5-2024

Fostering LGBTQ Spirituality: A Campus Case Study

Tracy Morin
University of Massachusetts Boston

FOSTERING LGBTQ SPIRITUALITY: A CAMPUS CASE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented
by
TRACY L. MORIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2024

Higher Education Program

FOSTERING LGBTQ SPIRITUALITY: A CAMPUS CASE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented
by
TRACY L. MORIN

Approved as to style and content by:

Cheryl D. Ching, Assistant Professor
Chairperson of Committee

Katalin Szèlenyi, Associate Professor
Member

Alyssa Rockenbach, Alumni Distinguished Graduate Professor
North Carolina State University
Member

Jay Dee, Program Director
Higher Education Program

Denise Patmon, Chair
Leadership in Education Department

ABSTRACT

FOSTERING LGBTQ SPIRITUALITY: A CAMPUS CASE STUDY

May 2024

Tracy L. Morin, B.S., Salem State University
M.S., Old Dominion University
Ph. D., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Assistant Professor Cheryl D. Ching

The importance of spirituality in the lives and identities of LGBTQ students is sufficiently documented in extant scholarship to encourage campus leaders to consider spiritual support in their efforts to improve campus climate (Birch, 2011; Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Means et al., 2016; Pryor et al., 2017), but there is minimal research to gauge whether, where, and how this consideration is being enacted. Even the Campus Pride Index, the nation's premier resource for ranking the LGBTQ-friendliness of colleges and universities, does not consider support for spirituality in their campus assessment criteria. The purpose of this study was to explore whether and how a university that is known to be LGBTQ-friendly (according to the Campus Pride Index) supports a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Using an embedded single-case study research design, this study collected data from documents, physical artifacts, observations, archival records, and interviews with six LGBTQ students and five staff at one university. The conceptual framework provided an analytical tool to examine structural components of this institution's campus spiritual climate and how LGBTQ students and staff experience those components. Data analysis offered insight into how one university provided resources, programs, and services to nurture LGBTQ spirituality. From my analysis, I developed three themes: 1) Closeted Spirituality, 2) Blind Spots, and 3) Pockets of Support: Places and People. Findings reinforced the importance of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ college students and evidenced the expansive and nuanced ways LGBTQ students experience spirituality. The study concludes with a discussion of how this research contributes to extant literature, lessons that may be useful for universities that seek to improve the ways they foster LGBTQ spirituality, and implications for policy, practice, and future research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the first week of our first summer session, one of my doctoral cohort mates said, “There’s a big difference between being supportive and being support.” He said this in reference to how our family and friends interact with us as doctoral students – the weekends consumed with schoolwork, the nights of reading, the dialogues we try to invoke at the dinner table. There is a distinct difference in how our closest network supports us; it can be support*ive*, with the pats on the back and words of praise, or it can be support in making dinner most nights during the week, keeping up with the laundry, and asking us about what we’re taking away from our experiences at school. I have both, and I am eternally grateful.

Tina, my wife, my best friend, and my #1 support – it is because of you that I made it through. You knew from day one that a doctoral program was “all in” for both of us. You sacrificed time, prioritized my schoolwork in our life together, hugged me in moments of defeat, and told me more times than I can count how proud of me you are. We did this together, and I love you.

Mom and Dad, your love and support, and beaming pride for your daughter (“the Doctor”) mean the world to me. I do not take for granted your unwavering belief in me and your interest in my research. To have parents who love me for who I am and who love the woman I love like their own daughter is a gift for which I am forever grateful.

Lisa, we might as well be identical twins because our brains are synced in a way that you usually only find in sisters who share the exact same DNA. You know me better than I know myself and understand what I’m feeling before I even have words to describe it. You are my grounding, my sounding board, and the person whose advice I seek first. Thank you for being my person and for journeying with me through the highs and lows of completing

this degree. Thanks also to you and Ross for having two great kids in Paige and Piper who ask questions that help me learn and grow as an auntie and an educator.

To my chosen family – Rev. Jennie and Paul Valentine, Rev. Heidi and John Champagne – thank you for loving me and for the miles of walks, pep talks, and deep conversations about faith, spirituality, joy, peace, healing, and love. You are in my heart always. Jennie and Heidi, thank you also for being the ministers that so many LGBTQ people need. You are love and light.

