"There is Power in Being Out": A Three Article Approach Celebrating the Experiences of Queer University Leaders

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“THERE IS POWER IN BEING OUT”: A THREE ARTICLE APPROACH CELEBRATING THE EXPERIENCES OF QUEER UNIVERSITY LEADERS

by

Andrew R. E. Lorenzana

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2024

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ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher education were historically built to serve a wealthy, White, straight male student population and the leaders of these institutions still largely reflect these demographics. This project specifically aims to celebrate and amplify the life and career of university administrators who identify within the LGBTQ community. Mainly through the use of a portraiture methodology, this three-article study attempts to examine the ways in which LGBTQ identity and career influence one another.

Worldmaking and narrative will be used as a theoretical frame to help analyze the ways in which the telling of a queer individual’s story makes the world at present and in the future, more queer. This research holds significance because it disrupts the heteronormative narrative within higher education administration and shows the unique ways that queer university leaders navigate an institution that has historically excluded them. It also works to archive the story of a trailblazing leader that can inform and inspire future generations of queer individuals looking to make their career in higher education administration.
DEDICATION

For the queer community.
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“This will never be okay with me”

“God, don’t let me break down”

“Love, Gayle and Linda”

“She’s probably on the dance floor”

“And there they were”

“They had paper bags over their faces”

“A Queer Icon”

Conclusion

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CONCLUSION

REFERENCES
INTRODUCTION

The story that is told in the three articles that compose this work is one of celebration. It celebrates the individuals who directly contributed to it and celebrates our shared queer community. It highlights our unique contributions, challenges, histories, and futures. They each touch on a respective portion of the experience of queer individuals working in higher education administration. Overall, these articles attempt to provide insight into the lives of queer administrators in higher education in order to inspire and role-model for other queer individuals working on college campuses who do not see themselves represented in leadership. This is a needed topic for discussion due primarily to the fact that there are very few leaders who identify within the LGBTQ community who hold positions of senior leadership in institutions of higher education (Stewart, 2022).

The articles move from broad to narrow in their focus as they progress. The first article discusses the findings of a semi-structured interview conducted with four LGBTQ-identifying higher education administrators that works to set the tone and describe the climate in which queer higher education administrators are working. The second article hones in on the experiences of a single university president who identifies as a lesbian and the findings which came out of a portrait process she was the subject of. The final article is the portrait which was conducted on that individual and is a more personal and creative expression of her contributions to higher education and the LGBTQ community. Each of these works is able to stand on its own though collectively they form a narrative that explores the practical and theoretical implications that affect this population of individuals each day in their work environment.
Theoretical Overview

The literature surrounding queer higher education leaders is sparse, but nascent, with much of it including personal narratives of queer administrators sharing their experiences. These three articles will bolster the amount of literature that lies at the intersection of queer theory and the study of higher education administration. In an example of this research, Sumara (2020) provides a personal view on what it means to pass as heterosexual, or not, as an administrator in higher education. The author, employing an autoethnographic approach called narrative hermeneutics, recalls the time he spent as the Dean of Education at a Canadian university. He discusses how he forced himself to pass for most of his career:

…there is no reliable historical, cultural, social or personal archive for those of us who identify as queer outsiders, we have become experts at crafting an identity out of the fragments of what we can use from non-queer cultures and histories, making up the rest as we go (p. 7).

In the last year of his ten-year deanship, Sumara decided to stop forcing himself to pass and became much more open about his partner and wearing clothes that represented himself more authentically. This work is powerful because it allowed for a university administrator to reflect on their personal history with queerness and how it affected their work. Personal reflections like this are beginning to queer the literature surrounding higher education administration and this personal style of writing is a motivating factor in the creation of this dissertation.

While the literature surrounding the experiences of queer university administrators is scant, what is there provides an invaluable look at this unique subset of university leaders. The literature here also emphasizes the importance of storytelling and the power that one’s own story holds in displacing dominant narratives. This literature lies at the intersection of leadership
theory and queer theory and works together to blend them in a way that can celebrate triumphs while criticizing structurally oppressive systems.

The concept of queer futurity is central to the theoretical underpinnings of the collective of these works. Munoz (2009) calls on society to consider a possible world that is “not here yet”. This idea brings a focused attention on the historical desire of members of the queer community to thrive and live in ways that cannot yet be imagined (McCann & Monaghan, 2019). Many queer theorists cite bringing this future about as a distinct goal of their work (Berlant & Warner, 1995; Hall, 2003). In order to bring about these futures, one must become focused on actions in the present which will lead to this new reality. By making the portrait participant's career more visible, this research will contribute to bringing about this future.

The theoretical foundations of this work broadly rest on narrative, queer futurity, and worldmaking because it is through the telling of the narrative that worlds can be made, and futures are created. When a queer lens is inserted into this process it works to create a system where queer stories can be pulled from the margins and celebrated. These theoretical aspects are emblematic of the portrait being created through this research as the subject of the second and third article is the first openly gay president in the history of the California State University (CSU) system. The act of telling her story creates a path for others to follow, increasing the visibility of queer university executives and informing and inspiring others in the process.

**Methodological Overview**

This project centers a portraiture methodology as created by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, namely in the second and third articles. Portraiture is a unique method of qualitative inquiry that centers the experiences of, in this case, a single person. Its focus lies in finding the good in the subject of the portrait and is written in a more creative-writing style that works to allow the
reader to connect to the details of the story being told in opposition to traditional academic methods of generalizability. While portraiture is only the method employed in the writing of the third article, it is foundational to the collective work of all three articles because it is the culminating work that brings aspects of both prior articles together. It is the highlight and jewel in the crown of this collective work that the first two articles set the stage for.

**Contributions to Literature and Practice**

The collective impact of this work is heavy. As mentioned previously, there is a dearth of literature that explores the experiences of queer higher education administrators. At minimum, these three articles work to expand the literature on the topic. Moreso, these works rely on queer theory and the foundational ideas that it works to bring forth. To “queer” something means to make something different, “to create new ways of thinking” (Jagose, 1996). The motivation for this work is to tell the story of individuals who have been viewed as different because of the identity they hold and to do that in a fundamentally different way, using portraiture. Our world is driven by social norms that say that individuals in same sex relationships and transgender individuals fall outside of what society deems as normal. The collective impact of this work is that it continues to queer the literature. This is a small contribution to the literature that works to push the bounds of what is regarded as acceptable academic discourse and, ultimately, what is acceptable socially.

This push towards the queer is particularly important in today’s climate. At an alarming rate, the bounds being placed on higher education’s ability to teach critical thought are increasing. Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs are being cut from college budgets, books attempting to shine a light on the darker side of American history are being banned, and critical race theory is actively being erased from curriculum. This is why research that pushes the bounds
of what has historically been accepted in the academy is important. I hope that by approaching this work in a slightly different manner from the norm, that it can have even just a miniscule impact on someone’s thinking in regards to what constitutes academic writing.
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ARTICLE ONE

EXPERIENCES OF QUEER UNIVERSITY LEADERS

For the vast majority of its existence, higher education has catered to the needs of wealthy, straight White males. However, the demographics of higher education have been shifting over the past few decades. Since 1979, women have held the majority in the college student population of the United States, and students of color are expected to take the majority from White students within the next decade (Carey, 2017). As diversity has increased among the student ranks, the same cannot be said for university administrators. Carey’s analysis of gender and race among university presidents found that 70% of them are male and 80% are White. LGBTQ status is not as well documented in the data, but Abdul-Alim (2017) pointed out that a group started in 2010 called “LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education” boasted 80 members at the time the study was conducted, a small fraction of leaders of the nation’s 4,298 postsecondary institutions in the country (Moody, 2019). Meanwhile, a 2016 survey by the American College Health Association found that 10% of college students identified as LGBTQ (Best Colleges, 2020).

The scholarship surrounding LGBTQ student experiences in universities is expanding as the LGBTQ student population expands. There are a number of studies concerning the experiences of LGBTQ students on college campuses (Duran, 2019; Preston & Hoffman, 2015; Glazzard, Jindal-Snape, & Stones, 2020), though less attention has been paid to the experiences of LGBTQ faculty, staff and administrators in the literature. An important aspect of student retention, faculty and staff morale, and a university’s overall attractiveness to potential students, faculty, staff, and administrators is its ability to have faculty, staff and administrator populations that are representative of their student body. As mechanisms to increase equal representation
among LGBTQ student and faculty/staff populations in universities become more widely used, it is likely that the populations of LGBTQ faculty and staff will also grow. The increase in scholarship around LGBTQ individuals in the faculty and staff bodies of higher education institutions (Vaccaro, 2012; Prock et al., 2019) is a telling sign of this slow-moving change in higher education.

While the number of LGBTQ individuals overall in higher education is slowly growing, the discussion surrounding LGBTQ leaders therein has not shifted much over time (Pryor, 2020; Lange, Duran & Jackson, 2019). This is largely due to the fact that the numbers, at least in campus executive positions, have not kept pace with the rising LGBTQ-identifying student population on college campuses. Some organizations, such as College Student Educators International, hold professional development workshops and conferences aimed at attracting LGBTQ higher education senior leaders. Again, likely due to the small numbers of these individuals currently holding positions in U.S. institutions, the conferences and workshops are also heavily geared towards staff and lower-level administrators with ambitions to move up the administrative ladder. This culture of fostering future LGBTQ senior administrators in higher education is key because it tells us that, though we may not see those numbers now, they are likely to come about in the future. This study centers the experiences of senior administrators in particular. This study set out to address the following questions:

- How do LGBTQ community members consider career advancement in higher education?
- What workplace experiences affect the careers of LGBTQ-identifying administrators in higher education?
- How do LGBTQ professionals in higher education present their LGBTQ identity in the workplace?
This paper takes these personal stories of LGBTQ individuals and discusses how that identity has and will potentially impact their careers in higher education administration. With its foundation in queer and leadership theory, this study aims to deconstruct the mainstream understanding of higher education administration. The literature points to an emergence of knowledge and interest in the study of the experiences of queer individuals in higher education administration.

**Literature Review**

Theoretically, this study fits within two areas: queer theory and leadership theory. This study lies somewhere at the intersection of the two and can be used to expand the range of both. It brings the experiences of educational leaders into the queer theory dialogue and the experiences of queer individuals into the discussion on leadership. Blurring the line between these theoretical foundations is important as neither is thoroughly brought up in discussions on the other. This study will help to bridge that space.

**Queer Theory in Higher Education**

Queer theory is based in its disruption of the heteronormative assumptions surrounding gender and sexuality and originated in the feminist, civil rights and gay rights movements of the 1960s. Judith Butler (1990) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) are seen as the pioneers of queer theory as it is understood today. These authors and others who began shaping queer theory in the 1990s were influenced by earlier works such as French philosopher Michel Foucault’s (1978–1986) multivolume *The History of Sexuality*. Queer theory is a relatively new theoretical approach that continues to be shaped today as discussions related to gender and sexuality increasingly become part of the mainstream dialogue.
A goal of queer theory is to place an emphasis on the historically overlooked viewpoints of LGBTQ individuals in mainstream academic writings. While queer theory has had crossover with certain other disciplines, such as comparative literature, psychology and sociology, its expansion into the field of education overall is limited. Pryor (2020) points to the “scant” offerings surrounding queer higher education leadership scholarship and, therefore argues that the researcher may have to expand their focus and look at queer leadership in other disciplines for insights that may be transmissible to the field of higher education.

Renn (2010) performed an analysis of the state of queer research in higher education. Similarly to Pryor, Renn points specifically to the lack of theoretical depth in the literature surrounding queer topics in higher education. The lack of depth in queer theory in higher education points to the overarching dearth in queer perspectives in higher education. Increasing the application of queer theoretical views to a historically non-queer institution like higher education could have positive effects in terms of attracting higher numbers of queer individuals to work in higher education. The potential of increasing the use of queer theory in higher education scholarship also lies in a reframing of the current issues facing higher education. Queer theory offers a critical lens to view the world and bringing this perspective to the issues currently facing institutions of higher education could shed new light on them and reveal intricacies never thought of before. Higher education has operated in largely the same way for centuries and critical perspectives like queer theory provide faculty, staff, administrators and students the opportunity to stand back and view the institution in new and innovative ways.

