a fear of being labeled as someone who is not a "team player." This is shown through his belief that he must always agree to speak at conferences, give presentations, and attend student events to avoid being seen as aloof. This fear highlights the pressure experienced by LGBTQIA+ faculty to demonstrate their commitment and dedication, particularly in cisheteronormative environments. In higher education, the culture of overcompensation is linked to the disproportionately high demands placed on minoritized individuals, including LGBTQIA+ faculty, particularly those like Bryan who find themselves pushed to the margins (O'Meara et al., 2019). The expectations related to research, teaching, and service, combined with the ongoing struggle to reconcile one's authentic self with societal norms, create an environment in which LGBTQIA+ faculty feel compelled to outperform their cisgender, heterosexual peers. This continuous pressure to excel in all areas, while simultaneously contending with the oppressive force of cisheteronormativity, results in an overwhelming workload and an increased risk of stress. His strategy could also be seen as a reactive survival mechanism, originating in the oppressive influence of heteronormative practices in his college that make him feel like he is not enough being a "queer faculty member." Bryan's approach may also be viewed as a coping mechanism that is facilitated by certain privileges. While he encounters marginalization based on his sexual orientation, his capacity to navigate these challenges through a consistent acceptance of new opportunities could be influenced by factors such as his race and/or gender identity. These opportunities may be more

accessible to him than to individuals who occupy more marginalized positions in the LGBTQIA+ community (Scharrón-Del Río's, 2018).

Angela, a white bisexual cisgender woman, shared that some LGBTQIA+ faculty members at her institution are “heavily closeted,” despite her institution being “very welcoming,” as evidenced by the institution’s LGBTQIA Faculty Staff Association and LGBTQ Center. She shared,

I know a lot of other [LGBTQIA+ faculty], you know, at my institution, they don’t have the same opportunities to just come out casually in conversation like I do. So, there are people who are heavily closeted, even though my institution is actually very welcoming. We have an LGBTQI faculty [and] staff association. We have, you know, a LGBTQ center on our campus.

Angela's understanding of the challenges her LGBTQIA+ colleagues encounter when discussing their identities in conversations, illustrates how individual identities interact in the broader framework of power and privilege. Angela herself identifies as white, cisgender, and bisexual, and as such, these aspects of her identity and being expose her to varying degrees of power, privilege, and marginalization. While her race and gender may grant her privileges and place her in closer proximity to power, her bisexuality may also make her vulnerable to the erasure experienced by non-monosexual individuals (Serpe et al., 2020). Angela's capacity to openly share her sexual orientation in casual conversation illustrates the privilege she holds in the LGBTQIA+ community. Her ease in disclosing her sexual orientation suggests that, in comparison to LGBTQIA+ individuals from more marginalized racial and gender backgrounds, she may encounter fewer systemic obstacles. Angela also highlights the “very welcoming” environment at her institution, given the presence of resources such as an LGBTQI Faculty and

Staff Association and an LGBTQ Center. While these initiatives may reflect the institution's commitment to fostering an inclusive campus climate, the fact that some LGBTQIA+ faculty still choose to remain “heavily closeted” despite these resources demonstrate how institutional efforts do not eliminate the influence of cisheteronormativity (Iosefo, 2016). Angela's observations also align with existing research on campus climate—studies consistently reveal that even in ostensibly inclusive settings, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to face anti-LGBTQIA+ prejudice and bias (Blumenfeld et al., 2017; Rankin, 2007; Tetreault et al., 2013). Angela also seems to suggest that disclosure falls on a spectrum ranging from “heavily closeted” to being “very open.” By mentioning that some LGBTQIA+ faculty are “heavily closeted,” she is acknowledging that there are varying degrees of openness and comfort among LGBTQIA+ faculty when it comes to disclosing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The experiences shared by James, an Asian gay cisgender man, show how the absence of clearly defined and disseminated policies and practices, possibly influenced by the challenging political climate for marginalized communities living in the Midwest, results in LGBTQIA+ faculty repressing their sexualities. He shared that, though his institution has a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity, he chooses to conceal his sexual orientation from faculty in other departments. “If I meet with people from other departments, which is not very frequently who don’t know me very well, I’m not out to them, like I feel like it’s...I try to keep that away from professional settings.” James also finds himself compelled to conceal his sexual orientation to conform to a professional persona that erases any trace of same-sex desire (Davies & Neustifter, 2021), as illustrated by his usage of “I try to keep that away from professional settings.” This separation suggests that James is likely influenced by heteronormative expectations that mandate LGBTQIA+ faculty keep personal matters, such as

their sexual orientation, private. He also expressed that he is unsure whether there is a tangible implementation of his institution's non-discrimination policy, introducing an additional layer of oppression, and as such, navigates this friction by keeping his sexual orientation hidden.

However, not everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community has the privilege to hide, and disparities in experiences exist based on overlapping identities within the community. His ability to keep this aspect of his identity concealed might be influenced by his gender identity, potentially affording him certain privileges, given the alignment of his gender identity with institutional norms.

However, Flax, a Latino gay cisgender man, stands in contrast to the experiences of James. He has chosen to be openly gay at his institution, indicating a degree of personal power. Even though his institution appears to have a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity, a critical examination of his institution's diversity policy reveals an absence of explicit language including sexual orientation and gender identity. Given his location in the Midwest, it is possible that the political climate, potentially anti-diversity in nature, not only contributes to the absence of inclusive language but also plays a role in the overall lack of acknowledgment and safeguarding for LGBTQIA+ individuals. This suggests an oppressive environment wherein LGBTQIA+ individuals are neither recognized nor protected. This also signifies the persistence of cisheteronormativity even within frameworks that claim to be inclusive. Even when HEIs proclaim inclusion, the subtle undercurrents of cisheteronormativity can shape policies, practices, and cultural norms. This inharmoniousness has created tension, causing Flax to question whether his institution genuinely supports and protects him and other LGBTQIA+ faculty. Flax shared,

The university [is] trying to go for diversity or fight for diversity or work towards diversity. For show. It seems like we are not important enough for the university to really see us or want us seen. And sometimes I do feel like, ‘Well, does my university really have my back?’ And a part of me has like a little bit of maybe a lot of pride and just like. ‘OK, well, if you don't do anything to protect me, then you just revealed yourself and I can find a job elsewhere. Somebody will want me’.

Flax's observation suggests that the institution's diversity efforts might be more of a façade than genuine commitment. This implies that the institution may engage in performative acts of diversity without addressing the deeper structural issues faced by LGBTQIA+ and other marginalized faculty (Ahmed, 2020). Additionally, when Flax says, “It seems like we are not important enough for the institution to really see us or want us seen,” he indicates that his institution does not truly value or recognize LGBTQIA+ individuals, highlighting a potential problem where diversity initiatives may fail to establish an inclusive environment where LGBTQIA+ individuals feel heard and respected. This points to a potential gap in diversity efforts, where certain aspects of diversity are prioritized over others, leaving racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty like Flax feeling like one of their identity markers are seen and respected but others are not. This situation does not liberate but further marginalizes them. The partial recognition of diversity initiatives perpetuates a form of invisibility, leaving individuals feeling acknowledged in one dimension of their identity but neglected in others (Miller et al., 2002). Flax also demonstrates his resilience and determination as coping mechanisms when navigating friction related to the institution's diversity policy. It also suggests that, in the face of adversity, Flax is fully prepared to seek opportunities elsewhere where he might be valued and protected. The fact that he is prepared to seek opportunities elsewhere indicates a form of

resistance against potential oppression, emphasizing his agency and refusal to accept a hostile or unsupportive environment.

Flax also suggested that policymakers must understand that existing policies and the absence of policies impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. The ability to formulate, implement, or neglect policies demonstrates the power that policymakers hold over institutional climate, as well as the safety and well-being of marginalized groups, including LGBTQIA+ faculty. This highlights that the policies in place (or lack thereof) have a tangible impact on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty (Lange et al., 2019). This recognition of policy influence emphasizes the power embedded in the structures and frameworks established by those in positions of authority. Flax also expresses frustration with policymakers, suggesting that their actions or inaction convey a lack of concern for the well-being and rights of LGBTQIA+ faculty. This is illustrated by his statement, “Like I said, it does not seem like they care.” This sentiment reflects a perceived indifference in the approach of those in authority. In addition, the political landscape of a region may play a significant role in shaping the responsiveness of policymakers to the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals. In regions where there is political will to champion LGBTQIA+ rights, there may be a greater likelihood of implementing inclusive policies. Conversely, in regions where such will is lacking, policymakers may demonstrate a reluctance to address the concerns of marginalized groups, including LGBTQIA+ faculty. Flax then declares that “the message they are sending by having policies that ignore, or not having any policies at all to support, underrepresented groups, whether it is LGBTQ+ [individuals], [individuals with] disabilit[ies], etc.,” sends a clear message that policies that overlook or fail to address the needs of minoritized groups communicate a blatant disregard for inclusion and support. This highlights an oppressive dynamic where institutional structures may perpetuate

marginalization through policy decisions. Flax also emphasizes that the implementation of supportive policies and measures would contribute to creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment, particularly for LGBTQIA+ faculty, which reflects a form of resistance against oppressive policies and a commitment to driving liberation within his institution. Once more, Flax navigates this friction by using his personal experiences and voice to drive change, while also maintaining a commitment to leaving his institution for another one if the need arises.