To the rest of the clergywomen in my life who have joined me in my own spiritual journey, thank you. Rev. Laura Biddle, Rev. Rebecca Pugh, Rev. Patty Kogut, Rev. Anne Abernethy, Rev. Laura Gronberg -- you are God's light. Keep shining. We need you.

To my incredible academic family in the Leadership in Education Department at UMass Boston, thank you. Cheryl Ching (committee chair extraordinaire), Kati Szélenyi, Jay Dee, Tara Parker, Liza Talusan – you all have stretched me to get uncomfortable and to grow as a scholar, activist, and educator. Cheryl, you always knew the questions to ask me to dig deeper into my research, and Kati, you pushed me to expand my own understanding of spirituality.

To Alyssa Rockenbach, thank you for believing in my research and for being my "content expert" in so many ways. Your research is advancing the way we talk about LGBTQ spirituality and shifting the focus away from trauma and deficit discourse to a conversation that embraces the complexity and beauty of spirituality.

To my #DreamTeam19, we've laughed, cried, stumbled, celebrated, complained, survived, and thrived together. Amy, Karen, Kristina, Ra'Shaun, Jenn, Andy, Chris, Velina – we may all be on our own journey, but I'm so glad I got to share mine with you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER Page

CHAPTER Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

A NOTE ON THE LGBTQ ACRONYM

Throughout this paper you will read many different acronyms, such as LGBTQ, LGBT, and LGB, and LGBTQ. These variations reflect the populations and acronyms used in the studies to which they are attributed. LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) reflects sexuality, Q is for queer and embodies fluid gender and sexual identities, and T refers to trans or transgender. Importantly, gender identity is a unique and important concept separate from sexuality. My research focused exclusively on sexuality, but I also include the T because trans/transgender individuals can identify as non-heterosexual. In addition, I include the Q because it captures a fluid range of sexual identities beyond the trichotomy of lesbian, gay, and bisexual.

For additional clarification, I use the following definitions for sexual and gender identity terms as found in *The Campus Pride Ultimate Queer College Guide* (2017):

> **Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that determines orientation.
>
> **Gay:** The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that determines orientation.
>
> **Bisexual:** An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to the same gender and different genders. It is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Transgender: A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity.

Queer: Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term can be inclusive of the entire community and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem

Public discourse in the United States often describes spirituality and religion as incompatible with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) identities. For example, the title of a 2013 college student newspaper article questioned, "Gay or God?" (Sanderson, 2013), and a 2021 *USA Today* headline quoted the Vatican's opposition to same-sex marriage because "God can't bless sin" (Bacon, 2021). Yet, despite this rhetoric, research has connected spirituality with positive outcomes for LGBTQ individuals, such as increased self-esteem, reduced internalized homophobia, and overall satisfaction with life (Lease et al., 2005; Tan, 2005). For many LGBTQ adults, spirituality is a source for coping with homophobia and discrimination, for remaining resilient in oppressive environments, and for finding affirmation of their sexual identity (Brennan-Ing et al., 2013; Goodrich et al., 2016; Halkitis et al., 2009). Religion may also provide these outcomes for LGBTQ individuals, but the two terms – religion and spirituality – are not synonymous.

Spirituality is an expansive construct that may be influenced by religion, but it encompasses a deeply individual experience in the search to make meaning and to establish connections between oneself and others, nature, and/or the sacred (Brady, 2019). By contrast, religion generally represents a communal experience guided by an institutionalized system of beliefs and practices (Brady, 2019; Halkitis et al., 2009). In 2020, 5.3 million LGBT adults

living in the United States (US) identified as religious, which represents 47% of all LGBT adults (Conron et al., 2020). Unfortunately, quantitative data on LGBTQ spirituality are not readily available, but since spirituality is a broader concept that can include religion, it is reasonable to posit that the number of LGBTQ individuals who identify as spiritual is even greater than those who identify as religious. When considering qualitative research, the difference between the two terms is especially pronounced for LGBTQ individuals who describe spirituality as providing strength and hope while many mainstream religions inflict trauma and feelings of abandonment and isolation (Bozard & Sanders, 2011; Love et al., 2005). In addition, much of the literature on LGBTQ individuals and spirituality has narrowly centered on religion and how negative religious experiences lead to increased risk for depression, suicide, internalized homonegativity, and substance misuse (Lytle et al., 2018; Newcomb et al., 2014).