In an update to Renn, Lange, Duran and Jackson (2019) explored how the state of the field had advanced in the decade that had passed. They performed a review of the literature on the topic and found that the current state of queer research in higher education is broken into four
houses, a la ball culture. They are the houses of Perceptibility, where research focuses on queer visibility, existence and identities; Endurance, where research is focused on climate and the persistence and resistance of queer people; Normalcy, where research is focused on academic outcomes and cocurricular engagement and, lastly, Flourishing, where research centers on success, belonging and institutional supports. All of these topics are related to the experiences of queer students specifically in higher education institutions and the authors add to the others who call out the dearth of literature on queer faculty and staff in higher education.

**Leadership Theory in Higher Education**

Queer theory is only half of this discussion however. Leadership theory, outside of the LGBTQ connections, has been more widely researched in the higher education setting. Kezar (2017) provides a summation of the movement from older trait-focused, leader-centered perceptions of leadership in higher education administration to newer schools of thought centering around a more distributed model of leadership. The author delves into the discussion surrounding ideas such as shared governance in higher education and how academia has yet to come to a consensus on a universally shared definition and structure for these newer forms of leadership. This shift in the structural leadership approaches university leaders have taken has also affected the leadership styles employed by many administrators in university settings.

Kezar also follows this evolution in leadership styles among higher education leaders. With the leader-centered approaches employed in the past, leadership styles of those administrators were largely authoritarian and based in power and influence over followers. As the structures evolved to be more distributed, the individual leadership styles of administrators evolved to be more emotional and based in shared values. Newer thoughts on leadership styles emphasize that leaders have shifted to empowering and collaborating with followers rather than
imposing over them, following the thinking of Greenleaf (1977). Kezar also points to the shift in both the structural and individual leadership styles to an overarching movement in the theories that are applied to study leadership in higher education institutions. The vast majority of earlier studies employed contingency, behavioral and trait theories whereas more recent research approaches have begun applying critical, postmodern, and social constructivist lenses in the scholarship surrounding higher education administration.

Kezar’s findings on these topics within higher education administration are summarized and bolstered by other works. These include Burke’s (2010) analysis of shared governance and distributed leadership, Eddy and Van Der Linden’s (2006) study on college leader’s self-descriptive language showing a movement away from traditional “hero” perceptions of leadership, and Black’s (2015) study of effective leadership qualities in higher education administrators which points to the growing trend for increased follower interaction and empowerment. Unlike the queer scholarship in higher education administration, the leadership scholarship points to a clear shift over time from leader-centered and trait approaches to a more distributed and shared structural model that is grounded in shared institutional values and follower empowerment.

**Methods**

Qualitative inquiry is best used to study experience, understanding, and meaning-making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As this study centers the meaning making of LGBTQ university administrators as they navigate their careers, this method is best suited to the examination of this phenomenon. Additionally, uncentering the word “research” and replacing it with “inquiry” is an intentional choice. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) describe, the word “research” comes with trappings of positivism and colonialism whereas the word “inquiry” shifts towards open-
endedness, freedom and liberation (p. 11). This study also rests upon critical inquiry in that it is negotiating with the power of an institution that operates in heteronormative and cisnormative ways. By bringing to light the stories of queer individuals operating in this space it works to push back on these norms within the realm of higher education.

This study utilizes a multiple case study design. As Yin (2018) explains, multiple case studies are effective tools when comparing multiple single case studies is a goal of the research. This study will do just that, comparing four individual narrative case studies. The case in each instance is created through the collection of a written artifact from the participant as well as information gleaned from an in-person interview.

Participants

Administrators in higher education can hold various titles including President/Chancellor, who often serve as campus chief executives in US institutions; Provost, Vice President/Chancellor, Associate or Assistant Vice President/Chancellor, Dean, Director, Manager and descriptors such “Senior” or “Executive” can be included in titles at all levels of institutional hierarchies to detail rank as well. As with many other types of organizations outside of higher education, the higher the administrator is positioned in the institution’s hierarchy, the more visible within the organization’s community they tend to be.

Participants for this study were selected based on purposive means. I used the network of administrators I had worked with in higher education who had come out to me personally and gathered a handful of options. The participants include: Dr. Anne Heard, who identifies as a lesbian cisgender woman and was serving as a Provost at the time of her participation and had been a Dean for fifteen years prior, Dr. Autumn Kowalski who identifies as a queer cisgender woman and has been a Dean for four years, Dr. Hazel Glenn who identifies as a lesbian...
cisgender woman and has been a President for five years and served as a Provost and Dean prior and, Dr. Michael Klein who identifies as a gay cisgender man who has served as a Dean for four years.¹

Foley (2012), in Brinkmann and Kvale (2014), describes three ways in which the participants in a study help to construct the context of the interview. The second of which is participant as teacher and is the model employed in this study. I am looking to the participants of this study as teachers and want them to bring as much of their voice and personal experience to the conversation as possible. With their written answers, they are in control of the process and I am responding to the direction they set there. As a queer professional in higher education with aspirations to go into administration, I am learning as much as possible from my participants and allowing them to assume the teaching role. Additionally along these lines, Martinez (2016) addresses the positionality his research tools bring into the research process though, more pressingly for the circumstances of this study, discussed at length his assumptions around his own presence and how that affected his interactions while performing his research. Thinking of this along with Foley’s ideas above requires one to also reflect on the ways they are constructing the context of their interactions with participants both consciously and unconsciously while allowing space for the co-creation of knowledge without letting one party steer the conversation in a way that will unduly affect the findings.

Data Collection and Analysis

In undertaking this study, I first provided three questions to the participants focusing on their career in higher education and identity in the LGBTQ community. I wanted to give them the space and time to discuss what they wanted to discuss without the confines of a time-

¹ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.
sensitive interview. After coding each of the documents they provided, I conducted a follow up in-person interview as a member check and debrief to ensure that I understood the participant’s written answers correctly and to discuss overarching themes on a deeper level. All communication between myself and the participants happened via email and through video conferencing applications.

The initial written questions were structured to have clear questions and instructions for the participant to follow. The follow-up in-person interview was allowed to be more open, naturally flowing and conversational, what Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) call a semi-structured life world interview. Once the written interview responses are returned, the answers were coded to determine overarching themes and any areas where there was ambiguity. The coding process was done using emergent codes, as described by Elliott (2018). These coded themes drove the in-person interview but it was not as clearly structured as the initial written questions were. The coding process is heavily tied to grounded theory, the creation of theory from the data. While the intent of this iteration of the work is not a grounded theory one, I see possible paths for it to become one in the future once more data is integrated in future iterations. Charmaz (2017) provides a description of constructivist grounded theory which is the vein of grounded theory I see this study fitting in and if theory begins to emerge from this work. Its emphasis on reflexivity and co-creation of data are important aspects for my research and would fit in well to the direction this study is moving. The in-person interview also provided the opportunity to see body language and analyze voice. I took notes during the interview and debriefed with myself immediately after. I analyzed all data myself and used MAXQDA to assist in the coding process, and Otter.ai for transcription.
The reason written artifacts were collected is foundationally out of a respect for the time of the participants. In my experience, university administrators are incredibly busy people and the thought of blocking an hour of their day for something not work-related seemed like a big ask to make of them. I asked for written responses so they could work on them at their own pace and on their own time. It also allows me to work off of information produced directly by them rather than being filtered by me into notes during a conversation. The subsequent conversation which does occur after their written responses are collected serves as a member check and to delve more deeply into themes which emerged from their written responses, creating two distinct sets of documents for each participant: their written responses and notes from an in-person interview.

**Autoethnography**

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) describe autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systemically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (p. 273). In this study I will describe my own experiences as a member of the queer community working in higher education and juxtapose my thoughts with those of my participants. While I am not a senior administrator in higher education like my participants are, I believe my personal experience can still add to the conversation being had throughout this study.

**Validity**

My own personal experience, as described above, can lead to questions of validity. I am both an insider and outsider in these settings. I am an insider as I am also a member of the LGBTQ community and work in higher education though an outsider as I am not an administrator. This outsider perspective may still influence the way the participants interacted
with me and how forthcoming they were with information. Clingerman (2007) expands on the insider/outsider dynamic and draws in work that supports the argument that a researcher can be both an insider and an outsider during the same study. You can have factors that give you credibility and shared experience with an aspect of your participants’ involvement but other aspects of the researcher’s experience can keep them an outsider, as is the case for me in this study’s instance.

There are also questions of external validity. It is unlikely that the experiences of the small number of participants selected for this study could be generalized to the entire population of LGBTQ university administrators. Yin (2018) describes focusing research questions on “how” and “why” questions to enhance analytic generalizability. The research questions in this study were continuously reworked to allow for this enhancement as well as clarified language.

This study is situated within a critical approach to higher education administration in that its goal is to bring to light the experiences of a marginalized group therein. Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe the credibility measures effective in qualitative research. This study’s goal is to discover what is unique in the experiences of members of this group as they are situated in an institution that was not designed with them in mind. Credibility was reinforced in this study through various measures including member-checking and collaboration with the participant through the use of the follow up interview and engaging in reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

Neuman (2014) describes critical social science research as necessary to reveal what is hidden and to liberate and empower people (p. 118). This study aims to do that for the LGBTQ population working in higher education administration. In critical tradition, this study unravels accepted societal truths around heteronormativity and assumptions surrounding the work of
queer individuals in higher education. The credibility measures taken work to honor this critical approach and ensure that the unique experiences of the individual highlighted in this study are expressed in an authentic way.

Findings

Several themes emerged from the four conversations though this discussion will focus on the three that were most salient. First, how LGBTQ identity is expressed in the workplace. Second, the heteronormative expectations that influenced their work. Lastly, the study revealed the importance of professional networks for LGBTQ folks within campus communities. These three themes were mentioned consistently throughout the provided responses and work together to create a holistic view of the roles LGBTQ administrators take on and the support needed for them to work confidently in the field of higher education administration.

Two other themes emerged from the responses but were not directly related to the intersection of LGBTQ identity and work in higher education administration. These themes were an “accidental” trajectory getting into the field of higher education and work performed as an administrator unrelated to LGBTQ identity. I did not investigate these findings because they do not meet the criteria of fitting into both queer and leadership narratives where the three other themes discussed above do.

Theme 1: Expression of LGBTQ Identity in the Workplace

The first of the three findings is related to the expression of LGBTQ identity in the workplace. The participants had varied views on the extent to which they expressed their LGBTQ identity in the workplace. Dr. Klein and Dr. Kendall described how they had not previously given much thought to how their identities intersected with their work in higher education specifically whereas Dr. Heard and Dr. Kowalski both felt like their identities greatly
influenced their work. Dr. Heard went so far as to say “My lesbian identity is very much tied to my academic identity” and that “my identity shaped my commitments, values, goals and work.” I found that, though Drs. Klein and Kendall said that they did not previously give thought to how their identity shaped their work prior to being asked for this project, the ideas they recounted to me said otherwise. Dr. Klein told a powerful story about how he was forced to lie and say he was married to a woman when he forgot to take his wedding ring off at work one day, something he did daily and instead wore it around his neck, because he feared being fired. He then said “I want everybody that works in (his college) to bring their complete self to the work they do. It's what we need. It's how we connect the experience of higher education with the purpose of higher education. It’s what moves this human experience forward.” Dr. Kendall similarly said “I feel like I have a real understanding of and am more committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, just given the fact that I'm a member of the LGBTQ plus community myself.”

Their identity drives both of them in their work, though it seemed to take them longer to connect their identity as being a driving force in their work than the two other participants.