Participants also highlighted that coming out, in response to heteronormative policies and practices, is a highly contextual, repeated process (Cooper et al., 2019). Cyril, a white gay cisgender man, for example, noted,

I think coming out is essentially by its very nature a continuing process. In higher education, in general, you're dealing with a new group of people all the time. You have new students. I mean, even if you're teaching in a major program, I mean, you're going to have majors you haven't had before. They may know things about me. They may not know things about me.

His acknowledgement of the continual coming out process reflects the power dynamics inherent in heteronormative practices. Heteronormative practices typically operate under the presumption that individuals are heterosexual by default unless they explicitly state otherwise (Seal, 2019). This assumption places an unwarranted burden on LGBTQIA+ individuals, such as Cyril, to continually disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, his racial identity as white affords him certain privileges compared to individuals who are racially minoritized, as they face compounded forms of oppression. Within the broader sociopolitical context, white individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, often experience less systemic racism and enjoy greater access to resources and opportunities (Applebaum, 2016). Moreover, Cyril's

identity as a cisgender man aligns with societal norms, which can afford him a level of acceptance and understanding that might not be extended to individuals whose gender identity diverges from cisnormativity. This alignment may grant Cyril a degree of societal acceptance that may not be as readily available to gender-diverse individuals. His privilege may also manifest in his ability to navigate heteronormative spaces with relative ease. The societal assumption of heterosexuality by default means that, as a gay man, Cyril can choose when and how to disclose his sexual orientation. This choice, while burdensome due to the continual coming out process, also grants him a measure of control over his visibility. This control is a form of privilege as it allows him to manage the potential impact of heteronormativity at work. However, while Cyril may experience certain privileges, he is not immune to the broader structures of oppression connected to his sexual orientation. Additionally, the often-conservative political climate of the Midwest, where Cyril lives, adds another layer of challenge to his continuous coming out process. The regional dynamics may contribute to the ongoing nature of his coming out journey.

Cyril also explained that the lack of comprehensive institution-level policies contributes to a heterogenous campus climate, with the potential for slower or minimal progress when certain administrators do not prioritize the protection of LGBTQIA+ faculty. This highlights the power administrators hold in influencing institutional policies. He shared,

I think the lack of clear policies at the university level help to sustain an extremely varied campus climate...Without university-level policies, you know, if you have a dean or a chair or a program director who is not going to prioritize this, you know, the climate is not going to change all that much or not very quickly. So, I think that kind of unevenness, that sense of I can be very out in certain disciplines, in certain departments and schools.

Cyril's statement highlights the critical role of cisheteronormativity in rendering LGBTQIA+ issues invisible. When institutional policies are primarily shaped through a cisgender and heterosexual lens, there is a significant risk that the specific needs and challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals will be disregarded. This invisibility perpetuates the absence of comprehensive policies designed to address the unique concerns of the LGBTQIA+ community. Cyril also asserts that college deans, department chairs, and program directors, not LGBTQIA+ faculty, should be the ones to implement non-discrimination policies if they are absent at the institutional level. This highlights how attitudes and beliefs at the interpersonal level influence policies and practices at the institutional level (Lincoln & Stanley, 2021). Cyril's mention of "unevenness" indicates that while affirming college deans, department chairs, and program directors implement non-discrimination policies, prejudiced and biased administrators may not. Therefore, if the onus falls on college deans, department chairs, and program directors to implement non-discrimination policies, such policies may be inconsistent or even never come to pass. Moreover, Cyril's insight serves as a critical analysis of how cisheteronormative environments can be deeply resistant to change, particularly when it pertains to challenging established norms. This resistance to change represents a wielded form of power that maintains the status quo and hinders or blocks the progression towards more inclusive and equitable policies. This resistance also suggests that HEIs actively preserve their harmful structuring (Bell, 1980). Cyril's reference to "prioritize this" hints at the formation of inclusive policy prioritization, which may be viewed as a direct challenge to conventional standards, contributing to the resistance to implementing clear, inclusive policies.

Flax and Elena shared that, at their respective institutions, they have come out in stages due to the presence of heteronormative policies. Flax shared, "I did it in stages. I did it to the

people that were closest to me first and then to the larger group and then to the whole faculty in my school, just by comments that I made.” Flax acknowledging that he came out to colleagues to whom he is closest before coming out to everyone else highlights the timeline of the coming out process. This timeline could be influenced by personal readiness, workplace culture, cultural/family background, and cisheteronormative policies, particularly the diversity policy which excludes sexual orientation and gender identity. Because these policies uphold heterosexuality and gender conformity as the status quo, Flax chose to disclose his sexual orientation gradually, starting with affirming colleagues, to gauge support and acceptance and to evade the possibility of facing discrimination that corresponds to being more visible about one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This fear of discrimination reflects the power that societal norms and potential biases hold over an individual’s decision-making. His measured coming out experience also highlights the management of ongoing disclosure and the navigation of this friction in different social settings. It also highlights the personal power to control and manage information about one’s sexual orientation. Similarly, Elena shared, “It’s continuous. It’s continuous in terms of, I mean, I do with students each semester.” Her statement shows that the coming out process involves various levels of disclosure and awareness. When I asked Flax and Elena how they have come out to students, their responses were revealing. Flax, for example, averred that he comes out in a roundabout way. Similarly, Elena shared, “The biggest thing I have had experiences when coming out to students is giving clues.” Flax and Elena pointed out that even in the presence of inclusive policies, they would still be vulnerable to risks and consequences. This emphasizes that policies, even those designed to be inclusive, may not eliminate the potential for discrimination and harm, emphasizing the limitations of policy-driven protection. As a result, they both employ strategies to navigate these challenges, with Flax

gradually disclosing his sexual orientation and Elena dropping subtle clues in an effort to insulate themselves from harm. Cyril and James shared that they drop subtle clues and use nonverbal cues, respectively, suggesting a form of oppression. The need to resort to such methods, rather than openly verbalizing their identities, implies a fear of potential discrimination in an environment that may not explicitly support LGBTQIA+ individuals. Cyril, for example, shared that in his administrative role he regularly meets with LGBTQIA+ students who are targets of bias,

I have other students who come to me and say I have a problem because, you know, I am being treated in a homophobic, transphobic, queerphobic way, and I can say, you know, I really understand that because [I have] been there. I mean, that's sort of a non-answer but a lot of it depends [on] what I'm doing.

He explained that the reason for his decision to not fully disclose in these meetings stems from the bounds and limits of his role, as stated in his institution's policy on college administration (Bosch, 2019). This highlights the complexity and individuality of the coming out process. He explained that this policy creates tension for him that he navigates by occasionally dropping a subtle clue by saying, "Been there," mirroring Elena's approach. This strategy not only communicates that he has personally faced similar challenges and can empathize with their struggles, even if he does not fully disclose his own identity. It also illustrates how LGBTQIA+ faculty resist heteronormative practices that pressure them to stay in the closet. Unlike LGBTQIA+ individuals who may feel pressured to hide their sexual orientation, Cyril has the privilege of choosing when and how to share his. This privilege, possibly shaped by his administrative role, allows Cyril to navigate his professional responsibilities while still

connecting with students on a personal level, striking a balance that may not be available to everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community.

James' experience navigating the coming out process has been highly contextual. He discussed how his lack of knowledge of any institutional policies that would protect him from harassment or discrimination has produced friction. This knowledge gap places him in a vulnerable position, causing him to disclose his sexual orientation to his colleagues using nonverbal cues. He described how he attended a college holiday celebration, where he brought his boyfriend and encountered new people from different departments. He explained that his boyfriend served as a form of self-expression, which is akin to coming out again, but without the need for explicit verbal disclosure, which points to how coming out can be influenced by the specific environment, relationships, and nonverbal cues, and, further, the contextual nature of the coming process, all of which are shaped by—and perpetuate—the oppressive nature of heteronormativity.

This section explored the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty as they navigate the silencing impact of heteronormative policies and practices. These participants face challenges related to concealing their sexual orientation, driven by the fears of potential harm and discrimination. They also describe how they selectively disclose their identities to protect themselves from violence and harm. Their experiences highlight the modus operandi of cisheteronormativity, which is to keep same-sex desire and gender nonconformity in the closet.

Visibility Risks and Consequences

This section highlights the risks and consequences when LGBTQIA+ faculty are visible about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the face of cisheteronormative policies and practices. Whether it is colleagues cautioning them against too much visibility, concerns

about misperceptions, or dealing with a hate crime, the participants' narratives emphasize how cisheteronormative policies and practices impact and pose risks for LGBTQIA+ faculty. Cyril, a white gay cisgender man, shared that colleagues have criticized him for being "too out" as a gay faculty member, highlighting how heteronormative practices can be used to regulate the behavior of LGBTQIA+ faculty. The criticism he receives for being "too out" indicate that, despite his privilege of being a white and cisgender individual, oppressive forces related to his sexual orientation are at play at his institution. Cyril's response to this criticism reflects his resistance to conforming to heteronormative expectations:

[Colleagues] have told me that I'm 'too out' and need to be more careful. I've thought about it. I've also questioned whether this is the right place for me. Am I in the right job? And I'm certainly not the first out faculty member.