Within higher education research, a similar deficit discourse is portrayed in the study of spirituality and LGBTQ students, which focuses on religious experiences that arrest spiritual development and lead to irreconciliation of sexual and spiritual identities (Dunn et al., 2015; LePeau, 2007; Stratton et al., 2013; Yarhouse et al., 2009). However, a growing body of literature approaches spirituality as a source of strength for LGBTQ students. Scholars developing this strength-based scholarship have found that LGBTQ students' spiritual identity develops alongside their sexual identity, and spirituality provides confidence to come out as non-heterosexual (Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Pryor et al., 2017). Spirituality also helps LGBTQ students find connection to others, nature, and the divine/sacred and to make meaning of their experiences (Birch, 2011; Means et al., 2016).

Further, spirituality serves as a source of strength and resilience for LGBTQ individuals who must navigate campus climates that are often unwelcoming (Love et al., 2005; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2017). Campus climate includes the attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices that signal the degree of commitment to access and inclusion of all individuals (Garvey et al., 2017). LGBTQ students experience negative and oppressive campus climates in a variety of environments, including residence halls, counseling centers, Greek life, and athletics (Pryor et al., 2017). Negative and oppressive campus climates have been shown to reduce LGBTQ student engagement, lead to feelings of detachment from the college learning experience (Renn, 2010), and negatively impact persistence and retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). One study found that one-third of all LGBTQ students have seriously considered leaving college because of sexuality-related incidents on campus (Rankin, et al., 2010). Other studies have found that when LGBTQ students do not feel safe, included, or welcomed by members of their campus, spirituality can provide an important outlet for coping, confidence, and strength (Love et al., 2005; Means et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Despite evidence demonstrating a positive connection between spirituality and navigating negative campus climates, spirituality is not generally included in the factors considered in rankings that assess campus safety and welcome for LGBTQ students. For example, the Campus Pride Index, a leading national nonprofit organization whose main goals are to work to "create a safer college environment for LGBTQ students" and to "develop necessary resources, programs and services to support LGBTQ and ally students" does not consider spirituality in their national rankings (Campus Pride Index, n.d.). The only place where spirituality is a focal point is in their newly established Campus Pride in Faith

Coalition, which includes only faith-based colleges and universities. The Campus Pride Index national rankings are described as a "vital tool for campuses to ultimately shape the educational experience to be more inclusive, welcoming and respectful of LGBTQ and ally people." The Index has over 430 LGBTQ-friendly campuses cataloged on its website (www.campusprideindex.org), and each year they identify 40 of them as the *Best of the Best*. To be a *Best of the Best* campus, an institution must achieve the highest score in benchmarks for LGBTQ-friendly policies, programs, and practices. There are eight factors considered in Campus Pride Index rankings: 1) LGBTQ Policy Inclusion, 2) LGBTQ Support & Institutional Commitment, 3) LGBTQ Academic Life, 4) LGBTQ Student Life, 5) LGBTQ Housing, 6) LGBTQ Campus Safety, 7) LGBTQ Counseling and Health, and 8) LGBTQ Recruitment & Retention Efforts.

The absence of spirituality in the factors considered by the Campus Pride Index does not necessarily mean that LGBTQ-friendly campuses are actually missing resources and supports to foster the spirituality of LGBTQ students. Rather, there is little (if any) research on LGBTQ-friendly campuses and their approaches to fostering LGBTQ spirituality from which to draw a conclusion. This signals a gap in the literature. While extant scholarship shows the positive effects of spirituality for LGBTQ students in negative campus climates, it is unclear what LGBTQ spirituality is like on LGBTQ-friendly campuses and whether and how LGBTQ-friendly campuses meaningfully foster LGBTQ spirituality. If there are no LGBTQ-friendly campuses that meaningfully foster LGBTQ spirituality, then the neglect of LGBTQ spirituality may reveal itself to be even more apparent and widespread. Literature has demonstrated that some LGBTQ students create their own spaces, often in solitude, to

practice their spirituality (Means, 2014; 2017), but others may abandon spirituality completely when there are no resources for support and growth.