The literature surrounding this theme is slim but Nielson and Alderson (2014) cover the topic in their discussion of lesbian professors coming out to their students in the classroom. They observed what they call “fighting for one’s identity” (p. 1093) where queer female faculty members expressed a motivation to let their queer identity drive, specifically, their teaching and be authentic selves in front of their students. This first finding expressed by the participants touches on both queer theory and leadership theory in that they all allude to an aspect of using their identity to be authentically themselves in their teaching, scholarship and leadership. This finding expands the knowledge base by placing the focus on administrators rather than faculty, or students, as the majority of the literature that falls here is.
Theme 2: Heteronormative Expectations on Administrators

The second finding relates to heteronormative expectations that impacted work as an administrator. The three lesbian participants all indicated that they are often asked if they would be bringing their husband as a guest to an event and the questions they and their spouse would run through in their minds to gauge how acceptable they thought it would be to bring their spouse. Dr. Heard captures the heart of the theme brilliantly and poignantly:

“We have both found ourselves in situations where the inevitable question is asked: “Will your husband be joining you?” or, by more sensitive folks, “Will you be bringing a ‘guest’?” It seems like a simple enough question, but it requires reflection on a series of questions to arrive at an answer: 1) What kind of group will this be? Older, more conservative? Religiously affiliated? New immigrant communities coming from cultures where homosexuality is still outlawed? 2) How well do I know these people? Have I worked with them long enough to have established credibility and confidence? 3) If I bring my partner of 20 years, will I introduce her as my partner or will I refer to her as “my colleague” or “my friend.” 3) Is this event important enough for our relationship to be made invisible? The answer to the last question is almost always, No! But why is this anybody’s business, and why do we feel an explanation should be forthcoming? What happens most often is that we attend on our own, simply because it is easier than having to negotiate all the issues involved and because we do not want to subject one another to potential discomfort or humiliation.”

Heteronormative assumptions are at the heart of queer theory’s ideas of performativity and passing discussed by monoliths of the field like Judith Butler (1990) and Jack Halberstam (1998). The examples provided by the lesbian participants point to these concepts in that they
must choose whether they are willing to perform the heteronormative role in these situations or not. How much are they willing to subject themself and their spouse to the heteronormative performativity of others in these spaces? The questions they run through in their mind attempt to gauge the level of safety and comfort they would feel in that space. Not bringing the other as their guest serves as a form of protection where being out in that space could put the other in emotional, or in other cases, physical harm. This also touches on the ideas expressed by Sumara (2020) previously where he described having to gauge his own level of comfort with being authentically himself in the space of higher education administration. This finding is important to the expansion of knowledge because it brings the discussion of heteronormative assumptions into the higher education space. Social construction theory teaches us that the vast majority of today’s institutions operate under largely unquestioned assumptions and the more we bring to light the ways they operate around race, gender, sexuality and other identities, the more those assumptions can be removed from daily thought.

**Theme 3: Importance of Professional Networking**

The final theme relates to the importance of LGBTQ higher education administrators joining professional networks in their campus communities. Three of the four participants touched on the importance of networks for LGBTQ individuals in higher education. Dr. Klein however said that he generally stays away from networks regardless of their focus and that networking in that way has not played a significant role in his career. The three female participants did all speak to how important these networks are though, within the institution they work at and outside. Dr. Kendall described how “having that community really affirmed my identity” at an institution she worked at early in her career. Dr. Kowalski shared a touching story about the first time she met another out administrator in the academy:
“That was the first time an administrator had sort of come out and said I will be that sounding board, not just for me, but also for (her spouse) in our roles. And I still thank (that person) for that, right, all of the time. I'm always like, Thank you for being that person. Because up until that point in my life, I'm sure there were other administrators who were out but maybe not as out and comfortable in higher education as (that person) clearly was at that point in time.”

Horne and colleagues (2014) argue that networks such as these “serve to build community, protect members, and support the development of a positive LGBTQ identity” (p. 197). This finding also touches upon the shift seen in the leadership literature in the field of higher education alluded to previously. Shared and distributed leadership styles rely upon networks of professionals like this to work efficiently in cross-campus collaboration. It not only supports the growth and development of LGBTQ community on college campuses, but supports this model of leadership as well. This theme builds upon the knowledge base by showing that findings, such as those relayed by Horne and colleagues, hold within the setting of higher education administration and that university administrators benefit similarly from support structures around their LGBTQ identities.

These three findings which emerged from the participants' responses are discussed in the literature though, as stated previously, the literature at the intersection of queer theory and leadership theory is lacking. These findings though, work to expand the discussion around LGBTQ individuals working in higher education administration and the needs of individuals therein. Gutierrez and Penuel (2014) discuss the concept of “relevance to practice” and findings such as those described above can drive practice as LGBTQ administrators are searching for jobs on onboarding into a new position. They work to provide insights to aspiring LGBTQ
professionals who hope to work as an administrator on a college or university campus in the future.

**Positionality and Reflections on the Findings**

My research interest lies in analyzing the experiences of LGBTQ folks who work in higher education administration. This interests me because I myself identify as someone from various underrepresented groups, including queer, and work in higher education, with aspirations to work in administration. I see higher education administration as a vehicle for me to be able to bring about lasting change in underserved communities. I am a first generation college student who is living a life I could not have imagined for myself when I was younger. I want to be able to show young people who grew up in neighborhoods like the one I did, that higher education can be a welcoming place for them and that it can positively impact not only their own lives, but the lives of their family and community as well. There is certainly work to do to make institutions of higher education more welcoming to those who are the first in their families to experience college life. It is my belief that diversifying faculty, staff and administration is key to expanding that feeling of belonging among first-generation students.

When I look to administrators in higher education, I do not see people like me. The majority of university presidents are straight, White males whose identities lift them to heights of privilege I may never know. Through my scholarship and practice, I want to be able to change, even if just slightly, the way society perceives those who belong in higher education administration. This research specifically, will set me on that path of learning more about the experiences of other people with LGBTQ identities in higher education administration. How the field has treated them and how they have treated the field. As a scholar, I am interested in the
notion of research as a reflective practice. A way to learn more about oneself through their research. This is why I am weaving in this autoethnographic portion to this work.

For academia at large, I have a few hopes for this research. Firstly, I hope that this research shows that people who come from historically underrepresented groups bring a unique outlook to the work entailed in higher education administration. Secondly, and somewhat selfishly, I hope it shows that research does not need to be detached from the researcher. In this I mean, I hope that other researchers look to work like this and think about how they can tie themselves into their scholarship. We all have stories to tell on a wide range of topics, so why not show some of that through your academic work? Green (2018) describes the intricacy involved with being a participant-observer in an ethnographic study which parallels many of the thoughts I have around my own personal closeness to my topic. She states “Research … is a collaborative process to be engaged in by both the researcher and the participants; it is … used to liberate people and communities rather than further oppress, marginalize, essentialize or exploit” (p. 10). Viewing research in this way, as Green also states, can lead people to question the validity of your research though when rigid rules of validity are followed, deeper understanding with and learning from participants may be stagnated.

Ultimately, I hope to push people outside of what they are comfortable in. It may be uncomfortable to see a half-Latinx queer person in higher education administration, and that is okay. It might be uncomfortable to write about your personal experiences as part of your academic writing, and that is okay too.

Conclusion

This study set out to address the following questions by interviewing four queer administrators working in higher education:
How do LGBTQ community members consider career advancement in higher education?

What workplace experiences affect the careers of LGBTQ-identifying administrators in higher education?

How do LGBTQ administrators in higher education present their LGBTQ identity in the workplace?

The findings, categorized into three themes: expressions of LGBTQ identity in the workplace, heteronormative expectations, and the importance of professional networking, work to answer these questions by describing key factors influencing the work of LGBTQ-identifying administrators in higher education. The themes touch on matters of support, societal assumptions and personal obstacles and triumphs. With four participants, this study is not an exhaustive answer to these questions though it does begin to allude to the factors which may be important in answering them.

Further discussions with LGBTQ identifying higher education administrators is needed to create a more holistic picture of what the workplace experience is like for them. Further exploration of any one of the three themes presented in the findings, as well as the two that were omitted, could also yield insights for future research. I also think that interesting insights can be found by interviewing LGBTQ staff working in colleges and universities with hopes of going into administration to see if individuals earlier in their careers share the same thoughts expressed in this study and to get a sense of the pipeline of future queer administrators. Questions I continue pondering on the topic also relate to a focus on a certain level of administrator (ex. “What if I only interviewed presidents?”). This may not yield extensively different insights though may be an interesting approach for a future study.
There is also one methodological implication of this study which relates to the way the written responses were gathered prior to the in-person conversations. Each participant expressed gratitude for being given the time and space to think through the initial questions and being able to respond to those in writing. They described how it helped them get their thoughts out on the page before sitting down for conversation. Those questions were intentionally broad and far reaching to gather stories and deep thoughts. Though, a word of caution: it was challenging at times to get the written responses back in a timely manner. I did feel as though I was pestering and did have to reschedule a couple of interviews because written responses were turned in without enough time for me to even do a cursory reading for themes. If using a similar practice, I recommend not scheduling the follow-up interview until the written responses are returned to give one time to find themes in the written responses that can guide questions during the in-person conversation.

Overall, this study is a starting point for future research around the workplace experiences of LGBTQ-identifying administrators in higher education. Its findings yield insights into how individuals who hold these identities navigate their lives in the academy and how the taken-for-granted structures of the academy help and hinder their professional progress. I extend my deep gratitude to my participants, all of whom I admire greatly and thank for their trailblazing work.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Survey and Interview Guide

Questions for initial survey:

This study aims to tell the stories of LGBTQ individual’s career experiences in higher education administration. The questions presented below work to get one thinking about how these two areas of their life are connected and what influences they have had on each other. A follow up interview may be requested by the researcher if any overarching themes appear in written answers that could be expanded upon.

1. How would you describe your career in higher education, including a description of the positions you’ve held?
2. How do you identify within the LGBTQ community?
3. Please describe, in narrative format, how you believe your LGBTQ identity shaped your work in higher education.

Questions for follow-up interview:

Researcher note: not all of these may be utilized as they are dependent upon the answers obtained in the initial survey. This interview will mainly serve as a member check to ensure I am understanding the participant’s answers as they intended and to provide them an opportunity to clarify or expand on their answers.

1. In your initial responses, the theme of (salient theme from written response) was discussed. Can you expand on your thoughts related to this topic?
2. I want to ensure I am capturing your thoughts on (topic discussed in written response which I am questioning its meaning). Can you describe what your intended meaning of (topic) was?
3. Can you clarify what you meant in saying (phrase/word/topic)?
APPENDIX B

Interview Memos and Transcripts

Link to memos

Link to transcripts
- SA
- GH
- ES
- BS
### APPENDIX C

Codebook

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<td>Instances where sexuality is discussed in the context of the workplace</td>
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ARTICLE TWO

WORLDMAKING THROUGH NARRATIVE: USING PORTRAITUDE IN QUEER HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES

For thousands of years, the telling of stories has been a powerful tool of liberation and inspiration, allowing people to tell a narrative that can be freeing to individuals and groups alike (Kaur et. al., 2023; Arnaud, Mills & Legrand, 2016). Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) pioneered the methodology known as portraiture, the analysis of a single individual, place, or object in a way that allows for readers to engage the writing in a more non-traditional way. The goal in portraiture is to write in a way that allows the reader to connect to parts of the story on a personal level. This study utilizes portraiture methodology to tell the story of a gay-identifying university executive. The story is meant to serve as inspiration to other members of the LGBTQ community working in higher education who aspire to roles in senior leadership. This work is especially poignant for those who do not come into regular contact with an individual who reflects that identity for them to look to for role modeling (Finkelberg, 2021; Allen & Collisson, 2020).

This paper describes the process and findings of a portrait I conducted on Dr. Gayle Hutchinson, President Emerita of California State University, Chico who identifies as lesbian. I first met Gayle in 2013 when she became provost at California State University Channel Islands, where I was an undergraduate student. As I continued thinking through my own queer identity and career aspirations in higher education, I watched Gayle ascend to the highest reaches of administration as an out member of the LGBTQ community. She was, in fact, the first openly gay president of any of the 23 California State University campuses in the system’s over 160 year history.
This paper will explain the background and contextual literature framing the portraiture study, its theoretical connections, background on portraiture itself, a discussion of the findings from that study, as well as implications for future research.