His statement signifies the existence of external pressure and criticism from peers. He is being urged to exercise greater caution when openly expressing his sexual orientation, indicating that his colleagues are aware of his sexual orientation, which has seemingly become a point of discussion. As such, it could be inferred that his colleagues may have reservations about the extent of his openness in the workplace. His statement also reveals his awareness that he is not the first openly LGBTQIA+ faculty member at his institution. This awareness reflects an acknowledgment of his institution's history and suggests that his decision to be open about his sexual orientation is not without precedents. It demonstrates that his visibility is not occurring in a vacuum. His admission that "I've also questioned whether this is the right place for me. Am I in the right job?" also highlights an internal struggle that he is facing and reflects a form of oppression. He is not simply reconsidering his level of openness but also contending with a sense of belonging at his institution. This internal conflict aligns with findings from Beagan et al.

(2021), which suggests that LGBTQIA+ faculty often wrestle with this internal struggle. Additionally, contemplation is not merely about his level of openness; it goes deeper. He is struggling with a fundamental question. He is wondering whether his institution truly aligns with his authentic self. This hints at a potential clash between his authentic self and the heteronormative expectations at his institution. This mirrors Flax's earlier sentiment: "A part of me has a lot of pride, and if you don't take steps to protect me, you've revealed yourself, and I can find another job. Somebody will value me for who I am." Cyril's and Flax's responses demonstrate their confidence and determination not to compromise their authentic selves, even if it means seeking opportunities elsewhere.

Jade, a white non-binary person who is attracted to females and female-presenting persons, shared that they take intentional steps to be visible as a non-binary faculty member. For example, they share their they/them pronouns on Zoom, in their syllabi, in their email signature, and in their faculty bio. They also educate their students on the importance of including gender-diverse people in film and theatre. However, they expressed concerns about how their visibility as a non-binary individual and openness in discussing gender non-binary issues leads colleagues to perceive them as "pushing an agenda," albeit an intentionally humanizing one:

I know that there's times when I felt like if [a colleague] is saying no to an idea of mine, it might be because I'm pushing an agenda that is too radical for that person to consider. Like they might be thinking, I don't know what they think, and part of my communication problem is that I have a terrible time figuring out what other people are communicating. I can't read body language; I can't read facial expressions. Not good at that. So, it's more a little bit of paranoia in my mind and like, oh, is that too much of a non-binary thing to say or sort of talk about?

Jade questions whether their non-binary identity and the topics they choose to discuss may be perceived as “too radical” by their colleagues. In the Southwest, where Jade lives, it is possible that the political climate views instances of LGBTQIA+ individuals advocating for visibility and inclusion, for challenging traditional norms, as “too radical.” This fear signals the potential for marginalization based on the visibility of their non-binary identity. Their statement, “too much of a non-binary thing to say,” also aligns with Cyril’s encounter of being cautioned for being “too out.” These instances altogether highlight the shared struggles LGBTQIA+ faculty endure when confronting cisheteronormative practices in professional settings. Their experiences also reflect how LGBTQIA+ faculty are criticized for being “too queer” by colleagues about their sexual orientation or gender identity, or for discussing topics related to gender diversity that challenge traditional norms (Fabbi, 2021). In both Jade’s case and Cyril’s case, there is an implicit expectation to conform to cisheteronormativity and avoid behavior, conversations, or expressing ideas that deviate from heterosexuality and gender conformity.

Jade’s experience also highlights the interplay between gender and ableism. One of the risks highlighted in their statement is the fear of others misunderstanding them. They shared that they have autism, making it difficult for them to decipher the communication of others due to challenges in reading body language and facial expressions. This lack of clarity in understanding others’ perspectives and intentions has produced friction, adding to their feelings of paranoia and uncertainty about the potential consequences of their visibility. Jade’s autism also presents communication challenges that intensify their concerns about being perceived as “too radical.” Their experience is in line with the findings of Cepeda's (2021) study, which reveals that faculty with disabilities not only confront but also resist ableist notions of performance, often facing a lack of institutional support even when accommodations are provided. Their experience also

highlights the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ faculty who experience multiple forms of oppression. Jade, for instance, must navigate—and is continuously harmed by—genderism and ableism (Miller, 2020). However, Jade is also white and as such, experiences overlapping systems of oppression and privilege. In Jade’s case, being white, non-binary, and autistic means their experiences are shaped by a unique interplay of identities. While white privilege may provide certain advantages, the challenges associated with gender identity and autism can overlap, resulting in a more nuanced and complex experience.

In contrast to Jade’s concerns about marginalization due to their gender identity, Flax, a Latino gay cisgender man, recounted a distressing incident at his institution involving a hate crime targeting his LGBTQIA+-affirming stickers. After attending a drag show on campus, he returned to his office to discover graffiti that read “gay” with an arrow pointing towards the LGBTQIA+-affirming stickers on his door. This incident, indicating an attempt to enforce an oppressive heteronormative environment, left him feeling vulnerable. He described the situation, stating,

They wrote ‘gay’ and had an arrow towards one of the stickers. And I think that might have been all of it. I was able to clean it up that same night when I found it, I was actually coming back from a drag event on campus that evening. I’m glad that I wasn’t alone, I was with a friend...I knew that it had been between me leaving my office to go to the event and coming back, but I didn’t know who it was, or if they were still around or not, but I was able to clean it. There were no remnants of the graffiti on the stickers or the door.

Flax indicated that his colleagues reported the graffiti to his university’s institutional equity office, which he did not know he could do. He said that the institutional equity office

investigated, in accordance with their non-discrimination policy, but ultimately could not identify the culprit. He explained that the graffiti led to his immediate decision to remove the graffiti “using hand sanitizer and Kleenex” and place more LGBTQIA+-affirming stickers on his office door, highlighting a form of privilege as he was able to clean up the graffiti promptly. His ability to address and rectify the situation swiftly may be linked to resources and a sense of security that not everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community may possess. Nevertheless, he shared, “The next day I went to the [LGBTQIA+ Resource Center] to pick up more stickers and put them on my door.” His unfamiliarity with the reporting process about this specific incident is also indicative of how cisheteronormativity conceals non-discrimination policies, leaving LGBTQIA+ individuals vulnerable to harm and dehumanization. Consequently, this reinforces the stigmatization of same-sex desire and gender nonconformity as abnormal or deviant. Despite the hate crime, he put up more LGBTQIA+-affirming stickers. This demonstrates his refusal to be intimidated or closeted, even when facing targeted attacks. His visibility highlights the risks associated with being openly LGBTQIA+. However, it also serves as an act of resistance against cisheteronormativity, which seeks to invalidate his existence and the existence of other LGBTQIA+ individuals (Pryor, 2021). While cisheteronormativity endeavors to silence, purge, and eradicate LGBTQIA+ individuals, his ongoing visibility counters these violent erasure tactics. He continues displaying LGBTQIA+-affirming stickers, as if to say: I will not retreat.

The experiences of Bryan, who is a white gay cisgender man, and Angela, a white bisexual cisgender woman, also illustrate the risks of visibility when policies and practices do not explicitly protect LGBTQIA+ faculty from how others perceive them. Bryan, for example, shared that the anonymity of student evaluations, a practice that influences policy and the results of which trigger certain policy-based consequences, has been harmful to him. He shared that he

has received student evaluations alleging that his sexual orientation influences his views and perspectives as a faculty member. This situation is consistent with Vaccaro's (2021) study, which found that LGBTQIA+ faculty often contend with queerphobic students who leave negative evaluations of their teaching based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. He said, "There are times when I have student evaluations that suggest that my being gay might impact the way that they perceive my views, my perspectives." The harm of this lies in the students' assertions that LGBTQIA+ faculty have inherently biased perspectives, implying that cisgender, heterosexual faculty are not biased. Cisgender, heterosexual faculty have the privilege of not having their sexual orientation and/or gender identity questioned or negatively evaluated. This privilege leads to their experiences being seen as the norm, while LGBTQIA+ faculty face assumptions about their perspectives. However, Bryan may benefit from racial and gender privilege, potentially shielding him from the specific allegations lodged by students in their evaluations from which racially minoritized and gender-diverse LGBTQIA+ faculty might not be protected. Racially minoritized and gender-diverse LGBTQIA+ faculty may have to navigate stereotypes related to their sexual orientation, race, and gender identity simultaneously, potentially facing student allegations that their teaching is influenced by these aspects (Thakur, 2021). While Bryan faces challenges, addressing accusations solely related to his sexual orientation may present a more straightforward path for him.