Campus leaders need to engage LGBTQ students in conversation to learn how campuses can transform into safe and supportive places that foster LGBTQ spirituality. Understanding the varied and complex ways LGBTQ students practice spirituality and the on-campus spiritual resources LGBTQ students say they need is the first step to improving campus climates across the academy and affirming the importance of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ students. Therefore, the problem this study addressed is the possible disconnect between the centrality of spirituality in the identity and lives of LGBTQ students and the consideration of spirituality in the ways campuses attempt to foster an inclusive and supportive campus environment for LGBTQ students.

Purpose of the Study

The importance of spirituality in the lives and identities of LGBTQ students is sufficiently documented in extant scholarship to encourage campus leaders to consider spiritual support in their efforts to improve campus climate (Birch, 2011; Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005; Means et al., 2016; Pryor et al., 2017), but there is minimal research to gauge whether, where, and how this consideration is being enacted. There is certainly more to learn about how LGBTQ students define and practice spirituality, but the work of improving campus climate and fostering LGBTQ spirituality can – and should – happen alongside research that advances understanding of LGBTQ spirituality. The risk of negative mental health impacts, and ultimately attrition, for LGBTQ students when they do not feel supported and affirmed on campus (Rankin et al., 2019) is too great to delay taking action.

Supporting LGBTQ spirituality is akin to supporting LGBTQ student visibility on campus. LGBTQ students should be able to be their whole selves on campus, including in their expressions of sexual identity and spirituality. A campus that has already demonstrated exceptional commitment to LGBTQ-friendly programs, policies, and practices offers a unique site at which to examine LGBTQ spiritual support. Therefore, the purpose of this single case study was to explore whether and how an institution that is known to support LGBTQ students promotes a campus climate that fosters the spirituality of LGBTQ students. A single case study offered a research design that included multiple data sources to deeply explore a single institution, which was critical to achieving my study's purpose.

For this study, I offer a definition for the term *fostering LGBTQ spirituality* as I specifically considered the literature on LGBTQ spirituality. *Fostering LGBTQ spirituality* is the alignment of campus policies, practices, resources, and LGBTQ student experiences with asset-based understandings of LGBTQ spirituality. In addition, my conceptual framework provided the tool to examine both the structural components (policies, practices, resources) and relational components (how LGBTQ students experience support for spirituality) to tell the story of one campus. It included main indicators for how LGBTQ-friendly a campus is from the Campus Pride Index, along with Hurtado et al.'s (2008) campus climate framework and Winkler et al.'s (2021) understanding of campus spiritual climate. Hurtado et al.'s (2008) framework provided the overarching dimensions of campus climate (structural, behavioral, and psychological), while Winkler et al.'s (2021) research offered a unique way to understand campus spiritual climate in the contexts of being productive, nonproductive, and provocative. The use of productive, nonproductive, and provocative as campus climate descriptors is unique because campus climate is more commonly categorized in a binary way,

such as positive or negative. Collectively, I drew on the Campus Pride Index indicators and the two pieces of scholarship (Hurtado et al., 2008 and Winkler et al., 2021) to identify policies, practices, and resources that had the potential to foster LGBTQ spirituality during my data collection, and then I used them to analyze data to understand how LGBTQ students and staff experience the campus environment related to LGBTQ spirituality. More detail on my conceptual framework is found at the end of Chapter Two.

Research Questions

The case study was guided by two main questions and a series of sub questions:

1. In what ways, if any, does an institution that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promote a campus environment that fosters the spirituality of LGBTQ students?
    a. How do university leaders foster LGBTQ spirituality?
    b. What programs and services are available for LGBTQ students to explore and practice spirituality?
    c. How and where does university messaging promote an environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality?
2. How do LGBTQ students experience the spiritual dimensions of campus climate?
    a. In what places, if any, do LGBTQ students experience institutional support and commitment to fostering their spirituality? (psychological climate)
    b. With whom on campus do LGBTQ students interact to discuss spirituality and/or to engage in spiritual practice(s)? (behavioral climate)

c. What campus programs, if any, do LGBTQ students participate in that relate to spirituality? (behavioral climate)

Significance of the Study: Campus Support for LGBTQ Spirituality Matters, More than Ever

The purpose of this study was to explore whether and how a university that is known to be LGBTQ-friendly supports a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. It reinforced the importance of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ college students, and it provided insight into how one university approached providing resources, programs, and services to nurture LGBTQ spirituality. While the takeaways from this research are discussed in the final chapter, even more critical is *why* this research matters in the United States, especially right now.