**Background and Contextual Literature**

This project fits within two bodies of knowledge: queer theory and leadership theory, specifically as they apply to higher education. The literature that helps to contextualize this topic lies somewhere at the intersection of the two and can be used to expand the range of both. The context described in this section shows how the literature on experiences of higher educational leaders is crossing into the queer theory dialogue and how the opposite crossover is occurring as well. Blurring the line between these theoretical foundations is important as neither is thoroughly brought up in discussions on the other. This study would bolster the connection between these two theories.

**Queer Theory**

The first component to aid in the contextualization of this work is queer theory. In this section, I briefly share the historical development of queer theory and its role in gender identity development. Queer theory is based in its disruption of the heteronormative assumptions surrounding gender and sexuality originating in the feminist, civil rights, and gay rights movements of the 1960s. These assumptions are centered around the thinking that heterosexuality is the normal and preferred sexual orientation, and that gender is a binary concept where attraction is most fitting between people of the opposite sex (Harris & White, 2018). The liberation movements of the 1960s, including the gay rights movement, attempted to push the boundaries of societal norms with this movement taking on heteronormativity. These
movements made way for study on topics critical of the assumptions that surround those norms (Armstrong & Crage, 2006).

While queer theory has developed a significant presence in disciplines such as comparative literature, psychology and sociology, it has yet to be fully recognized in education overall, and in higher education more specifically. Higher education has operated in largely the same way for centuries. Thelin (2019) traces the history of American higher education from the founding of Harvard as the first college in the United States in 1636 to present. He recounts how in the centuries since, higher education remains an institution built to serve a student body that is primarily White, straight, male, and wealthy with other populations exhibiting lower feelings of belonging on campuses across the country. A critical perspective like queer theory pushes the normative higher education boundaries by providing faculty, staff, administrators, and students the opportunity to challenge institutional norms so that it better serves students who fall outside of those historically served categories (Renn, 2010).

Pryor (2020) points to the “scant” offerings surrounding queer higher education leadership scholarship, therefore arguing that researchers may have to expand their focus and look at queer leadership in other disciplines for insights that may be transferable to the field of higher education. For example, Renn (2010) performed an analysis of the state of queer research in higher education. Like Pryor, Renn (2010) points specifically to the lack of theoretical depth in the literature surrounding queer topics in higher education. The lack of depth in queer theory in higher education points to the overarching dearth in queer perspectives in higher education, making this a topic ripe for continued research. To move in that direction, researchers can rely on queer theory, and critical theories more broadly, to the higher education landscape to continue evolving the narrative of the institution beyond its historical bounds.
Higher Education Administration

Queer theory is only half of this discussion in setting the stage on this topic, as leadership theory and practices outside of the LGBTQ connection, have been widely researched in the higher education context. In this section, I briefly share the historical development of leadership practices and structures within institutions of higher education.

Analysis of the current higher education landscape can be found in works such as Burke’s (2010) discussion on shared governance and distributed leadership, Eddy and Van Der Linden’s (2006) study on college leader’s self-descriptive language showing a movement away from traditional “hero” perceptions of leadership, and Black’s (2015) study of effective leadership qualities in higher education administrators which points to the growing trend for increased follower interaction and empowerment. The leadership scholarship points to a clear shift over time from leader-centered and trait approaches to a more distributed and shared structural model that is grounded in shared institutional values and follower empowerment.

Higher education has indeed seen much evolution in the nearly 400 years since Harvard was founded, though many of the same structures and norms which it was built on at that time continue to inhabit it today. These structures were built for the predominantly White, male, straight, and wealthy population which had access to a university education at that time (Synnott, 2022). Over time, the student population has become more female, racially and ethnically diverse, and queer (Gonzales et. al., 2021). What has occurred concurrently is an organizational structure where a single chief executive shares power with a group of administrators and faculty, largely, at various levels who hold responsibility for unique university functions. While the management operation within universities has evolved, leadership within universities has stagnated when it comes to diversity, making it challenging for individuals who hold diverse
identities to find their way up the organizational ladder. Hearing the stories of specifically queer individuals, for the purposes of this project, who have traversed the leadership ladder is important for the next generation of queer university leaders to learn lessons in hopes of making their path smoother.

**Theoretical Connections**

**Narrative**

Narrative, and the purposeful action of telling one’s story, is central to the theoretical underpinnings of this work. Lewis (2011) touches on the importance of narrative, characterizing it as a symbiotic relationship with all humans. “Narrative being is human, and human being is storied” (pg. 506). The narrative and process of telling the story are foundational to the human experience. It is that foundational level of narrative that this project seeks to tell about the portrait-subject’s career and queer identity. Kim (2016) conceives of the storyteller as a midwife, delivering the stories of our research participants. This conceptualization places the storyteller in a significant role, ensuring that the story being told is delivered in a way that honors the individual whose story it is. It also inherently calls for the story to be passed through the storyteller before reaching the reader. As the story is assembled by the researcher, it is subject to their worldview, theoretical perspectives, and goals of their research agenda, among others. The story is birthed for the reader through this interplay between the originator of the story and the researcher who ultimately tells the story. This thinking on narrative places much emphasis on the self, those of the person originating the story and of the researcher-storyteller.

Danielson (2022) and Bhattacharya (2020) discuss Gloria Anzaldúa’s work around *autohistoria-teoria*, a theory that pushes against the rigid categorizations that go into determining the scholarly nature of academic writings. It argues that one should bring more of the self into
academic works, the authors referencing how Anzaldúa connected many of her own life events to the theories she brought forward and how she expressed her academic thoughts artistically, sometimes through poems or short-stories. While opening possibilities for what contends as academic writing, it also opens immense possibilities for researchers to bring their own self into their academic writing. It is through progress on fronts such as this, where researchers are encouraged to bring themself into their writing, where the walls that keep the stories of queer university administrators silent can come down.

Anzaldúa (2000) herself pointed to the possibilities that sharing one’s story opens academically. In an interview she gave toward the end of her life she discussed how she wrote in her own way and the theorizing followed. This is a path that the stories of queer university administrators can follow as well; the more that their stories are told, the more they will enter the academic consciousness, and the theories related to their unique experiences will begin to take shape thereafter.

These narrative elements are connected to the theoretical idea of worldmaking. The theoretical connection between narrative and these elements of queer theory are grounded in the assertion that the more that stories of queer individuals are told, the more the world is made queer and the faster a more queer future will come into being.

**Worldmaking**

Worldmaking has applications to various disciplines and points to how we use, and reuse, symbolism to construct the world around us through social conditioning (Goodman, 1978). The theory was developed by Nelson Goodman who fundamentally redefined the word “worlds”. Cox (2003) summarizes:
Goodman’s worldmaking is a disciplined business. We do not always make worlds when we manipulate symbols. Worldmaking is constrained by coherence, consistency, the fit with intuitive judgment and intelligible purpose and these virtues add up to what Goodman calls the “rightness” of a version. Right versions make worlds, and are produced by many different kinds of people. Scientists create worlds; philosophers create worlds; artists create worlds; an advertising agency might create a world. World’s are the product of any ambitious, successful attempt to create an order of things (p. 36) We all make worlds through the work we produce and where we choose to focus our attention. Using narrative to tell the story of a university president who holds identities that are not consistent with the majority of other presidents works to create a world around that intersection of career and queer identity; a queer worldmaking.

Queer worldmaking is then the second step in the theoretical direction of this project, after narrative, as the telling of the story is what produces the “world”. Goodman (1978) explains the process of worldmaking as decomposition and recomposition. This means that historically, oppressive systems have been reproduced over the ages though they appear different in various time periods. Whatever portions of society get included in the decomposition process of a certain period of time will end up being recomposed later. So the more queer narratives, through any medium, that are included in the society at present, the more they will be able to be reproduced in future societies. Zaino (2021, pg. 580) bolsters this thought as she characterizes worldmaking as a theoretical framework that pushes beyond “narratives of resistance” that are commonly found in critical scholarship and moves towards “narratives of creation”.

A key aspect of moving towards creation and against Goodman’s notion of consistency is being cognizant of how we perform gender. Butler (1988) popularized the theory of gender as
performance, expanding on how social norms dictate how women are supposed to be feminine and males are supposed to be masculine according to societal norms and pressures. According to Butler, there are many men who feel feminine and women who feel masculine causing dissonance between internal thoughts and feelings and outward behaviors and gender manifestations. Butler argued that those who feel this dissonance do not want to go with social norms to perform the gender they are assigned at birth, and do not want to disrupt the norms by acting in a way that aligns more with their thoughts and feelings. This idea is foundational to thinking surrounding gender and sexual identities and connects to the concept of worldmaking through Goodman’s notion of consistency being a main factor that hinders the production of new worlds.

Methods

This project relies on qualitative research methodology which focuses on understanding how people make sense of the world and the experiences they, and others, have in it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research stands in contrast to quantitative research which focuses largely on numerical analyses of samples from larger population groups, with findings that can be generalized to that larger population group (Ercikan & Roth, 2006). It is also usually enacted through scientific inquiry which tests a specific theory within a controlled environment where qualitative research is typically performed on much smaller sample sizes, limiting generalizability but answering many of the “why” and “how” questions that quantitative research is generally said to struggle with answering.

Qualitative research is a vast category however, and phenomenological case study helps to hone in on the most specific method used in this work: portraiture. Portraiture lies at the intersection of these methods. Phenomenological studies attempt to get to the essence of a
particular phenomenon. This is usually done by gathering data from several participants who have all shared the phenomenon being explored (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). A case study is a bounded analysis of a single case, which can be an event, activity, individual, etc., and tries to get deep description of the case (Flyvbjerg, 2011). It is in the blending of these two methodological approaches, which allow a researcher to bound the analysis while focusing on attaining the foundational essence of a phenomenon, where we come across portraiture.

**Portraiture**

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Davis (1997) took the metaphor of painting a picture of an individual’s life to create a methodological approach known as portraiture. The method is used to paint a picture, through writing and research, by celebrating the life of a subject. Some choose autoethnographic approaches to paint a self-portrait while others look for subjects to highlight and paint a portrait of. This method highlights the importance of celebration and positivity in recounting the story of one’s life. All too often the stories we tell are framed in a negative way, though this method challenges the researcher to move beyond the deficit lens often found in critical studies (Davis & Museus, 2019) and celebrate the inherent positivity within the subject of study.

With regard to generalizability of portraiture as a method, qualitative research overall is not the branch of research to look to in order to find great swaths of generalizable findings. Portraiture is often conducted by looking solely at a single person, place, or thing. This inherently limits its generalizability though Lawrence-Lightfoot emphasizes the need for the portraitist to be as keenly detailed as possible to allow for readers to glean information from the story which resonates with them. So, while not highly generalizable in the conventional sense,
Portraiture does emphasize standards of practice that the researcher should try to follow to ensure that the greatest number of readers can identify with some part of the story being told.

Portraiture is a form of phenomenological case study and can be approached in several ways depending on the portrait that the researcher intends to create. I set out to tell an individual’s story through this project. In that, I am employing various techniques to capture the story and analyze its impact on theory and practice. I spent three days with my subject at her place of work and her home and conducted four semi-structured interviews with her throughout that time. See Appendix 1 for the self-constructed interview protocol with my subject. Each of the four interviews includes five questions which aim to capture a certain portion of her life. The first interview focused on contextualizing her identity and career, gathering foundational knowledge on both of those aspects of her life. The second interview looked back and asked questions related to her past experiences as a faculty member and university administrator. The third is based on her position as a university president, from which she retired in the summer of 2023. It was conducted partly as a go-along interview (Steigler, 2022) where the researcher follows the subject as they walk around an area, in this case the university where the subject worked for over thirty years. Some questions were specifically designed to have the subject lead the researcher to a particular destination that is of importance to them, or the researcher simply follows the subject observing how they interact with spaces and make decisions on where to go. The observations were accompanied by questions about the subject’s current thinking on how her identity and career influence one another. The last interview of this interaction was focused on the subject’s future. At the point the interview was conducted, the subject had about one month until she retired and she was asked questions that speak towards life after retirement and giving back to the profession.
In addition to the four interviews that took place during the first interaction, I attended two retirement celebrations for my subject, one at her home and the other at a farm owned and operated by the university at which she worked. I also took observational notes throughout the entirety of my time at the subject’s workplace using Spradley’s (1979) nine observational dimensions (See Appendix 3). The observations are meant to support the data gathered through interviews and contextualize the settings to allow for richer description in the writing of the portrait. I also took photos on my phone, where appropriate, to be used as reference and in the portrait.