Angela, who is a visible and outspoken advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community at her institution, shared that her institution's tip line, which is a mechanism meant for reporting threats and misconduct, was manipulated to target her, highlighting the danger that anonymity poses to LGBTQIA+ faculty. She shared,

Someone did one about my activism, and like the queer community, there were so many different ones, and that was not what that tip line is for, but it was just like totally abused by people who wanted me to stop saying and doing what I was doing on campus; there was something deeply offensive to them about me as a person.

Her remark about people wanting her to stop her advocacy reveals the intentions of those who abused the tip line and may be intensified by a hostile anti-LGBTQIA+ political climate in the Midwest. Their goal was to silence her activism and prevent her from continuing to advocate on behalf of LGBTQIA+ individuals on campus. She also expressed that others found something profoundly offensive about her as an individual. This reflects how the oppressive nature of cisheteronormativity can lead to hostility and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals who challenge harmful norms and advocate for marginalized communities. She also described how the tip line policy created friction, leading her to feel unsafe and take steps to protect her reputation. Recognizing the potential impact of the allegations, she sought advice from her institution's legal counsel regarding the possibility of retaining an attorney to challenge these assertions. However, she was informed that the allegations lacked evidence and would be dismissed. This was a source of exasperation for her, as she hoped for a more definitive resolution to the situation. However, her decision to seek legal counsel and the subsequent response regarding the lack of evidence may reflect a system that, consciously or unconsciously, favors individuals with certain identities. Her ability to explore legal avenues and receive a dismissal based on the absence of evidence might indicate a level of protection afforded by her racial and gender identities.

James, an Asian gay cisgender man, and Joseph, a white queer transgender man, brought much-needed attention to the absence of inclusive restroom policies and practices, and how this

absence contributes to the visibility risks faced by transgender faculty. Their experiences show how the limited availability of all-gender restrooms perpetuates feelings of exclusion and the need for universities to prioritize inclusive facilities (McGuire et al., 2022). Additionally, the lack of trust in transgender faculty and systems to enforce policies correctly also highlights the impact of visibility. James, for example, who resides in the Midwest, discussed the lack of all-gender restrooms in his building, indicating exclusionary policies. James compared his current institution to his previous one, where the College of Education had all-gender restrooms. This contrast illuminates the need for inclusive restroom facilities in his current building. He shared,

In our building itself is that we don't have an all-gender family restroom. We still have restrooms that are specifically for cisgender men, specifically for cisgender women.

There is still that sense of exclusionary policies by not having these, I've seen it in other buildings on campus, but as far as I'm concerned, we don't have these all-gender restrooms. And I bring that up because in my previous institution we did have in our College of Education. So, it was interesting that we have not yet, at least again, far as I'm concerned, having only been in the first and second floors there might be on the third floor. I don't know, but I have yet to come across an all-gender restroom in our building.

James draws a comparison with his prior institution, particularly the College of Education, where all-gender restrooms were available and finds it interesting that his current institution lacks these facilities. This comparison highlights that the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals can vary based on the geographic location of an institution (Renn, 2022). Different regions or states may have distinct cultural attitudes, legal frameworks, and social climates that influence institutional policies and practices. If James moved to an institution in an area that is less progressive or LGBTQIA+-friendly, it might explain the absence or limited availability of all-gender restrooms.

In contrast, his prior institution, located in a more progressive region, may have had more comprehensive policies. The type of institution, whether it is a public university, private college, or community college, can shape the inclusion initiatives each adopts. Institutions in progressive regions tend to possess greater resources and motivation to implement inclusive policies. Conversely, institutions in more conservative regions may face different challenges in prioritizing the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals (Strunk et al., 2017). James might be experiencing a contrast in inclusion measures due to the differing priorities, resources, and organizational structures of the two institutions. James also acknowledges that he has only been on the first and second floors of the building and, therefore, may not be aware of all the facilities in the building. He notes the possibility of all-gender restrooms being present on the third floor, indicating a willingness to acknowledge his own limited perspective: “I don’t know, but I have yet to come across an all-gender restroom in our building.”

Joseph, who resides in the Northeast, discussed the challenges associated with gendered restrooms at his previous college despite being in a state with favorable policies. This reveals that even in supposedly progressive areas the oppressive nature of cisnormativity impacts individuals whose gender identity diverges from gender conformity. He expressed concerns about the enforcement of policies, including ones that are inclusive. He highlighted the need for supportive individuals as a form of protection in the cases where policies, even the supportive ones, may not be effectively enforced, demonstrating how HEIs hold power over the experiences of transgender faculty. He explained that the accessibility issues of having only three all-gender bathrooms on a large campus impacted his ability to navigate gendered restrooms safely. The fear of rumors led him to adjust his class schedules to be closer to an all-gender bathroom. He shared, “I really didn’t need to add to the rumor mill stories about students seeing me in the

men's bathroom, you know, and like...so you know, I wound up as time went on, like working with our scheduling people to make sure that my classrooms were close enough to one of the all-gender bathrooms." His decision to navigate this point of friction by adjusting his class schedules to be closer to an all-gender bathroom was an attempt to mitigate the potential harm caused by rumors and maintain a sense of safety and comfort in a cisnormative context, where gendered norms dictate that individuals should fit into binary gender categories. The fear of rumors also points to the power dynamics at play, where transgender faculty who do not conform to institutional norms may face consequences (McKenzie, 2020).

Leah, a white queer non-trans woman, and Sarah, a white lesbian cisgender woman, shed light on the harmful consequences of visibility for transgender faculty regarding a lack of access to essential healthcare at their respective institutions. Leah, for example, explained that transgender faculty face both being targeted and silenced, and this combination ultimately results in them leaving her institution. This aligns with Duran and Nicolazzo's (2017) study, which found that often when some transgender faculty are faced with challenges, they choose to leave their respective institutions. Leah specifically highlighted the lack of access to healthcare for transgender faculty, which indicated an oppressive systemic issue that directly affects the well-being and livelihood of transgender individuals. She also mentioned that transgender women faculty have been driven out of the institution through various means. She stated, "Trans faculty can't get healthcare at the institution I'm working at. Trans women faculty at this institution, in particular, have by and large been driven out of the institution in a variety of ways." This situation could possibly be exacerbated by living in the Southwest, where the political landscape is not particularly friendly to transgender individuals. This landscape could very well impact HEIs' treatment of transgender individuals. Her statement demonstrates the harmful impact that

visibility can have on transgender individuals in academic settings. The lack of healthcare support for transgender faculty, for example, is a policy that entrenches cisnormativity and transphobia (Jaekel & Nicolazzo, 2022), where their basic healthcare needs are neglected, which not only undermines their physical health but also sends a clear message that their well-being and rights are not prioritized by the institution. Additionally, the inability of transgender faculty to access healthcare highlights how institutions are embedded in power structures that enforce cisnormativity. These structures create barriers for transgender faculty who are neither cisgender nor heterosexual. This exclusionary policy produces friction by targeting transgender women faculty, contributing to their departure from the institution. The fact that transgender women faculty “have by and large been driven out” spotlights the transphobia and genderism that contribute to their marginalization.

Emphasizing the insights made by Leah, Sarah highlighted the consequences of hostile, anti-transgender legislation in her Midwestern state. The political climate in this region has increasingly become more hostile towards the transgender community. The punitive nature of the anti-transgender legislation has forced several transgender faculty members to leave both her institution and the state altogether to access essential healthcare services. She said, “I’ve known people who have moved out of state just so they can transition.” Her insight also aligns with the findings of Duran and Nicolazzo's (2017) research, highlighting the reality of transgender faculty choosing to depart from their respective institutions that are marked by dehumanizing and transphobic conditions. However, the fact that some can relocate is a mark of privilege, as they can afford or have the resources to move to a more accepting state, in comparison to those who do not have this option. She also revealed that, despite her institution's existing non-discrimination policy, transgender faculty have faced challenges in obtaining vital healthcare

services, including mammograms and prostate exams, which are part of their healthcare benefits that have been impacted by the anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation. She reported, “It can be precarious for transgender [employees], you know, trying to get approval, to have a mammogram done and a prostate exam both done.” This situation reveals that even when institutions maintain non-discrimination policies on the surface, the clutches of cisnormativity undermine the effective implementation and enforcement of these policies and can be impacted by external factors, such as political climate. Political ideologies and shifts in governance can impact the priorities and attitudes of HEIs. In some cases, changes in leadership or political climate may either strengthen or weaken the commitment to enforcing non-discrimination policies.

This section highlighted the risks and consequences when LGBTQIA+ faculty are visible about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the face of cisheteronormative policies and practices. Participants’ narratives reveal how these policies, practices, and norms impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Their experiences also reflect the shared struggles of LGBTQIA+ faculty when confronting cisheteronormative practices in professional settings, often involving both internal struggles and external pressures.