The Trevor Project's *2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health* shows troubling trends among LGBTQ youth ages 13 – 24. Of the near 34,000 LGBTQ teens and young adults surveyed, 45% seriously considered suicide in the past year and 73% experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lifetime. In addition, 73% of respondents reported symptoms of anxiety and 58% indicated experiencing symptoms of depression. Further, 60% of LGBTQ youth and young adults who wanted mental health care in the past year were not able to get it, and among the most common reasons why were: fear of discussing their mental health concerns, lack of affordability, and fear of not being taken seriously (The Trevor Project, 2022).

The good news (and thankfully there is good news) is although LGBTQ youth and young adults are up against discrimination and mental health challenges, they are also experiencing moments of joy. Participants in The Trevor Project's 2022 survey indicated that

"going to college" and "faith and spirituality" are two sources of strength and joy (p. 24). These two sources of joy are the primary reason why my dissertation research matters. This research matters because college is a time and place where LGBTQ students find refuge from the fear and uncertainty of what the future holds for people who identify as LGBTQ in the United States. It matters because college offers a place for LGBTQ students to lean into sources of joy, such as faith and spirituality. It matters because now, more than ever, university leaders need to nurture campus environments that foster LGBTQ spirituality. This dissertation tells the story of one university, but the lessons learned and paths toward fostering LGBTQ spirituality can reach colleges and universities across the United States.

Further, this study is important to deepen the understanding of what it means to be an LGBTQ-friendly campus when support for LGBTQ spirituality is considered in a campus assessment. Currently, spiritual support is not a factor in Campus Pride Index rankings, and these rankings are a popular and reputable source for evaluating LGBTQ-friendliness. This study is the first of its kind to examine whether and how an institution known for supporting LGBTQ students fosters a safe and affirming spiritual environment. The lived experiences of LGBTQ students, alongside discussions with campus staff and an evaluation of campus messaging, revealed a holistic picture of whether and how the campus supports LGBTQ spirituality. My findings show that even a university that is welcoming for staff and students who identify as LGBTQ can miss the mark in fostering a supportive spiritual environment.

Spirituality has been shown to be an important aspect of personal identity among LGBTQ students, as well as a source of motivation and support (Love et al., 2005; Means et al., 2016), yet its consideration in creating a safe and affirming campus environment appears to be overlooked. For example, the university at the center of this study does not generally

welcome conversations about spirituality, and topics of faith, religion, and spirituality are avoided and stigmatized because of a highly secular culture. Yet, the student participants in this research call on their spirituality for connection, calm, and reassurance.

From a practical perspective, this study provides a methodological template to examine support for LGBTQ spirituality at other campuses, with a focus on centering the specific ways LGBTQ students say their campus can foster their spirituality. It also reaches beyond campus administrators to faculty, student affairs professionals, and to organizations that are adjacent to higher education institutions, such as the Campus Pride Index. With a spotlight on the importance of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ students, the Campus Pride Index may be especially interested in expanding its LGBTQ-friendliness criteria to explore whether and how campuses foster LGBTQ spirituality. Further, leaders across organizations will benefit from collaborative opportunities to affirm commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality.

From a research perspective, this study advances knowledge of the ways LGBTQ students define and practice spirituality, and whether LGBTQ students feel affirmed in their spiritual identity(ies) on campus. In this study, students turned to their spirituality for connection with others and with nature, for prayer, and for contemplation. In addition, representation of faculty and staff who hold LGBTQ and spirituality identities proved to be foundational in helping LGBTQ students see how their multiple identities can coexist and thrive on a college campus. LGBTQ spirituality is dynamic, complex, and deeply personal. As such, the more LGBTQ student stories (and counterstories) research can amplify, the greater understanding campus leaders will have to foster LGBTQ spirituality.