In addition to my subject, I interviewed five individuals she recommended to me who can speak to her life and help construct her story from an outsider’s perspective. The five included the subject’s spouse, a former university president the subject reported to when she was a provost, two vice presidents who reported to her when she was a president, and a longtime colleague who is also a close friend of the subject. One of these interviews was conducted during the three days I spent with the subject, with the other four taking place after the visit, either in-person or virtually (See Appendix 2). Lastly, I performed a fifth interview with the subject approximately four months after our first interaction. This interview coincided with the start of the first academic year after her retirement. This final interview was purposefully done at that point to allow some time to pass to give her the space to reflect on the totality of her career. These questions were centered around reflection of her career and identity and the future, for her personally and for queer individuals in higher education overall.

All interviews with my subject and the five additional individuals were audio recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai and I took written notes to supplement the recordings and transcriptions. Once these data were collected, thematic analysis was used to create themes
among data collected from both observations and interviews. I thematized myself to better engage with the data.

**Findings**

There are three findings which came out of the portraiture process and are directly related to the themes which emerged from the data. They are oneness of identity, the power of being out, and safety concerns. These findings come from themes that were repeatedly expressed by the participant and were reinforced in the conversations had during the associate interviews. This section will examine each of the three findings, putting them into conversation with literature in the field.

**Oneness of Identity**

My initial working hypothesis centered on a “push-and-pull” idea between the participant’s lesbian identity and her identity as a university executive. This was duly proven wrong after conversations with her. She described her identity as one, no push or pull in either direction, except in moments where she was concerned for her own safety, which I will expand upon later. To quote Gayle: “It's not compartmentalized like that. It's not, they're just layers on top of who you are and that makes the whole”. I realized later that I had placed my assumptions and feelings about my own identity onto my hypothesis, thinking others must experience their identities similarly to how I experience mine. This section will draw connections to the literature on the concept of a “oneness of identity”.

Ideas surrounding identity development were first published by famed psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s and 60s (Erikson, 1950; Erikson, 1968). Erikson’s theory of identity development followed individuals through adulthood where “identity is the integrator that moves one toward wholeness” (Kroger, 2015, p. 2). Erikson explained that this is a continuous process
throughout adulthood meaning that as one matures, their identity would continue to gain aspects of wholeness juxtaposed against the “fragments” of identity described in his fifth stage of psychosocial development, identity vs. role confusion. Erikson’s thinking around identity development helps frame how my and Gayle’s thinking differ so greatly when analyzing our own identities. She is in her 60s and I am in my 30s, allowing more time for her to develop wholeness among her identities.

In oversimplified terms, the idea of identity wholeness presented by Erikson can be summarized as: the more one matures in age, the more wholeness they activate in their identity. The three “layers” of Gayle’s identity, to borrow from her quote above, that she discussed most frequently in our time together were those of being a woman, a lesbian, and a higher education executive. There were repeated references during the associate interviews of Gayle being “the same person” during and outside of work hours. This phrase was expanded upon to mean that she did not shield any parts of her identity while she was working; she did not “wear a mask”. I take these references to allude to the wholeness of her identity. She does not feel the need to hide or oppositely, overemphasize any parts of her identity in her daily life because, as she describes, they are layers that make up the whole, not separated silos that shift from day to day.

This finding that Gayle described sits mainly in the psychological literature and displays her ability to process her varying identities cohesively over the course of her life. This finding is personal in that it relates to an individual’s psychological development though it leaves out the contextual factors that drive that development. For the purposes of this study, that context is the working environment found on college campuses. The next finding, relating to being “out” in the workplace, adds that contextual level of analysis.
The second finding that came out of this portraiture process relates to the power of being “out”. Pachankis and Jackson (2022) define being “out” as “… the psychosocial experience of disclosing, in some form, one’s sexual minority status to others.” (p. 1). Gayle characterized this finding as her feeling as a confidence that came with living authentically within her lesbian identity. This does not involve ensuring everyone she comes across knows how she identifies, it simply means that she does not hide it, or otherwise deny it. She will make reference to her wife, or other aspects of her life which make others aware that she is a lesbian and she says that the act of doing that imbues one with a level of power over others who may wish to weaponize one’s identity against them. In other words, if I am free and open with my identity, someone else cannot “out” me in a malicious way. To quote Gayle:

There's more power in being out. You know, someone can't say, ‘Oh my God, she's lesbian!’ because it's right here already. And if you can't confront it, and you want to talk about it behind my back, well, you're gonna find that in being out, I get to be more powerful because you cannot hold anything over me. What will you hold over me? I am who I say I am.

King and Noelle (2005) performed a quantitative study of the coming out stories of over 100 gay men and women and found that the concept of power played heavily in these stories. The authors state that many individuals in the study spoke about how, during their coming out process, they felt as though they lost social power by moving into a “maligned minority group” (p. 11). While the coming out process can move an individual into a minority identity group, Gayle’s assertion runs counter to this as she describes the power she feels as a confidence and
pride in her identity that she can use to deflect the words or actions of anyone who wishes to use her identity to malign her.

Whittier (2012) adds a layer to the power that comes with being out. She juxtaposed the concepts of individual and group identities and her work shows that queer folks who come out feel a sense of power through their visibility as a member of a societal group. The author explained how the queer community overall is one that celebrates their identities and brings to the group a shared pride in an identity even if an individual in the group still held internalized feelings of shame. There is a specific pointing towards the power that comes with being a member of a group. While Gayle’s assertion is not explicit in this aspect of power, it is an important consideration to add to the discussion on this finding.

Safety Concerns

The third and final finding of the portraiture process concerned safety when publicly discussing queer identity. Gayle mentioned that the only caveat to the power that comes with being out is when she feels her safety would be threatened if the people she was around knew about her identity. She worked for the majority of her professional life in an area of California that is more conservative and she mentioned that, on occasion, when she was not familiar with the area or who exactly would be in the audience she simply would make sure to not mention her identity. An important point she made in this was that she would never deny her identity or her wife in any way, she would simply leave it mute. She also spoke of a time, when as a new professor, a student began following her and repeatedly threatened her and expressed his disapproval of her identity and his thinking that a lesbian should not be allowed to teach. She said she felt unsafe, not knowing when this student would appear or if his violence would
become physical. Inherent in Gayle’s concerns around safety is a fear of harm, whether that be physical, verbal, or other.

While this is a sad reality, it is one that is discussed in the literature around queer identities extensively (MacEoghain, 2021; Pascar et.al., 2022; Daniel & Berwick, 2020). Menon (2015) elaborates on the ideas of universalism and partition, which she discussed in concert with the theory of social construction which argues that social norms are constructed through sustained societal agreement. So, when one operates outside of the socially constructed norms, that person’s visibility in society is increased, they stand out, which could lead to a higher likelihood of harm being done to them. Gender and sexual minorities are examples of identities that fall outside of the social norm, where cisgenderism and heterosexuality are the norm, which places the individuals who identify in those groups as greater targets of harm.

To work against the structural and interpersonal harm and trauma which can come from holding these identities, the idea of safe spaces has evolved recently, predominantly so on university campuses. While discussing safe spaces on college campuses, MacEoghain (2021) describes the specific support they provide to members of the LGBTQ community. The author argues that these spaces act as safe havens from violence and also work to educate others about the violence that is faced by queer individuals. Pascar and colleagues (2022) expand upon the idea of queer safe spaces to anywhere there is protection “from heteronormative and patriarchal violence that shapes the everyday lives and subjectivities of queer individuals” (p. 7). The creation of these safe spaces is vital to the protection of queer individuals. This vein of thought is developing into an area of study in its own right that Daniel and Berwick (2020) call queer security studies which works to investigate the meanings of safety and security in queer and feminist spaces and thought.
Conclusion and Implications

This study describes portraiture methodology and its use to frame the life and career of Dr. Gayle Hutchinson, President Emerita of California State University, Chico. Portraiture focuses on finding the good in the research subject and rooting the work in celebration and positivity and generally focuses on an individual idea, thing, or person. Theoretically this work sits on two pillars: narrative storytelling and queer futurity and worldmaking. By telling the stories of queer individuals one is making the world more queer and moving society towards a future where being queer is accepted and celebrated without fear of persecution or harm. I wanted to put these methodological and theoretical pieces together to explore the career experiences of queer higher education administrators and the findings that came out of this process include ideas of a oneness of identity, the power that comes from being out, and concerns about one’s safety.

The implications this study has on future research can be separated into three categories: methodological, theoretical, and practical. Methodologically, this study exemplifies the ways that portraiture can be used to tell a story in a unique way when compared to other qualitative methods. This method can be used to reach the same depth and breadth of other methods and does so by centering on the goodness inherent in another person. Theoretically, this study moves us closer to a future where queer individuals are fully accepted. Research like this is a small progression towards that goal and by simply telling stories like this, researchers can make the world a queerer place. Lastly, practical implications center around others being able to identify pieces of their own stories or identities in Gayle’s story. A goal of portraiture is to write in a way that inspires others and allows them to see themself in the story. That is my central motivation in
performing this research. I hope it has a positive impact on someone who has never seen their identity shared by someone in senior administrative positions.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Portrait Interview Protocols

First Participant Interaction:

Intro: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Portraiture methodology requires repeated interactions with the portrait subject. We have scheduled this session as well as three more over the course of today and tomorrow. Each conversation will have a separate focus starting with contextualizing your life and career, followed by your looking at past ways your identity and career have influenced one another, how they interact presently which we will do by walking around campus, and one that focuses on the future. Each should take no longer than an hour and audio recording will be used when appropriate and with your permission. These recordings will be used solely by me for the purposes of this research. Again, thank you for your participation and let’s get started with our first conversation.

Context:

-How do you identify within the LGBTQ community?
-How do you identify racially, ethnically, religiously, etc. (non-LGBTQ identities)?
-Why a career in higher education?
-Why Chico State?
-What professional associations do you belong to?

Past:

-How was the process of coming to terms with your identity?
-Who were your mentors?
-How has your identity influenced your career?
-How has your career influenced your identity?
-When and how have you experienced discrimination based on your identity?

Present (Go-Along):

-What places on campus are and have been important to you?
-How do you feel in these spaces?
-How do you view your current role?
-What is your approach to leadership?
-How have you felt during transitions in your career?
-How mindful of your identity are you in these moments?

Future:
-What would you like your legacy on this campus to be?
-What would you like your legacy in higher education to be?
-What do you think the future looks like for queer administrators in higher ed?
-What do you plan to do after retiring?
-Do you have any mentees?

Second Participant Interaction:
(Few months after first interaction, via Zoom)

Intro: Thanks again for the time you gave me a few months ago. I wanted to follow up now that some time has passed to discuss some topics regarding your career overall. This shouldn’t take longer than an hour and I’ll be recording audio that will solely be for my personal use in regard to this project. So, let’s get started.

-What strategies did you use to overcome challenging times in your career?
-What are three high-points of your career? Why?
-What themes do you see in your work?
-How would you tell your story?
-What do you want me to know that we haven’t discussed already?
APPENDIX B

Associate Interview Protocols

Intro: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me to talk about (portrait subject). My dissertation uses a portraiture methodology to paint a picture of the subject’s life. I am highlighting (subject) in my research to bring a focus to the ways that queer identity influences higher education administrators’ career and conversely, how their career influences their identity. I understand you have worked with (subject) for many years and she shared your name with me as someone who could aid in contextualizing this intersection of her identity and career. This should take no longer than an hour and I will be audio recording, with your permission. These recordings will be used solely by me for the purposes of this research. Again, thank you for your participation and let’s get started.

-Tell me about your association with (participant)?

-How would you tell (participant)’s story?

-What themes have you seen in her work?

-How do you think her identity has shaped her work?