Enforcing Conformity to Gender Roles

This section reveals how LGBTQIA+ faculty are differentially treated by cisheteronormative policies and practices for not conforming to traditional gender roles. The narratives in this section illustrate how assumptions about gender roles and relationships shape not only their experiences but also the institutional treatment of them. Bryan, a white gay cisgender man, for example, discussed how his same-sex marriage differs from traditional heterosexual marriage and how this impacts the way heterosexual faculty colleagues think about his commitment to the institution. He shared that this has come up in his faculty evaluation, as

per his institution's faculty evaluation policy. Bryan explained that, if he were in a heterosexual relationship, there would be an assumption that his spouse would move to support him in his career. However, being in a same-sex relationship introduces a level of uncertainty for his heterosexual faculty colleagues regarding their expectations of him. This calls attention to how the fluid dynamics and gender roles in same-sex relationships create ambiguity and discomfort among heterosexual faculty colleagues who may struggle to understand and discuss not only Bryan's relationship but also his long-term prospects. While he is white, the privilege associated with his whiteness does not completely negate the effects of the heteronormative assumptions he faces. He still experiences oppression tied to his same-sex marriage. He shared,

I think the fact that I have a husband and not a wife who is remote from me should impact the way that the faculty think about my staying or leaving, right? So traditionally, you know, in a heterosexual couple, if I were male and my spouse were female, I think the assumption would be that my spouse would come with me or would move to me, and the fact that we are both male makes it a bit less clear to them sort of whether I would stay, whether he would come, you know, in part because the dynamics and gender roles are less fixed for us than they are for other people. And so that's led to some sort of not uncomfortableness that this isn't sure how to talk about my relationship and sort of my long-term prospects here.

Bryan suggests that his marital status, being married to a man who lives and works out of state, should be a factor considered by the faculty when thinking about his decision to stay or leave. His remark illustrates how he challenges heteronormative expectations that are often rooted in traditional gender roles in a heterosexual marriage (Di Marco et al., 2022). He seems to imply that his same-sex marriage disrupts these traditional assumptions. Bryan also points out that if he

were in traditional heterosexual relationship, it would be assumed that his spouse, if his spouse were a female, would relocate to be with him. Here, Bryan contrasts his situation with that of a heterosexual couple, highlighting how, in such a relationship, there is an expectation that the male faculty member's female spouse would follow him in the case of relocation. Bryan then explores the complexity of his same-sex relationship, highlighting that because he and his spouse are both males, it is less apparent to others whether he would remain or if his partner would relocate. This highlights the unique dynamics in same-sex relationships where gender roles are less restrictive. Consequently, this disrupts the power dynamics associated with rigid gender roles and norms in heterosexual relationships. The ambiguity of these dynamics can lead to uncertainty among others when discussing Bryan's relationship and long-term commitment to the institution. This uncertainty seemingly arises from the challenge of not fitting Bryan's situation into familiar, heteronormative relationships and gender roles.

Leah, a white queer non-trans woman, has had to navigate cisheteronormative expectations that are deeply entrenched in institutions' spousal and partner hiring policies. She noted that cisnormative assumptions based on traditional gender roles are embedded in institutions' spousal and partner hiring policies, shaping their (and their partner's) experiences as LGBTQIA+ faculty. She stated,

So, we were both engaged in job search processes at multiple institutions because we were long, we had been long distance and wanted to be at the same place as faculty. You know, people knew we were doing this et cetera, et cetera and knew who we were. And there are kind of like nuanced ways in which people would misgender my partner by assuming that she was like the leading spouse that it was based on offers given to her that we were making decisions. And I think that there are all kinds of ways that people can

explain that away because she's also a more senior person in her work as a faculty member. But you can kind of read how people are relating to you as a couple and be like, oh, there's some like straight assumptions at work here that are misgendering, you know, one of us and misunderstanding both of us as partners.

Leah mentioned the nuanced ways in which her partner is misgendered due to assumptions that incorrectly identify her as a man (McKenzie, 2020). By assuming a traditional heterosexual model where her partner is presumed to be the primary decision-maker, which is a masculine characteristic that is read onto her, her partner is misgendered. This masculinist assumption aligns with the traditional gender norm of men being seen as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers in relationships. By attributing traditional masculine qualities such as seniority and authority to her partner, colleagues misgender her by assuming she is playing the leading role in the relationship. While Leah faces oppression through cisnormative assumptions embedded in spousal and partner hiring policies, which reflect traditional gender roles, Leah's identity as a white person may afford her privileges in navigating institutions and interacting with colleagues. In such situations where she and her partner have faced challenges due to assumptions, her whiteness might have provided her with some degree of protection compared to individuals who face additional forms of racial discrimination.

Leah also highlighted how certain policies, such as those regarding partner accommodations, can perpetuate biases and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ faculty. She explained that even if these policies do not explicitly express queerphobia, LGBTQIA+ faculty often face greater challenges navigating and benefitting from such policies compared to their cisgender, heterosexual colleagues. This highlights the challenges LGBTQIA+ faculty face in benefitting from policies that may be available to them. Even if inclusive policies exist, the lack

of knowledge, support, or resources to implement and enforce them effectively can hinder LGBTQIA+ faculty from fully accessing the benefits and protections they should provide. She also highlighted the importance of institutions acknowledging that policies can exist informally, even if they are not explicitly written down. This emphasizes the insidious nature of anti-LGBTQIA+ bias and prejudice, asserting that they can permeate institutional culture, influencing practices that may not be explicitly codified in written policies (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009). “[It is important] for institutions to recognize that things become policy that are not written as policy, that end up targeting queer and trans folks.” She also pointed out that practices can sometimes be mistakenly treated as official policies, especially when they have been in place for a long time. “There are all kinds of practices that people walk around talking as policy when it is just a practice that everybody has done for a while.” This suggests a need for clarity and distinguishing between actual policies and longstanding practices. She also highlighted a discrepancy in understanding between individuals who study policy and those responsible for policy interpretation. “So, I think the point I think folks who study policy know that, but I do not think a lot of readers or people who end up responsible for policy interpretation know that.” Her statement highlights the need for institutions to recognize and differentiate between written policies and informal practices that can inadvertently target queer and transgender individuals. While policy scholars may recognize the existence of informal policies and practices, those in leadership positions or tasked with interpreting policy might not be as aware.

Building upon Leah’s account of being impacted by cisnormative policies, Joseph, a white queer transgender man, highlighted the challenges he faced when colleagues attempted to prepare students for his presence in the classroom. He shared that the preparatory activities were influenced by a training and education policy that neglects transgender experiences. This

oversight in institutional policy perpetuates stereotypes and misunderstandings, pointing out the existence of cisnormative beliefs, where normative assumptions harm Joseph and other transgender faculty and reinforce the struggles they face navigating HEIs. While Joseph faced obstacles due to his gender identity, his whiteness may have provided him with a degree of protection that might be unavailable to racially minoritized transgender faculty. He described his predicament as being “double screwed,” which suggests that he faced two distinct challenges or disadvantages in this situation. The first challenge was the “initial basic transphobic reactions” from students, implying that some students may have reacted with bias when interacting with him for the first time (Siegel, 2019). It also highlights the oppressive nature of discriminatory attitudes towards transgender individuals. The second challenge was the expectation that Joseph had to meet certain criteria for looking and behaving like a transgender person “should” in the eyes of these students. This double burden reflects the additional pressure and oppression that transgender individuals may face when trying to navigate societal expectations and stereotypes while also dealing with transphobia. Joseph also assumed that students should have a more enlightened and accepting view of transgender individuals just because “it is not 2010.” This assumption overlooks the reality that societal attitudes and knowledge about transgender issues vary widely, change is not guaranteed with the passage of time, and anti-transgender sentiments have become more pervasive in recent years throughout the country, irrespective of region (Casey et al., 2019). Joseph's experience also highlights that there are still misunderstandings, stereotypes, and negative reactions towards transgender individuals, even in ostensibly enlightened times. The notion that “students have an idea about what we look like” indicates that preconceived notions and stereotypes still exist, irrespective of the year.

Joseph's experience also highlights instances of cisnormativity, whereby normative assumptions about gender identity permeate HEIs, and may be amplified by regional dynamics. Joseph highlighted the need for educating and supporting allies in understanding gender identity and the complex experiences of transgender individuals. The allusion to “doing it right” hints at the existence of societal expectations dictating how a transgender person should express themselves and navigate their gender identity. These expectations are deeply rooted in the presumption that there exists a “correct” way to embody transgender identity, which reinforces cisnormative beliefs about the binary and fixed nature of gender identity (Garrison, 2018). In particular, Joseph's account may connect with Jade's earlier reference to feeling “too much” to colleagues as a non-binary individual. This sentiment illustrates how the oppressive nature of cisnormative practices not only marginalize transgender and gender non-binary faculty by imposing the gender binary on them but also cast them as excessive or deviant for not adhering to restrictive cisnormative expectations. This leaves them contending with a sense of being “double screwed” as they negotiate the dehumanizing spaces of academia while embodying transgender and gender-diverse identities.

Summary

The experiences shared by the participants demonstrate the challenges LGBTQIA+ faculty face. The narratives presented here illustrate how assumptions regarding gender roles and relationships not only affect the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty but also influence how they are institutionally treated. Addressing these challenges necessitates a shift away from biased assumptions and policies and towards a commitment to equitable treatment of LGBTQIA+ faculty.