Organization of the Dissertation

The subsequent chapters of this dissertation are organized as follows: In Chapter Two, I discuss background literature on the concepts of religion and spirituality, the meanings and manifestations of LGBTQ spirituality, and research on the campus climate for LGBTQ spirituality. The chapter concludes with a description of my conceptual framework. Chapter Three details the case study methodology I used for my research, including data collection and data analysis procedures. It also includes practices to support trustworthiness. Chapter Four illustrates three main themes that emerged from my data analysis: 1) Pockets of Support, 2) Closeted Spirituality, and 3) Blind Spots. Finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss how my findings helped answer my research questions, I highlight three lessons to be learned from my research, and I propose possibilities for future empirical study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into three areas. In the first literature area, I unpack spirituality and religion as distinct concepts with unique meanings and manifestations. Then, I describe the ways LGBTQ individuals define and experience spirituality. Research discussed in this section includes studies focused on LGBTQ students as well as research on LGBTQ individuals in the broader US population.

The second section of the literature review begins with a discussion of foundational theories of LGBTQ identity development (most of which fail to consider spirituality as an influence in developing sexual identity) and then I narrow the focus on LGBTQ students. In particular, I consider how LGBTQ and spiritual identities intersect for LGBTQ students in relation to their identity development as both non-heterosexual and spiritual people.

The third and final section addresses experiences with the campus climate for LGBTQ students and the ways spirituality can be a source of strength to persist amid unwelcoming campus environments. On-campus support and resources for LGBTQ spiritual development are absent from many campuses beyond providing a list of off-campus houses of worship. As such, LGBTQ students create their own spaces, often alone, to explore and develop their spirituality (Rockenbach et al., 2016).

Collectively, the literature review builds the case for why LGBTQ spirituality needs more attention on university campuses, in rankings that examine campus LGBTQ-

friendliness, and in future research. The literature discussed illustrates ways LGBTQ students make meaning of the terms, "religion" and "spirituality," and how spirituality (more broadly) is important in LGBTQ identity development. Critically, despite the centrality of spirituality in the identity development and experiences of LGBTQ students, little is known about whether and how campuses can (or perhaps already do) foster the spirituality of LGBTQ students. Thus, the literature review circles back to the research questions, which remain largely unanswered in extant scholarship.

Meanings and Manifestations of Religion and Spirituality

Defining and Differentiating Spirituality from Religion

Prior to discussing how LGBTQ people describe and experience spirituality, I start this literature area with general definitions of spirituality and religion, as it is important to understand the various ways those terms have been described in the broader literature. The terms spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably in public discourse (such as news headlines and media stories), but while they are not complete opposites, they are also not the same. Religion tends to be an easier concept to capture as it encompasses "a personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, beliefs, and practices" (Brady, 2019, p. 2). Generally, people who identify as religious focus on devotion, piousness, organizational membership, doctrinal acceptance, lifestyle, and rituals (Holdcroft, 2006; Sedikides, 2010). They regularly attend worship services that focus on reverence for a god or deity, and they participate in social and service activities with their religious community (Adeyemo & Adeleye, 2008). Despite these descriptors and behaviors, defining religiosity and/or religiousness is tenuous (i.e., how much devotion and piousness are required for one to be considered religious?). However, scholars of religiosity/religiousness generally agree that

there is a combination of some or all of these concepts in what it means to be religious, and most especially, the alignment with a particular belief system and/or doctrine.

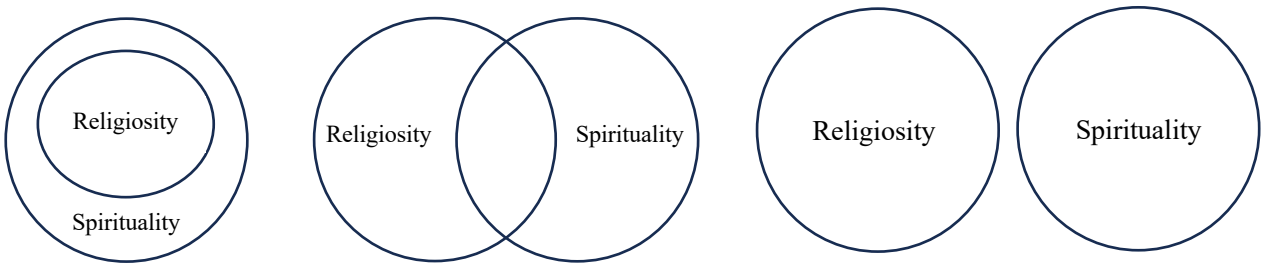
By contrast, spirituality may not – and often does not – involve adherence to a doctrine or organizational membership. Instead, spirituality tends to be an inward-focused concept that centers meaning-making, connectedness, and believing that there is sacred in everyday life (Brady, 2019). It also aligns with the words of 17th-century Zen Master Matsuo Bashō: "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise; seek what they sought." To be sure, some people find spirituality in religion while others find it in "a life lived with consciousness, attentiveness, alertness, and awareness" (Hindman, 2002, p. 168). Spirituality is often relational and includes seeking connection to oneself, others, nature, and the sacred (Brady, 2019). It may integrate elements of religion, or it may be entirely different.