-What do you think her legacy will be?
APPENDIX C

Observation Protocols

Prior to the observations taking place, I will ask for permission to observe and share the purpose of my research. If permission is granted, I will follow the 3-part template below: First, I will make a note of filing information for organizational purposes. Second, I will write descriptive observations using Spradley’s Nine Observational Dimensions to elicit an overall picture and identify the most salient dimension. Finally, I will write focused observations.

Part 1 of 3: Filing Information

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Part 2 of 3: Descriptive Observations

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<td>II. Actors</td>
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<td>VIII. Goals</td>
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<td>IX. Feelings</td>
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Part 3 of 3: Focused Observations

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Since the most salient dimension is acts, my focused observations will specifically describe where the acts occur (Space), how the acts incorporate use of objects (Objects), ways acts are part of activities (Activities), ways acts are part of events (Events), ways acts vary over time (Times), ways acts are performed by actors (Actors), ways acts are related to goals (Goals), and ways acts are linked to feelings (Feelings).</td>
</tr>
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*The specific dimension is subject to change and will be selected based on descriptive observations.
ARTICLE THREE

PORTRAIT OF A QUEER UNIVERSITY LEADER

"Openness may not completely disarm prejudice, but it's a good place to start."
- Jason Collins, professional basketball player

What follows is a portrait, a term coined by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot, of Dr. Gayle Hutchinson, President Emerita of California State University, (CSU) Chico, where she was the first female president and the first openly gay president of any of the 23 California State University campuses. Portraiture, as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot, is “... a method of social science inquiry distinctive in its blending of art and science, capturing the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience” (1997, p. 3). Lawrence-Lightfoot also describes how portraiture’s goal is to sit in positivity with the portrait subject, focusing on the good and inspirational. This does not mean a purposeful removal of negativity, it just means framing those experiences in a way that honors the person while gleaning the lessons and goodness from the situation. Lastly, portraits are written in a style that is unlike that of much other works of qualitative research. It is written in a creative way that allows the reader to imagine themself in the world being described, imagining themself smelling, seeing, touching, and inhabiting the spaces being discussed in the text.

This portrait is guided by time I spent with Gayle at her home and workplace in Chico, California in May of 2023. I performed five interviews with her in total, four in-person during that time and one via Zoom a few months later. I also interviewed five individuals close to her: her spouse, a longtime colleague who is also a close friend, the president she reported to while she was provost, and two vice presidents who reported to her when she was a president. I attended two retirement celebrations for her, one at a farm operated by the university and one at
her home. In addition, I spent two full days shadowing Gayle at work, sitting in on meetings where she allowed me to take observational notes. She showed me mementos from her career, shared with me a transcript of an oral history she had given in partnership with a faculty member at CSU Fullerton, I got to know the staff in her office and other campus leaders, and I met many of her friends. I also spent time on my own exploring the Chico State campus and City of Chico, taking pictures and observational notes during my four day stay there.

Gayle and I met while I was an undergraduate student at CSU Channel Islands during her time as provost there. She was the most senior openly gay administrator I had ever met. I was just starting to grapple with my own queer identity and had aspirations to go into academic administration. We had met once at an event and I emailed her asking if she would be open to grabbing a coffee on campus to talk about career paths in higher education. She took the time to chat with me and humored me with kind answers to the somewhat naive questions my 20-year-old self had thought up. Nearly 10 years later, she would continue humoring me by accepting my invitation to be the subject of this project.

“This will never be okay with me”

These words were spoken sharply by a woman to her daughter, as they stood nearly nose-to-nose. “This is my life” the daughter replied in the same tone. It was tense for a moment on that cool Massachusetts afternoon. The day was meant to be one of celebration, a college graduation, though it was also a moment that put great distance between the mother-daughter pair, a distance that lasted for a decade.

Earlier that day, Gayle and her family were in fact celebrating her academic accomplishments. A beautiful ceremony was had, strewn with the maroon and white colors of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Gayle had, not long before, shared with her parents
that she was gay, of which her mother was unsupportive. This was not the way her partner’s
parents reacted however. She had the juxtaposition of a supportive parental reaction and an
unsupportive parental reaction to bookend her coming out experience.

During the decade that her relationship with her mother was strained, Gayle began her
career as a faculty member in the kinesiology department at California State University, Chico.
She rose through the academic ranks to a full professor, eventually becoming a department chair
and, in a rare occurrence in higher education, became the dean of a separate college from the one
she had been a faculty member in. After working her way to the dean’s office at Chico, she
became provost at California State University Channel Islands. After three years as provost, she
returned to Chico to serve as its twelfth president until retiring seven years later, in the summer
of 2023.

Figure 1

Portrait of Dr. Gayle Hutchinson

Note. By J. Halley - California State University, Chico (https://shorturl.at/bBJY2)
“For me, a portrait is something from which you feel the person, their inner quality, what it is that makes them who they are.”

– Herb Ritts, *fashion photographer*

“God, don’t let me break down”

Hurriedly, I left my office and got in my car at CSU Channel Islands prepared for the six-and-a-half-hour drive that laid before me. It was a cold and cloudy morning. I wondered if my trusty gray ‘98 Camry with sun-stained hood and roof and missing hubcap would make the trek. “Too late for that” I thought. I left Ventura County and drove across the sprawling San Joaquin Valley, thousands of square miles of open fields and pastures painted in shades of golds and greens. I passed sign after sign reminding me of my progress: “Kern County Line”, “Kings County Line”, “Fresno County Line”, and on until I reached Stockton. Sprawling urban life once again. I was somewhat relieved to be out of the long straightaway that is the 5 Freeway between the Grapevine down in Kern County and Stockton. I think only because I was afraid of my car breaking down on a stretch of the open road after reading signs informing drivers that their next rest stop or gas station wouldn't be for another 100 miles or more.

That open stretch of land was nostalgic for me as it was the road my mom and I would take to visit my grandma when I was a child and she was living about half an hour outside of Fresno. The feeling of being at my grandma’s house was so much different than what I felt at home in Oxnard. There is a relaxed feeling when you leave southern California, less hustle and bustle. I appreciated the remnants of that feeling I sat with on that stretch of the drive. After stretching my legs in Stockton, I continued north.

I had never been to Sacramento and was excited to see what I could from the freeway as I sat in a few minutes of traffic. I moved through the remainder of Sacramento County, which I
was somewhat surprised to see turns back into wide open land after the capital, and then moved along straddling the border between Sutter and Yuba counties, heading for Butte. After passing through a smattering of small towns and the seemingly infinite rows of almond and pistachio orchards, I knew I was close.

The folks who built the City of Chico must have been trying to make it an awe inspiring entrance to their slice of the North State, because that’s exactly what I felt when I got to the lush greenery of trees at the city limits. I was greeted by a huge welcome sign “Chico Welcomes You - Home of Bidwell Park & Mansion and California State University, Chico”. I had arrived.

“Love, Gayle and Linda”

I was set to attend Gayle’s retirement party hosted by the university at the University Farm. I got to my Airbnb, a charming and quiet place right on the creek which ran through the center of town, spruced myself up and headed over. It was warm there, even as the evening was quickly approaching. I was going to meet up with three folks from work who had also stayed in contact with Gayle after she left Channel Islands. I drove up to the farm, guided by signage on plastic A-frames reading “President Hutchinson Retirement Celebration” with an arrow under it decorated in the beautiful deep red and silvery gray colors of the campus. I was then greeted by the sights, sounds, and smells of farm life as I was met by a student in a neon safety vest standing next to a large pig pen who welcomed me and pointed me in the direction of the parking lot. I was momentarily taken aback by the sheer volume of cars present, the large parking area directly in front of the barn that housed the party was full. I found a spot next to a few other stragglers behind some tractors and industrial farm equipment that was completely foreign to my city-slicking eyes.
Figure 2

*The Pavilion at the CSU Chico Farm that housed the party*

*Note.* By A. Lorenzana

I walked to a check in table to get a nametag and a beautiful gold pin with the university seal emblazoned on it with a note that read “Thank you for your support and for being part of this memorable celebration. Love, Gayle and Linda”. That was my first encounter with what I went there looking for: her queerness, her lesbian identity. I placed it in my pocket with such care, as if it were a prize I’d won. I walked in and immediately spotted my three companions sitting close to the entrance. I hurried over to greet them just as the cheery voice of the emcee came over the speakers to announce food was ready. I was about half an hour late, which I was happy with after the long drive. My attention shifted to the massive room. Hundreds of people were in this barn, along with a large stage, lighting and screens, and a dance floor sat in the center flanked by long tables on either side. A bar laid in the corner closest to the entrance and
the buffet of food and desserts ran across the back of the room. Rows of string-lights twinkled overhead and beautiful floral centerpieces ran along the tables that easily sat 50 people each and of which there were four on either side of the dance floor. Unintelligible chatter filled the space. I told my three tablemates about my drive and the event I had that morning at work which kept me from getting on the road earlier. We grabbed our food from the buffet line and resumed our seats.

The program began with a video of folks discussing the campus and Gayle’s impact on it and them personally, it was a moving tribute. This was followed by greetings from local elected officials. I worked in government relations at a university and have witnessed the niceties that feel performed out of obligation by the holder of an elected office. This was different. These men, as all three were, spoke in detail, and somewhat emotionally, of the bond they shared with Gayle and that she shared with them and the region. They each presented her with certificates and posed for photos, each laughing and sharing sidebar conversations with her while the others spoke.

This was followed by remarks from Mr. Dennis Ramirez, Chair of the Mechoopda Indian Tribe, with whom Gayle had worked with closely to build a strong partnership between the tribe and the university. In these first few portions of the program there were several mentions of Linda, Gayle’s spouse, being a driving force in her life, and a great personal and professional support to her. Mr. Ramirez then introduced Gayle to speak, passing a gift to her as they greeted one another. She took the microphone, emotional from the outpouring of praise she had just received. “Linda”, she gestured into the audience beckoning her spouse to the stage. “Come up here with me”. I was in awe. I had never seen a person from the LGBTQ community call out to their same-sex partner and then proceed to embrace them and talk about the love and support
they share for each other in front of so many people in my life, outside of the television screen.
She described Linda as her “rock” and “life partner of 23 years” then invited her to speak.

**Figure 3**

_Gayle and Linda on stage_

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_Not_. By A. Lorenzana

Butte County is conservative, located in the red interior north of the state. I grew up in
Ventura County, on the coast just an hour’s drive north of Los Angeles. As I was driving up on
the 5, I was greeted with handmade signs blaming the water crisis hitting the large fertile valley
in the center of the state on Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat. There were signs and flags in
support of President Donald Trump and other Republican state and federal lawmakers. I knew
that Chico was going to be different from Oxnard, politically and in many other ways. I had done
my research, studied the demographics, and had even explored the town virtually using Google
Maps. It’s different when you actually see it in front of you though, on handmade signs, bumper
stickers, and billboards. I brought my own assumptions of how a redder part of the state would
embrace a prominent lesbian leader. I assumed her identity wouldn’t be forefront, that of course
folks would know, but perhaps it wouldn’t be mentioned as much, at least not in large venues. I was wrong.

“She’s probably on the dance floor”

Gayle and Linda stood there on stage in front of hundreds of people, the spotlight on them, thanking each other and folks in the audience, in general and some specifically, for their personal and professional support over the seven years of her presidency. After they spoke, a band took to the stage and guests to the dance floor. It was getting late, and I was tired from the day’s drive. I still had to connect with Gayle and her assistant to work out details for the time I’d be spending in the office with her. I had arrived on a Friday and I was to spend the following Monday and Tuesday with her before leaving on Wednesday morning. I found her assistant who gave me the details of her Monday morning and we decided upon a time I’d arrive at their office. I then beelined for the dance floor as I had been told that I’d likely find Gayle there and indeed, I did.

Gayle was a varsity basketball player in her high school and early college years. She continues to have the indefatigable energy and drive of an athlete. Several individuals I spoke to described her as “the Energizer Bunny”, always full of energy, especially so for all things related to Chico State. Her dark glasses framed her eyes and her hair is shoulder length, dark brown with bangs across her forehead and silver streaks where her glasses fade into it at her ears.