The insights gained from these interviews shed light on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty, revealing three overarching themes. The first theme highlights the oppressive impact of heteronormative policies and practices, pressuring LGBTQIA+ faculty to conceal their sexual orientation. The second theme reveals the risks and consequences when LGBTQIA+ faculty are visible about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the face of cisheteronormative policies and practices. The third theme highlights how LGBTQIA+ faculty are differentially treated by cisheteronormative policies and practices for not conforming to traditional gender roles. These findings also illuminate the challenges LGBTQIA+ faculty face as they navigate the various points of friction generated by cisheteronormative policies and practices, which are recurring phenomena that cut across all three themes, at their respective institutions. These themes collectively highlight the pressing need for HEIs to disrupt cisheteronormativity.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The dual aim of this dissertation project was, first, to understand the impact of policies and practices on LGBTQIA+ faculty and, second, to explore the strategies they employ to navigate points of friction produced by them. Grounded in queer theory, the study scrutinized how HEIs embed heterosexuality and gender conformity into policies and practices, upholding cisheteronormativity (Seal, 2019). While existing research primarily focuses on interpersonal discrimination and harassment faced by LGBTQIA+ faculty (Barnett et al., 2013; Nadal, 2019; Vaccaro et al., 2019), this project emphasized that policies and practices also contribute to the normalization of heterosexuality and gender conformity. This project also brought to the fore that the distinction between the interpersonal and institutional levels is not as clear-cut, considering that anti-LGBTQIA+ bias and prejudice at the interpersonal level influence cisheteronormative policies and practices at the institutional level (Lincoln & Stanley, 2021).

Discussion

The first research question of this project inquired into the impact of policies and practices on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. This question yielded many significant findings around the relationships between power, privilege, and marginalization and their impact on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. For example, white LGBTQIA+ faculty may find it less parlous to come out compared to their racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ colleagues. This difference is rooted in the societal advantages attributed to whiteness, in which privilege is inherent, as it often affords a level of protection and acceptance for white people (Applebaum, 2016). In the United States, white dominance has produced institutions, including higher education, wherein opportunities for white people are elevated over racially minoritized groups. The privilege associated with whiteness empowers white LGBTQIA+ faculty to navigate

conversations about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity with more ease and conspicuousness (Shelton, 2020). This relationship highlights the importance of offering nuanced support to LGBTQIA+ faculty, not treating them as a monolith, and acknowledging the complexities of their lived experiences and challenges.

Moreover, the findings highlight the impact of external factors, particularly anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, on LGBTQIA+ faculty members' access to essential healthcare services. Even when HEIs have non-discrimination policies in place, the political climate can hinder effective policy implementation. This raises concerns about the efficacy of inclusive policies in safeguarding LGBTQIA+ faculty when they can be easily undone by government actions. It emphasizes the important role that HEIs must play in advocating for and protecting LGBTQIA+ individuals and serves as a reminder that HEIs cannot remain passive in the face of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation. Instead, HEIs must adopt a proactive stance in defending the rights and healthcare access of LGBTQIA+ faculty against oppressive state regimes that attempt to codify cisheteronormativity into law.

Another finding brings attention to overcompensation behaviors such as LGBTQIA+ faculty feeling compelled to attend all student events. The significance of this finding lies in the revelation that LGBTQIA+ faculty often engage in these overcompensation behaviors to shift the spotlight from their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These behaviors appear to arise from a desire to be recognized and valued for their contributions as individuals rather than solely for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. As such, HEIs must commit to fostering academic environments in which LGBTQIA+ faculty are fully affirmed, valued, and not subjected to differential treatment that results in a palpable sense of marginalization (Tetreault et al., 2013).

The findings also indicate that the existence of ostensibly inclusive initiatives, such as LGBTQIA+ faculty associations and LGBTQIA+ centers, while supportive of and important to LGBTQIA+ individuals (Patton, 2012; Patton, et al., 2011), may not effectively eliminate the oppressive nature of cisheteronormativity. To combat deeply entrenched cisheteronormativity, it is important to ensure systemic equality for LGBTQIA+ faculty specifically and LGBTQIA+ individuals in general. The findings also reveal the doubts expressed by LGBTQIA+ faculty regarding the authenticity of policies, even when these policies explicitly mention sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTQIA+ faculty question whether these policies genuinely represent a commitment to supporting them or if they are merely a façade, designed to give the appearance of support without meaningful action (Ahmed, 2020). This also highlights the importance of HEIs moving beyond symbolic gestures and actively demonstrating their dedication to the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ faculty.

In addition, the findings indicate that harmful policies targeting LGBTQIA+ faculty may not always be explicitly documented but can instead manifest through informal practices (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009). For example, a faculty hiring committee, without clear documentation, might decide against hiring an individual from the LGBTQIA+ community based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, perceiving potential issues if that person is employed. This scenario prompts critical considerations about the violence and harm directed at LGBTQIA+ faculty. It highlights that discrimination is not confined to formal, written policies. Instead, it can operate implicitly through decision-making processes and practices.

The second research question investigated points of friction, which encompass the violence and harm produced by cisheteronormative policies and practices. This question generated significant findings. One finding is that LGBTQIA+ faculty employ various coping

and resistance strategies to navigate points of friction, including self-advocating and concealing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to protect their careers. However, these strategies prompt consideration of the potential overlapping dimensions of privilege and marginalization. While these strategies may prove useful for white LGBTQIA+ faculty, questions are raised about whether they would be as effective for individuals with different identity markers in the LGBTQIA+ community. Participants indicated that they often find themselves self-advocating when questioning diversity policies at their respective institutions, highlighting the importance of revising these policies to include sexual orientation and gender identity. This aim is to prevent LGBTQIA+ faculty from being invisibilized by broader discussions of systemic oppression. Specifically, racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty highlighted the importance of ensuring that diversity policies are not written in a way that acknowledges one dimension of their identity, such as their race, and neglects another, such as their sexual orientation or gender identity. This also highlights that any “diversity” policy lacking language related to sexual orientation and gender identity is nothing more than a pretense, perpetuating cisheteronormativity, and forcing LGBTQIA+ faculty to suppress their identities to conform to unspoken expectations (Davies & Neustifter, 2021). Consequently, LGBTQIA+ faculty often resort to selective disclosure, revealing their identity only to those they perceive as affirming (Tetreault et al., 2013). HEIs must address these issues in policies and campus culture to ensure a more inclusive environment.

The findings also highlight the specific issues and challenges faced by transgender faculty due to the limited availability of all-gender restrooms and accommodations, highlighting the urgency for HEIs to prioritize inclusive restroom facilities. It also highlights the visibility of transgender and gender non-binary faculty and the expectations associated with their gender identity, emphasizing the need for HEIs to challenge rigid gender norms while promoting

diversity and inclusion. This calls for immediate actions taken by HEIs to demonstrate their commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive environment free from the oppressive grip of cisheteronormative expectations.

Recommendations for Practice

It is strongly advised that HEIs collaborate with LGBTQIA+ faculty as well as on-campus LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups/centers to receive feedback and direction during policy development and implementation. Centering the voices and experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty will help ensure that policies do not inadvertently normalize heterosexuality and gender conformity. It is also important to continuously develop, revise, and review policies to keep them free from anti-LGBTQIA+ bias, even as the sociopolitical climate of higher education evolves. Policies should also not just be statements on paper but actively demonstrate a commitment to protecting LGBTQIA+ individuals from all forms of violence and harm. To accomplish this, HEIs should establish protocols for confidential reporting and support for LGBTQIA+ individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination, harassment, or hate crimes (Stotzer, 2010). For example, University of Maryland offers various avenues for individuals in its campus community who believe they have experienced any of the above. They can fill out and submit an online bias incident report, reach out to an administrator, or utilize a 24/7 hotline (University of Maryland, n.d.). University of Maryland sets a standard for commitment to the safety and well-being of its community members. HEIs should implement protocols, similar to University of Maryland, and communicate them effectively. To ensure clear communication for reporting protocols, universities should host listening sessions that explain the reporting process, provide information and reporting in multiple languages, create a webpage that details the reporting process, include reporting information as part of new employee and student

orientations, and require an annual harassment, discrimination, and bias training that employees and students have to complete. Promoting transparency in the reporting and investigation of discrimination, harassment, or hate crime complaints is vital for building trust and accountability. No member of a university community who feels like they are a victim of the aforementioned harassment and discrimination should be left in the dark about how to report it or to whom it needs to be reported.

HEIs also need to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ faculty by hosting campus events that spotlight Pride Month, LGBTQIA+ History Month, National Coming Out Day, International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, etc., increasing LGBTQIA+ representation in leadership roles, and establishing LGBTQIA+ Centers that provide support, resources, and community to LGBTQIA+ individuals, including a name and gender marker change clinic. For example, Arizona State University's Rainbow Collective partners with the human resources department to help individuals go through the process of changing their name and/or gender identity in a supportive and compassionate manner (Arizona State University, n.d.). Because changing one's name and/or gender identity often requires navigating dehumanizing, bureaucratic processes, this partnership is crucial and should serve as a model for other HEIs. HEIs need to also practice supporting and prioritizing inclusion for transgender and gender non-binary faculty by ensuring that gender-neutral restrooms and facilities are ubiquitous, clearly marked, and well-maintained in addition to establishing partnerships with healthcare institutions that provide life-sustaining, humanizing services, and providing benefits that do not exclude gender-affirming surgical procedures.