Jastrzębski (2022) offers a helpful visual to capture different depictions of religiosity and spirituality (Figure 1). In these depictions, religion/religiosity can be seen as a subcategory of spirituality (the first set of circles), or religiosity and spirituality can share some similarities while also carrying unique traits (the second set of overlapping circles). In the second understanding of how spirituality and religion are related, the common characteristic is the search for something sacred (Jastrzębski, 2022). Then, in the third set of separate circles, religion and spirituality can be described as independent concepts. The author explains:

> When conceptualized distinctively, spirituality is viewed as a characteristic of a person, similarly to a personality trait, and is related to one's personal relationships to larger, transcendent realities. Religiosity is related more to the beliefs, rituals, and practices within an institutional context, a community or social organization. (p. 121)

Figure 1

Depictions of Religiosity and Spirituality



Note. This image was recreated from "The challenging task of defining spirituality," by A. Jastrzębski, 2022, *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health,* 24(2), p. 120.

Spirituality can embody secular concepts of humanism, existentialism, and esoteric views that deviate from any sort of belief in a deity or sacred being. For many LGBTQ individuals, experiences with religion have resulted in harm, abandonment, and disapproval of their non-heterosexual identity (e.g., the news headline presented earlier that describes same-sex marriage as a sin). As such, the term used in most of the strength-based literature on LGBTQ individuals, both within and outside of higher education, is the more expansive, journey-seeking, meaning-making term of spirituality. Thus, spirituality is the term used throughout this dissertation to capture LGBTQ experiences that include organized religion as well as those that do not.

In the discussion to follow, the voices of LGBTQ individuals are centered to describe their interpretations of and experiences with spirituality. Some experiences align with religion, but many of them diverge from it. The discussion begins with a synthesis of the research on LGBTQ spirituality beyond the field of higher education, where the literature is most abundant. Then, I focus on LGBTQ students and their definitions and experiences with spirituality.

LGBTQ Individuals' Definitions of and Experiences with Spirituality

Beyond Higher Education. LGBTQ people describe spirituality in a variety of ways, and they generally emphasize the importance of connection, reflection, and purpose in their spiritual practice. The research reviewed in this section includes evidence of these concepts in addition to other aspects of LGBTQ spirituality.

Halkitis et al. (2009) described "the meanings and manifestations of religion and spirituality" among LGBT adults in their influential research (p. 250). Their mixed-methods study was conducted at an annual Pride event in a Northeastern US city and included 498 racially diverse participants. The majority of participants were raised as Christian (74.7%), 9.8% were raised as Jewish, 2.4% were raised in an Eastern religion, and 8.6% were raised Atheist or Agnostic. At the time of the study, participants identified themselves as significantly more spiritual than religious, and this held true regardless of sexual orientation, gender, or race/ethnicity. Participants defined spirituality using phrases like "a belief in a divine," "being accepting of oneself," "interconnectedness of all life," and "knowing one's purpose" (p. 255). Spirituality was a source for coping and resiliency, a form of wisdom and insight, and a guide for making meaning and finding purpose. Religion, on the other hand, was associated with "organized or structured worship," "a man-made cultural institution," and "an agent of divisiveness" (p. 255). These phrases provide a rationale for why the majority of participants moved away from their childhood religion to embrace a spiritual identity instead. For many participants, religion was a negative influence in their lives.