It was a revolving door of folks coming up to her, hugging her and wishing her well. I waited for my moment. Two of my companions had been waiting to get to her from the other side so I slipped in with them. It had been seven or eight years since we had seen each other in person and I was wondering if she would recognize me. “Andrew, I’m so excited you’re here!” she shouted over the music as she gave me a welcoming hug. She was wearing a necklace and
earrings made of beautiful green beads and a yellow, green, and blue floral jacket. “I love your coat!” I said. “I love color!” she responded with a smile. She invited me to brunch at her home the following morning, a more personal retirement celebration she described it as. I was excited and a little anxious, it was starting to feel real. This was the data gathering portion of my dissertation and I only had one go at it. I had to remind myself that I was there to perform research, walk a line between social guest and observant note-taker.

Saturday started with brunch at Gayle and Linda’s home. It was in a newer looking neighborhood at the edge of town composed of beautiful homes with neatly manicured lawns and landscaping. The festivities were concentrated in their backyard, where a pool lied in the center, two friendly knee-height dogs wandered greeting folks, an assortment of food and drink sat under the awning closest to the house, one small and one larger dark wooden gazebos on opposite ends of the yard shaded folks from the warming sun, and a small putting green sat at the back. As folks were mingling and chatting at the various seating arrangements scattered throughout the yard, I noticed quite a few lesbian couples in attendance. There was community here amongst them and it was beautiful to behold.

Gayle chatted with two of my companions from the night before and I for some time, sharing stories about how the different facets of the yard came together under Linda’s handiwork. They had built the larger gazebo together by hand, just the two of them, and she took us over to a fenced off portion of the yard which contained a small shed and vegetable garden with a small seating area. That area too, they had put together by hand, shed included. Gayle shared with us that she hoped to be able to do more projects like this after she retired, along with travel, and hone her musical skills on the guitar. I expressed my gratitude for the invitation to
their home, it was something I wasn't expecting and appreciated the extra time I got to share with her there, then set off to explore.

**Figure 4**

*Kendall Hall on the CSU Chico campus*

From the gathering at Gayle and Linda’s I made my way to the Chico State campus to familiarize myself before the time I would spend there the following Monday. Everything felt so close in this town, nothing further than a 15-minute drive it seemed. The streets were tree-lined with what at times seemed like a dense forest, a sea of beautiful dark green leaves. I parked and made my way to Kendall Hall, the administration building. It greeted me, sitting just behind the
building across the street from the structure where I parked. A large beautifully ornate brick building with a dome at the center and two wings jetting out on either side of it. The walkway from the parking structure leads right up to it, a flagpole and giant stone slab engraved with the university’s name sit across a sizable lawn in front of the building, where a perpendicular walkway crosses which serves as the campus’ main east-west artery.

Continuing down the walkway that cuts through the lawn toward the building, I was met with perfectly pruned circular bushes, taller than me, that create a circular space in the pavement with copper plaques evenly spaced around the edges of the circle: time capsules. One reads: “Class of 1933 Time Capsule - Opened October 11, 2003”. They continue, one per year, around the circle and then into the larger, open cemented area directly in front of the entrance to the building where they become a red checkerboard of stones each with years stamped into them. “1962”, “1987” all the way through “2023”, which isn't meant to be opened until 2073. I look up from the time capsule checkerboard to see three archways, above the middle one reads “ADMINISTRATION”. I step through it and under the awning that covers the front door which itself is surrounded by an ornate stone archway. Above the double door, made of paned glass with decorative rivets, reads the university motto: “Today Decides Tomorrow”. The door is locked, I peek through to see a couple of portraits on the wall, one of Dr. Glenn Kendall, a former president after whom the building is named, and a grand spiral staircase at the center of the building, hugging a covered grand piano.

**Figure 5**

*Main door into Kendall Hall*
Note. By A. Lorenzana

I have visited many college campuses. Not many have left me as awestruck as Chico State has. It is historic, as evidenced by the cornerstones of Kendall Hall of which there are two dated 1929 and 1889. Markers of a rebuild which came after a fire that destroyed the original building, I would come to learn. It is lush, as evidenced by the giant trees dotting the campus and the creek which cuts directly through its center. It was lively, as evidenced by the amount of foot traffic I saw on a Saturday afternoon, due in part to its position at the far end of the city’s downtown. I walked around campus for some time, crossing back and forth over the many bridges that spanned the creek, peeking into buildings, taking in the gardens and public art pieces. I spent a couple hours that afternoon in the campus library, reading and working before setting out towards downtown to gather some souvenirs and grab something to eat before heading back to my rental.
The following day I took a tour of Bidwell Park and Mansion. The Bidwells were a prominent family who played a large role in the expansion of northern California in the mid-1800s. Mr. Bidwell bought the land known as Rancho Arroyo Chico, “little stream ranch”, and later donated the land adjacent to his family home to be used as the site of the northern branch of the State Normal School in 1887. The State Normal School in Chico has evolved into what is today Chico State. The Bidwells are considered the founders of the City of Chico and I wanted to take the time to understand the area where Gayle lived and worked for thirty years.

She was drawn to the city by happenstance, having originally applied for her first faculty position at a university in Texas. After that fell through, someone there recommended she reach out to a colleague of theirs at Chico State. She described to me how she scoured a map of the state, unaware of the city’s location in it. She found the dot designating the city in the far north of the state, dashing her hopes for a life on the beach. She described to me how she found her lesbian community there, attending a concert that a lesbian folk artist was playing at a local church. “And there they were” she said as she described the first time she attended a service there.

Figure 6

Bidwell Mansion on the CSU Chico campus
“*They had paper bags over their faces*”

Monday morning began at the Office of the President at Chico State where I met the four staff members who work there. There was a 9:00 am meeting of the president’s cabinet, the executive team of seven individuals who, along with the president, are responsible for the daily and long-term operations of the university. The meeting took place at a conference table in Gayle’s office with two folks joining via Zoom. There was a carpeted area at the back of the office where Gayle’s desk was along with a couch and a couple chairs for smaller conversation. The portion of the room with the conference table had a hardwood floor and a large screen on the wall where the folks joining virtually were as well as what they used to navigate the agenda and other discussion items. There were trinkets in various areas of the office that caught my attention. Near us at the conference table, there was a torso-height cabinet on which sat Gayle’s chain of office, a few books of meaning to her, some pictures and awards. Back closer to her desk, the university mace hung on the dark gray wall, there were flowers on a side table near the couch and her desk had family pictures, printed emails, and notes. Gayle introduced me and I spoke briefly about my project before each person introduced themself and their role. The Chief Financial Officer had recently assumed the role on an interim basis and this was her first cabinet meeting. I felt more at ease knowing that I wasn't the only person there for the first time.

I watched Gayle and the others intently while they moved down their list of agenda items over the course of about an hour and a half. Gayle has a keen ability to focus on the person speaking in such a way that lets them know she is giving them her undivided attention. It was a regular comment in the interviews I did with others as well, her ability to intently listen to whoever she is speaking with. She leaned forward with her elbows on the table looking at
whoever was speaking, nodding in agreement and asking questions to clarify or to help summarize, for herself and the whole. It was during that meeting that I connected with a member of the cabinet who told me that he had just been hired there about a year ago, that it was the only place he had applied, and he did so because of Gayle’s presence as an out gay leader telling me that he himself was gay and wanted to learn from and watch another gay leader.

After that meeting Gayle lent me an oral history she sat for with a faculty member from CSU Fullerton who profiled all of the female presidents in the CSU system a few years prior. I read through that over the course of the next couple hours while she had a private meeting and a lunch with a local community college leader. From it, I learned a tremendous amount about her life. She told of her early health battles with diabetes where she recounts she “almost died” from extreme fluctuations in her blood sugar before she was diagnosed and continues to wear an insulin pump. She recounted her memories of the first time she attended a Pride parade, where she recalls teachers marching with paper bags over their faces to hide their identities. She would later allude to these stories as she and I talked as well, they were formative and continued to drive practical and aspirational aspects of her life.

The remainder of that day was filled with a couple smaller meetings and about a half hour of time for conversation between her and I. Her meetings included one with her speechwriter, where they discussed upcoming speeches and other communications she’d be delivering, and a meeting with a coach and a faculty athletics representative discussing a wide range of topics related to the campus’ sports programs. In these I saw that same person, leaning in, asking how her guests’ kids and families are doing, she would give positive affirmations such as “she’s a pro” in reference to her speechwriter, giving positive feedback to her guests in the forms of “good job”, “good point”, “well said”, and “that’s a good plan”. She made people feel
comfortable, greeted folks with a genuine smile or a hug, made direct eye contact so they felt heard and affirmed, and gave genuine thanks when they left.

It was perhaps though, in the moments outside of meetings that I saw her truest self shine through. She held a meeting with a staff member in her office that she asked me to sit out of because of confidentiality. I sat on a couch in the large open space directly outside of her office proper where three staff members and the student workers in the office each had work stations. She came out of her office into this open working/waiting space with the person she had been meeting with and out the secured door that led into the main hallway of the building where other administrators’ offices were. She gestured to me to join her and said “we’re taking (person’s name) up to HR to get him some help with something”. The three of us walked into the hallway and up the spiral staircase at the center of the building that hugged that grand piano, now uncovered. HR was on the second floor and when they entered the suite of offices there, she asked that I wait for them in the hall, which I did. I saw the two of them enter an office and shut the door. They emerged about ten minutes later, she shook her guests hand goodbye and rejoined me in the hallway. “Do you often walk people to other departments?” I asked somewhat in jest though curious for her reply. “Sometimes” she replied “I knew I could help solve an issue he was having and it was just faster if I went with him”. She was unique, I started thinking. Not every president would have done that, maybe they would have asked their assistant to accompany the person or simply point them in the right direction but she took her own time to help when she knew it would make a difference.

**Figure 7**

*The interior of Kendall Hall*
Note. By A. Lorenzana

On a separate occasion, I was waiting in that working/waiting space when I heard Gayle’s Chief of Staff answer her cell phone in her office which was directly to my right with the door open. She stated the name of one of the vice presidents when she answered, followed by a short pause, then “oh my God! Are you in your office? I’m on my way!”. She darted from her desk and out the door into the hallway. The few staff members there and I looked at each other, not knowing what to think. The Chief of Staff’s assistant then received a text message from her after about five minutes, the vice president’s mother had just passed away unexpectedly and she was distraught in her office. Gayle emerged from her office a few minutes later, where she had been taking a video call, unaware of what had happened. The staff told her and without hesitation she took off at a jog out the door and down the hall in the same direction as her Chief of Staff had gone. The two of them returned about fifteen minutes later informing the staff that the vice
president would be out for the next few weeks and to direct any work-related inquiries they or others had to a separate administrator in the area that she oversaw. It was genuinely astounding to see her care for others play out in such raw moments, seeing how she reacts to shocking news or when she knows she can make a difference.

The second day I got to spend more time with Gayle, getting through three sets of interview questions throughout the day. It started with a meeting of the Provost’s Council, the deans and other academic leaders of the campus, in a building near Kendall Hall. The room was full when we entered. It was a classroom where the desks had been rearranged to make a square and each person had a nameplate, Gayle’s was at the top of the room, at the center. She made a quick circle around the room saying hello to everyone and came and stood next to me, placing her hand on my shoulder as I was sitting. She introduced me to the group and invited me to briefly describe my research to them. She made her way to the seat with her name plate as I was speaking and sat down. I concluded, grateful for the room’s positive reaction, she smiled and winked at me and then moved into the meeting’s business. There was something in that moment, the hand on the shoulder, the wink. I was somewhat nervous, coming into a room of senior administrators I had never met who were surely wondering who I was and what I was doing there. She put me at ease. I could feel her care, her pride in me, the esteem she felt for her colleagues. It was an unexpectedly kind moment. This would be her last meeting with this group and she expressed her and Linda’s gratitude for them, she laughed, she cried, she shared memories.