Recognizing that violence and harm against LGBTQIA+ faculty may not be explicitly articulated in written policies, it is imperative for HEIs to proactively eliminate

cisheteronormativity. HEIs can undertake this by fostering an appreciation for diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, coupled with comprehensive audits of institutional policies. These audits should extend beyond written policies to encompass unwritten norms and practices that may inadvertently perpetuate discrimination. However, echoing Bell's (1980) insights on interest convergence, attempting to legislate changes within HEIs may prove futile. If HEIs were to implement non-discrimination policies or inclusive practices, according to Bell (1980), their motivation might not stem from a genuine commitment to the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Instead, it might be driven by a desire to maintain a positive public image or evade potential legal issues. Unless the dominant group genuinely prioritizes the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ faculty, such measures alone may fall short. In light of this, LGBTQIA+ faculty are encouraged to seek remedies outside of HEIs. This could involve engaging with external support systems, advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights on broader platforms, and finding affirming communities that prioritize their humanity and professional growth.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is strongly recommended that researchers conduct campus climate studies specifically tailored to LGBTQIA+ faculty to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of their campuses. Campus climate studies have proven to be helpful tools for assessing the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students (Garvey et al., 2015; Garvey et al., 2017; Garvey et al., 2018; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). However, campus climate studies must start focusing on the experiences and challenges of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Future research should build on these foundations, incorporating perspectives to better capture the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty, particularly those who belong to multiple marginalized groups. It is also recommended that researchers examine the various strategies and coping mechanisms used by LGBTQIA+

faculty to navigate disclosure and the impact of these strategies on well-being and career advancement. Understanding how LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate disclosure is important. Research has highlighted the importance of identity management strategies, shedding light on how LGBTQIA+ individuals negotiate their identities while seeking career success (Fletcher & Everly, 2021; LaSala et al., 2008). Future studies should look deeper into the effectiveness of different disclosure strategies, their implications on career advancement, and the interplay between personal identity and institutional expectations. Additionally, considering the potential emotional toll of these strategies is crucial, as emotional labor may play a significant role in LGBTQIA+ faculty members' overall well-being.

Moreover, researchers need to evaluate the impact of updated non-discrimination policies on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty by measuring changes in discrimination rates, job satisfaction, and overall well-being before and after policy updates. Evaluating the effectiveness of updated non-discrimination policies is crucial in creating inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ faculty. Future research should investigate the impact of policy updates and the role of policy implementation and enforcement. Additionally, examining the interactions between policy changes and other factors, such as cultural shifts and leadership support, is essential in comprehending the full scope of policy effectiveness in HEIs (Madani, 2019).

Researchers need to also explore the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty who choose to be more visible about their identities and those who do not. Understanding the dynamics of visibility and identity among LGBTQIA+ faculty is an evolving area of research (Davies & Neustifter, 2023; Prock et al., 2019). The literature highlights that visibility can have both positive and negative consequences, impacting job satisfaction and career advancement. Future research studies should explore factors influencing the decision to be visible, including personal

motivations, institutional culture, and the broader sociopolitical context. Further, considering how visibility compounds with other identity factors, such as race and gender, is essential for a comprehensive analysis (Dill & Zambrana, 2020).

Researchers should also consider further investigating the experiences of transgender and gender non-binary faculty, focusing on their interactions with colleagues, students, and administrators. The experiences of transgender and gender non-binary faculty are wide and varying and demand focused research attention. Existing literature suggests that they often encounter unique challenges related to gender identity and expression (McKenzie, 2020; Rankin, 2007). Future research should examine the specific barriers transgender and gender non-binary faculty face, such as issues related to restroom facilities, pronoun use, and healthcare access (McKenzie, 2020; Shultz, 2018). Further, identifying and promoting inclusive policies and practices that accommodate transgender and gender non-binary faculty is crucial for creating more equitable and supportive academic environments (Stryker & Aizura, 2013). Also, researchers should study the effects of stereotypes and preconceived notions on transgender and gender non-binary faculty members' experiences in the classroom and examine how these stereotypes may affect their teaching evaluations, professional relationships, and overall job satisfaction, as they can significantly impact experiences. Future research should investigate how these stereotypes influence teaching evaluations and faculty-student interactions and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, exploring strategies to mitigate the effects of stereotypes and promote a more inclusive educational environment for transgender faculty needs to be prioritized.

Future research could also benefit from a comparative analysis of various disclosure strategies employed by LGBTQIA+ faculty, exploring not only the effectiveness of different

approaches but also the consequences for LGBTQIA+ faculty that flow from each approach, such as gradual disclosure, subtle clues, or nonverbal clues, in managing the friction between personal identity and institutional expectations. Comparative analysis of disclosure strategies can provide critical insights into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Future research should explore the differences between these strategies, their outcomes in terms of workplace relationships and job satisfaction, and the factors that influence their effectiveness. This research can offer valuable guidance for LGBTQIA+ faculty and institutions seeking to foster more inclusive academic environments.

It is also recommended to conduct research on the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty. Recognizing that racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty experiences are critical for a comprehensive understanding of their challenges and opportunities, future research studies should draw from the works of Nadal (2019), Morales-Díaz (2014), and Aguilar and Johnson (2017) to further explore the ways in which racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty are harmed and dehumanized by multiple systems of oppression (e.g., racism x heterosexism x cissexism) simultaneously. Researchers should also explore geographical and political contexts and their impact on the degree of institutional support for LGBTQIA+ faculty concerning institutional policies and practices. This could involve a comprehensive analysis of the geographic location and political climate of academic institutions and how these factors could influence the level of support that LGBTQIA+ faculty receive in terms of institutional policies and practices. This research could consider regional disparities and the role of government policies and public sentiment in shaping the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty. Another recommendation would be to conduct an in-depth examination of the impact of diversity policies on racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty. The focus should be on how these policies are

written and whether they effectively acknowledge and address different dimensions of identity, such as race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The research could explore the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQIA+ faculty, investigating how the language and implementation of diversity policies contribute to a sense of inclusion or marginalization, or both. In addition, examining potential disparities in the recognition of support of different identity dimensions within these policies could provide valuable insights for refining and enhancing diversity initiatives in HEIs.

Conclusion

The present study, which is situated within the broader context of higher education research and utilized queer theory, explored the ways in which heterosexuality and gender conformity are embedded within policies and practices, upholding cisheteronormativity. While this critical qualitative research study was limited to a sample of 10 LGBTQIA+ faculty across various institutions in the contiguous United States, the findings provide a snapshot of LGBTQIA+ faculty experiences in higher education and how their experiences could be shaped by the broader social and political landscape. These findings can undoubtedly serve as a crucial resource for scholars, university policymakers, administrators, and practitioners seeking to advocate for and make transformational changes benefitting not only LGBTQIA+ faculty but also the broader LGBTQIA+ community in higher education.

The study's participants represented diverse identities and perspectives, collectively highlighting the immediate need for structural and systemic changes aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ faculty. LGBTQIA+ faculty experiences remain an evolving area of study, and this research contributes to the expanding body of literature dedicated to understanding their unique challenges. As this study demonstrates, LGBTQIA+ faculty often

contend with violence and harm perpetuated by institutional level cisheteronormative policies and practices, which are influenced by anti-LGBTQIA+ bias and prejudice at the interpersonal level.

Looking ahead, this project implores us to challenge oppressive norms, advocate for systemic changes, and envision HEIs as places where the liberation for queer and transgender people is possible. It challenges policymakers, administrators, and practitioners to embrace changes that transcend the present and pave the way for a more inclusive and liberated future. This project, therefore, does not merely provide an in-depth exploration of an important phenomenon; it serves as a call to action for HEIs to prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community. In recognizing that HEIs are reluctant to change, LGBTQIA+ faculty and the broader LGBTQIA+ community in higher education are encouraged to look for affirmation, support, as well as personal and professional development outside of HEIs.

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Appendix A: Consent to Participate in Research

University of Oklahoma

You are invited to participate in research about how policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty in higher education.

If you agree to participate, you will complete a 3-minute Qualtrics survey. Afterward, the primary investigator (PI) will reach out to you to schedule a 60- to 90-minute Zoom interview that will be audio and video recorded.

You may experience these risks:

Data collected online or by a device and transmitted electronically: You will be asked to complete an online survey as part of this research. The organization hosting the data collection platform has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. There is a risk that the external organization, which is not part of the research team, may gain access to or retain your data or your IP address which could be used to re-identify you. No assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

Questions that could be emotionally distressing: You will be asked to answer questions that may make you distressed or trigger strong emotional reactions. If these questions make you uncomfortable, you do not have to provide an answer, or you can stop our discussion or discontinue participation in the research. If the researcher sees signs that you are distressed, they will pause the discussion and ask if you would like to continue. The National LGBT Hotline is also a resource available to you. Their number is (888) 843-4564.