When we returned to the office, there was some free time and Gayle offered to host me on a tour of campus. I couldn’t resist. We boarded her golf cart with her speechwriter, so she could have some extra time with Gayle to work through some additional questions she had for
her. As we traversed the campus, she told me about the different names of buildings, programs that were housed in various academic buildings, areas that hold special meaning to the native community, descriptions of various public art pieces and sculptures, background about ongoing and past construction projects, details of historic homes and spaces on campus, and a description of the various sports complexes. She also told me about the harsher history of certain areas including a building that needed to be renamed because research had revealed the previous namesake held racist views, areas where violent incidents had occurred, and details about the campus’ response to the wildly devastating Camp Fire and the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we were returning to the office, we came across a group of 5 or 6 gray-haired women who were walking around. Gayle quickly stopped to ask what brought them to campus. They said they were alumnae of the university who had reunited over lunch and decided to take a walk around campus after. They asked what she did on campus and she told them that she had the great privilege of being the university president. They were surprised that the president was driving two other folks around on a golf cart, one of them saying in jest while gesturing to me “ shouldn't he be driving?”. Gayle laughed and said I was a guest of hers who she was showing around. She chatted with them for about ten minutes, asking them what they studied and about the paths that their lives took after college. She took a selfie with them and then we went on our way. She was genuinely delighted to speak to them, and they were with her. We then spent another hour-and-a-half or so in discussion in her office about her life, career, and queer identity and that was the conclusion of my time at Chico State.

“A Queer Icon”

Dr. Gayle Hutchinson is an out lesbian leader in higher education and has had many “firsts” in her career. The portrait thus far has focused on the interactions that I had with her
myself and that I observed her having with others. I spent many hours observing and in conversation with her to create that portion of this work. That is just a portion of the portrait I would like to share of her however. I spent an additional number of hours in conversation with those close to her: her spouse, a long-time colleague and dear friend, two vice presidents who reported to her when she was a president, and the president who she reported to when she was a provost. I want to provide some sentiments from my interactions with these folks to better help frame the portrait of Dr. Gayle Hutchinson.

The first interactions I had with Linda, Gayle’s spouse, were at the retirement celebration at the barn I described previously. I was excited to see a same sex partner play such a prominent role in the festivities. I would come to learn that Linda played a tremendous role in Gayle’s presidency. A role certainly of support and confidant but also of “an effective partner”, as described by one of Gayle’s vice presidents that I spoke to. This person described Linda as “just as amazing and extraordinary as Gayle”, outlining how she makes people feel at ease and brings just as much energy and care for the institution as Gayle.

**Figure 8**

*Looking down a street in Downtown Chico adjacent to the CSU Chico campus*
I met Linda for our interview over lunch at a diner near campus. She was seated at a back table when I arrived just past the entrance to the kitchen. “This is our corner” she said gesturing to the table as she greeted me, “we’re kind of regulars here”. I asked Linda various questions about her and her spouse’s life, including how she thinks her spouse defines goodness. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) instructs that portraiture is about finding the goodness that lies in the subject of the portrait though to not assume that the researcher’s definition of goodness is the same as other’s. Because of this, I asked the individuals I talked to, how they thought Gayle would define goodness. “She actively looks for the good in situations and people, doesn’t think she’s better than others because of her position, and tries to bring hope to people and to the campus”.

Linda spoke of her spouse’s leadership through various crises, quipping “she’s dealt with everything but locusts”. She managed nearly one major crisis each year of her presidency: a fire, a collapsing dam, a pandemic, a student’s suicide, threats of gun violence on campus, and a body found in front of the administration building. Most presidents would deal with one, maybe two of such incidents in a presidency as long as Gayle’s. Seeing longtime colleagues and friends suffering on the campus she had called home for so long made these tragedies all the more challenging, Linda explained. But these are the moments when her leadership shines through the most, she went on to describe, she gave people hope and could be truly empathic in her response.

When I spoke to the president that she reported to as provost, I got a similar sentiment. He described how, in a presidential career of nearly 25 years, he never had a relationship with another provost like he had with Gayle. “My strongest professional relationship” he said of his time with her, which lasted three years. He described her as “genuine, savvy, enthusiastic,
thoughtful, warm, positive, adventuresome, and fun”. He told me about her tradition of doing something she’s never done each year on her birthday, the conversation where she asked him if he “minds if she brings her wife along”, and her introduction to the campus community where she rapped the university’s many acronyms in her first meeting with an auditorium full of new colleagues. Gayle counts this person as one of the three “brightest stars in her constellation of mentors”. I asked him about how it felt to know that he had that impact on her. He said that she probably taught him just as much about being a leader as he had taught her.

The other vice president who I spoke to was the gentleman who told me that he had applied there to learn from another gay leader. He told me about his story of coming to terms with his gay identity in recent years, already a vice president at a different campus by then. As he worked through his own identity, he looked for other leaders who shared that identity. He found Gayle and applied to Chico. He told me how he is driven to move up the ladder of university leadership and that he looks to her for guidance in his journey towards that goal. It was incredibly moving to hear his story and the effect she had on him even before he met her. His story is the story of this work. To talk about the life and career of a leader, an effective, compassionate, energetic, and genuine leader who happens to be gay and because of that identity, is a stronger role model to so many.

**Conclusion**

I share her story and what I learned from her in this form because I hope that others can take inspiration from it. I hope this work resonates with other academics who do not see themselves represented in the leadership they see in the academy currently. The number of executives in higher education who come from minority identity groups is low, with a “homogeneity” of older, white, male, and straight leaders (Senese, 2021). Dr. Richard Senese,
President Emeritus of Capella University, is an out gay man and discusses the role that gay leaders at present play in modeling “an out career”. He cites using inclusive language, standing up if you are a member of the community or an ally by stating your pronouns or placing a sign on your office indicating your support, and creating clubs or affinity groups to help model that supportive behavior.

I certainly witnessed Gayle show her support and be open about her identity when appropriate, and the positive response that came from those around her because of it. A queer student who helped manage the university social media channel at Chico State referred to Gayle as a “queer icon” in a video before Gayle invited that student into her office and had her try on her regalia and presidential medallion. It was an unscripted and unplanned interaction while the student was walking the halls filming a video advertising an opening for a student worker position in her department. In Gayle’s retirement announcement, a nearly six minute video shared on the university’s social media platforms and in an online news release, she is sat next to Linda the entire time. Gayle served as an inspiration to those around her by living truly and authentically in her lesbian identity.

My hopes in regard to more theoretical contributions is that this portrait works to advance the ideas of queer worldmaking and queer futurity, as discussed by Zaino (2021) and Munoz (2009) respectively. These theories describe society’s evolution towards a queerer future, where individuals in the LGBTQ community are more accepted and celebrated. By telling narratives such as Gayle’s, they get placed into the societal ethos and work to bring that queerer future about by shining a light on the contributions a lesbian has made to her identity-based communities, geographical communities, and to her profession. This story is just one brick added in the construction of the home that is our celebrated queer future. This also serves as a call out
for others to tell their own stories or the stories of their role models in the queer community to continue the work of queer worldmaking.

Gayle and her mother did eventually reconcile. It was a quiet thing, somewhat unspoken from her mother’s perspective. But her mother would come to care for and acknowledge Gayle’s partner. While perhaps not the resolution that was expected or desired, it was resolution nonetheless, one that lasted the remainder of her mother’s life. “There is power in being out” Gayle told me during one conversation in her office. “People can’t hold your identity against you, because you are being exactly who you told them you are”. That was a profound idea for me then, and has continued to take on greater significance in my life throughout the remainder of the time I have worked on this project. She says that, even after a strained relationship with her mother for a decade and watching folks hide their faces under paper bags out of fear of persecution. There is indeed a power in being out, which I feel envelopes the essence of this project and ties together the various experiential and theoretical aspects of it.

I have looked for goodness through this project, as Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot beckons us to do when we follow her methodology. I have found goodness in Dr. Gayle Hutchinson, President Emerita of California State University, Chico. I hope it resonates with you as you need and that you continue telling powerful stories.

“Being normal is being completely unique, because nobody’s the same. Normal, honey? Who is she, anyway?”

-Jonathan Van Ness, *Over the Top: A Raw Journey to Self-Love*
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CONCLUSION

While able to stand independently of one another, these three articles are vitally connected. Each stands on the shoulders of the others and they collectively work to tell a portion of the story that is a queer university leader’s experience in the workplace. They were performed using different methodologies and calling upon different theoretical foundations to support their arguments though they all point to common aspects of work life for individuals who share this identity. Jointly, the findings from articles one and two work together to provide context to the unique situations in the lives of queer university leaders.

Safety and security concerns stand out in the findings as they appeared in both articles and sit starkly against the more optimistic feeling of the other findings. I point to this finding first because it is the ominous shadow behind those other findings. What if a queer administrator expressed their identity to a colleague who held anti-LGBTQ views? What are professional networks of queer administrators insulating themselves from? Why do some folks never work to bring their identities to oneness? What does the act of coming out give a queer person power over? The answers to all these questions, that rest in the context of the other four findings from the first two articles, could all tie back to safety and security concerns in some way. It is unique in its omnipresence.

Gayle recounted the story of a student threatening her because of her identity when she first started her professorial career as a moment where her lesbian identity and career clashed, recalling it as a pivotal career moment. One of the female participants in the first article recounted the mental gymnastics she performed to determine when her spouse should attend work events with her. I was sitting on a bench outside of a bar at night holding hands with a guy I was dating, and a group of people rode by on bikes, did a U-turn once they passed and rode
back by us just to call us “fags”. That was the first time I felt unsafe because of my queer identity and I’m sure almost every queer person has a similar story they could tell that has happened to them within or outside of their workplace. I bring these up not to reinforce the negative energy that is regularly directed at the queer community but to end this work by starting a conversation about what could be done to minimize this negativity, even if just slightly.

As discussed in the findings of article one, networking with other queer professionals in higher education was a strategy that three of the four participants in that study shared was important for them in their career development. An interesting factor in that finding that should be pointed out is that the one participant who said that professional networking was not important in their career development was the single male participant in the study, with all three females discussing its importance in their lives. I want to take this a step further by discussing Gayle’s responses to the questions I posed to her about what she would be doing after her looming retirement and questions around legacy. This portion of her and my conversation was perhaps only five minutes long out of the many hours we spent together but it touches on a topic that I feel ends this work well: mentorship and professional development. These are two concrete activities that individuals within and outside of the queer community can take part in that can work to educate and emulate for others the types of interactions that create a positive environment for queer professionals regardless of their workplace.

Gayle discussed her desire to serve as a mentor to individuals who are earlier on in their higher education careers, and especially so for those who identify as members of the LGBTQ community. This type of professional development, one that is largely driven by one-on-one interactions where knowledge is passed from someone with more experience in a career path to someone who has less, is largely what Gayle was discussing in her responses. Ivanovic (2023)
points to the lack of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for LGBTQ professionals as a major barrier in career advancement. This type of direct mentorship interaction can work to displace those barriers and aid in advancement opportunities for queer professionals in higher education. This is a unique relationship that can be built with a queer elder who has worked for many years in a certain career path and serves as a way for that person to give back and share their knowledge and experience.

Secondly, professional development programs that pay specific attention to queer culture are another aspect of this work that can serve to remove barriers faced by queer professionals working in the academy. Vaccaro, Dooley, and Adams (2019) performed an analysis of professional development activities for university faculty members that centered on improving cultural competency around the queer community. Faculty and staff on college campuses can be powerful agents of inclusion for students and their colleagues and this study’s findings show that faculty members who participated in professional development programs that centered the queer community utilized less exclusionary language in conversations with students and colleagues, wrote more inclusive policies and procedures, and increased their overall cultural competency. This type of learning in a professional setting is key to removing barriers that queer professionals face in the workplace and educates the larger workforce on the unique contributions that queer individuals bring to professional settings.

I end with this discussion as a call to action. Serving as a mentor, taking part in a professional development opportunity, or facilitating one is something that each of us can do to make our workplaces more positive and welcoming places for members of the queer community. The negativity faced by members of the LGBTQ community is not going to stop; it is deeply rooted in global social norms. Though there are ways that we can push back against those norms
in the pockets of power we all operate in on a daily basis. You have the power to influence positive change. I ask that you take the baton and think about what you can do to make your workplaces, your organizations, and your homes and neighborhoods more positive and welcoming places for all.
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