Collection of demographic or geographic location data that could lead to deductive re-identification: You will be asked to provide demographic information that describes you. We may also gather information about your geographic location in this research. Different combinations of personal and geographic information may make it possible for your identity to be guessed by someone who was given, or gained access, to our research records. To minimize the risk of deductive re-identification, we will not combine identifying variables nor analyze and report results for small groups of people with specific demographic characteristics.

There are no benefits for participating in this research.

Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be confidential.

We might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional assent from you.

The research data (de-identified variables only) may be uploaded to an online data repository platform where it would be publicly available for anyone interested in using it.

Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason.

If you have questions about this research, please contact:

Sage Mauldin, PI, sagemauldin@ou.edu, and Dr. Haslerig, Faculty Advisor, hslerig@ou.edu.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns, or complaints about your child’s rights as a research participant or if you don’t want to talk to the researcher.

IRB # _____ IRB Approval Date _____

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Yes

No

Do you agree to participate in the study? (If you answer no, you will be disqualified from participating.)

Yes

No

Appendix B: Qualtrics Survey

What year were you born? [insert text]

Please select any and all races and/or ethnicities that you identify with:

- Black
- Latino/a/x
- Asian
- Native/Indigenous/First Nations
- White
- Alaska Native
- Hawaii Native
- African
- Pacific Islander
- Caribbean
- Middle Eastern
- North African
- Arab
- Biracial/Multiracial
- If you selected biracial/multiracial, please share which races you identify with: [enter text here]
- If not listed: [enter text here]
- I prefer not to say

How do you describe your racial/ethnic identity?

Please select any and all sexual orientations that you identify with:

- Asexual (Ace)
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Fluid
- Heteroflexible
- Homoflexible
- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Same-Gender Loving
- Aromantic
- Questioning
- If not listed: [enter text here]
- I prefer not to say

How do you describe your sexual orientation?

Please select any and all sexes and/or genders that you identify with:

- Cisgender woman
- Cisgender man
- Woman
- Man
- Assigned female at birth (AFAB)
- Assigned male at birth (AMAB)

- Transgender woman
- Transgender man
- Gender queer
- Gender non-conforming
- Two-Spirit
- Non-Binary
- If not listed: [enter text here]
- I prefer not to say

How do you describe your gender? [enter text here]

What is your citizenship?

- Born in the United States
- Born in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Northern Marianas
- Born abroad of U.S. Citizen parent or parents
- U.S. Citizen by naturalization
- Not a U.S. Citizen
- If you are not a U.S. citizen, please share your country of origin: [enter text here]

Are you an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to share
- If you selected yes, please share which federally recognized tribe: [enter text here]

What is your marital status?

- Single (never married)

- Married, or in a domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- I prefer not to say

Please select any and all that describes your highest level of education:

- Ph.D.
- Ed.D.
- All but dissertation (ABD)
- J.D.
- M.A.
- M.S.
- M.B.A.
- M.F.A.
- Other [enter text here]

Please select any and all that describe your current faculty appointment:

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Non-tenure-track
- Tenure-track
- Tenured
- Instructor
- Assistant Professor

- Associate Professor
- Full Professor
- Emeritus
- University
- Clinical
- Teaching
- Research
- Adjunct
- Visiting
- Other
- If you selected other, please explain: [enter text here]

How long have you been faculty (in years)?

- One year or less
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 20+ years

Do you hold an administrator position?

- Yes
 - No
 - If you selected yes, which position? [enter text here]
-

What is your academic field? [enter text here]

What type of institution do you work at? Select any and all that apply:

- Four-year university
- Community college
- Liberal arts college
- Graduate school
- Public university
- Private university
- R1 Institution
- R2 Institution
- R3 Institution
- If not listed: [enter text here]

Are you “out” at work?

- Yes
- No
- Sort of
- If you selected sort of, please explain: [enter text here]

Have you been differentially impacted by policies and practices at your institution because of your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?

Examples include (but are not limited to):

a. Example #1: At a large, public, research-intensive university, the Office of the Provost has in place a “diversity” policy for hiring committees that includes race, ethnicity, and gender but excludes sexuality. When a Dean challenged the exclusion of sexuality, the Office of the Provost defended its position by declaring that sexuality is not considered a “diverse” identity. Resulting from this is non-heterosexual faculty do not feel seen or valued by the university.

b. Example #2: At a large, public, research-intensive university, the LGBTQ+ Center requested to illuminate prominent campus buildings in rainbow colors in celebration of Pride Month. In response, the request was denied, and a policy was enacted that forbids any groups from making similar requests. Resulting from this is LGBTQIA+ faculty, staff, and students do not feel that their support is a priority to the university.

c. Example #3: At a large, public, land-grant university, administrators put in place a restroom policy meant to enable transgender and gender non-conforming faculty, staff, and students to use restrooms without harassment but in actuality reinforces harm because it also encourages people to report someone whom they believe to be in the “wrong” restroom. Resulting from this is transgender and gender non-conforming faculty, staff, and students constantly worry that they will be discriminated against in any of the restrooms on campus.

Yes

No

Kind of

I am not sure

If you selected kind of or I am not sure, please explain: [enter text here]

Please choose a pseudonym: [enter text here]

Please provide your email address: [enter text here]

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Hello [pseudonym]! My name is Sage Mauldin, and my personal pronouns are he/him/his. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma, and my dissertation project, titled “The Impact of Cisheteronormative Policies and Practices on the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Faculty in Higher Education: A Critical Qualitative Inquiry” seeks to understand how policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty in higher education. My dissertation project aims to improve higher education policies and practices for LGBTQIA+ faculty. This interview is expected to last anywhere between 60 and 90 minutes. The sensitive nature of the interview questions could elicit an emotional response. If you need someone to speak to after the interview, you may contact the National LGBT Hotline at (888) 843-4564. As I shared in the consent form, this interview will be both audio and video recorded for transcription purposes. However, if you want this interview to only be audio recorded for an added layer of protection, please tell me. During the interview, we can skip any questions, and you can withdraw at any time. Also, if you say something you want me to strike from the record, please tell me, and I will do that. Do you wish to continue?

1. You indicated that you are “out” at work. Can you please share more about this?
 - a. (if necessary) Have you had a “coming out” experience at work? What did that experience mean to you?
 - b. (if necessary) How has “coming out” impacted you professionally?
 - c. (if necessary) In what settings are you out (e.g., classroom, department, ERG)?
 - d. (if necessary) To whom have you “come out” at work (e.g., students, colleagues, department chair, administrators)?
 - e. (if necessary) Are you “out” in all of your professional roles?
 - f. (if necessary) How have people reacted to your sexuality/gender identity?
 - g. (if necessary) Have there been any instances when you have been supported or invalidated after you have “come out”?
 - a. (if necessary) Did you seek justice or adjudication following this experience? Why or why not?
 - b. (if necessary) How did your supervisor respond?
 - c. (if necessary) Were there any (interpretations of) policies or practices that hindered your ability to seek justice?
 - h. (if necessary) Have there been contexts in your professional life where your sexual orientation and/or gender identity has been most noticeable?
2. You indicated that you work at a public university. What has your experience been like with your current institution as a queer non-trans woman faculty member?
 - a. (if necessary) Do you think your current institution being a public university impacts your experience as a queer non-trans woman faculty member?
3. You indicated that you have been differentially impacted by policies/practices at your current institution because of your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Please tell me about the policies/practices that impacted you.
 - i. (if necessary) Were the policies/practices formal or informal?
 - j. (if necessary) How have you navigated these policies/practices?

- k. (if necessary) How have the policies/practices impacted LGBTQIA+ faculty at your current institution?
- l. (if necessary) How have LGBTQIA+ faculty at your current institution navigated these policies/practices?
4. Have policies/practices at your institution impacted other aspects of your identity?
5. Are any policies/practices protecting your sexual orientation and/or gender identity at your current institution?
6. How could your experiences better inform policies/practices at your current institution?
7. What do you hope the impact of this research will be?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is important for this research?

Appendix D: Deductive Themes

Cisheteronormativity

The closet

Coming out

Visibility

Appendix E: Alignment Between Research Question(s) and Deductive Theme(s)

Research Question(s)	Deductive Theme(s)
How do LGBTQIA+ faculty make meaning of how policies and practices impact their experiences in higher education?	Cisheteronormativity, the closet, coming out
How do LGBTQIA+ faculty navigate points of friction at their institution?	The closet, visibility, coming out

Appendix F: Recruitment

Tweet:

I am recruiting LGBTQIA+ faculty to participate in my research study. The study's purpose is to understand how higher education policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty in higher education. If you are interested in participating, please fill out this Qualtrics survey: https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1N8jsTPWjw6ETPw. If you meet eligibility, I will email you to schedule a 60- to 90- minute Zoom interview.

LinkedIn Post:

I am recruiting LGBTQIA+ faculty to participate in my research study. The study's purpose is to understand how higher education policies and practices impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ faculty in higher education. If you are interested in participating, please fill out this Qualtrics survey: https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1N8jsTPWjw6ETPw. If you meet eligibility, I will email you to schedule a 60- to 90- minute Zoom interview.