Goodrich et al. (2016) presented similar findings in their consensual qualitative research (CQR), which was conducted in a counseling setting. In total, 12 white LGB individuals participated in their study; three people identified as spiritual and not aligned

with a specific religion while nine identified as Christian. All 12 individuals received counseling that addressed religious or spiritual questions or concerns. Half of the participants (n = 6) indicated that upon accepting their sexual identity, they moved away from their childhood religion to establish a new spiritual identity. For two participants, this new spirituality aligned with an agnostic belief system, while another participant experienced the loss of her Catholic faith in her ongoing journey to find an affirming, welcoming, and fulfilling spiritual identity. Spiritual beliefs were described using phrases like "God's love for everyone" and "God's gift of sexuality" (p. 799). All but one of the participants was able to articulate a personal spiritual identity upon completion of the counseling sessions.

A third study comes from Brennan-Ing et al. (2013) and demonstrates that some LGBTQ individuals find spirituality in a religious setting while others find it elsewhere. Their qualitative survey research captured the religious and spiritual experiences of 210 LGBT adults, all of whom were at least 50 years old and lived in the Chicago, IL area. The focus on older adults offers a unique perspective compared to other research that includes mostly younger adults, and it also exemplifies the lifelong journey of spirituality and spiritual identity for LGBTQ individuals. Many of the study's participants experienced homophobia in religious communities and/or were rejected by their congregation. As a result, participants adapted their spiritual journey. Some individuals found a Christian denomination or an entirely new religion, such as moving from Catholicism to Buddhism. In fact, Catholicism was the religion mentioned most frequently when participants spoke about the religion from which they moved away. In addition, the current religious affiliation identified by some of the participants provided spiritual support through retreats and monthly spiritual groups. As one woman reflected, "My church has provided a place for me to experience the richness of

spiritual life and showed me that being in a community of believers can be rewarding" (p. 85). Not all participants found another religious community after experiencing homophobia and abandonment from their previous religious affiliation. Instead, their spirituality manifested in a new "personal belief system" that embodied "an all loving and all-inclusive God to whom sexuality was not an issue" (p. 83). One participant remarked, "My support comes from within my spirit in oneness with his spirit" and another stated, "I am very spiritual now and consider myself closer to Goddess than ever before" (p. 83).

Numerous other studies published over the last 15 years present findings that echo sentiments of spirituality being connected to one's spirit and the ways spirituality provides strength and support in the homophobic environments LGBTQ individuals encounter within religious contexts and in general society (Gandy et al., 2021; Lease et al., 2005; McCann, 2020; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Tan, 2005). For example, in his quantitative survey study of the spiritual well-being of 93 gay and lesbian adults, Tan (2005) found that participants experienced "spiritual nourishment" (p. 142) regardless of whether they found spirituality in religious participation. Spiritual nourishment feeds self-esteem, authenticity, and openness, and for some individuals, it is found in a religious community, while for others, it is in "'existential well-being' (EWB), or the sense of life purpose and satisfaction, without religious reference" (p.137). Relatedly, Gandy et al.'s (2021) qualitative study of 30 LGBTQ Christian adults identified "healing authenticity" (p.103) as one of three main areas in which LGBTQ individuals had positive experiences in a faith community. Similar to spiritual nourishment, healing authenticity means that participants found a space where they could be open as their whole selves. The other two areas, "joy of inclusion" (p. 103) and "community"

(p. 105) uplift the importance of affirmation of multiple identities (i.e., race, LGBTQ, theology, spirituality) and the power of connection and relationships.

Lastly, the research of Rosenkrantz et al. (2016) offers a powerful testimony to the positive aspects of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ individuals. The study was conducted by researchers at a large public university in the United States, but the online survey format enabled the international recruitment of participants. In total, 314 LGBTQ adults completed the survey, representing 37 US states and 17 different countries. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses revealed five themes to describe positive aspects of being a spiritual/religious LGBTQ individual: (a) love and acceptance; (b) deeper meaning and purpose; (c) empathy, openness, and compassionate action; (d) positive relationships; and (e) spiritual strength. Each of these themes was exemplified using rich, powerful quotes from participants, but perhaps none more succinctly captures the essence of the topic of this study than this statement from a Black lesbian woman:

> Having a spiritual side to my life only enhances my ability to move through this world as a lesbian. It is through this faith that I was able to come out in the first place. So for me, it is a cornerstone of my very existence as a human being on this earth. (p. 133)

As evidenced by this discussion of LGBTQ individuals' definitions of and experiences with spirituality, each person's story is unique and there is not a single narrative to explain how LGBTQ individuals define and experience spirituality. A common theme, however, is that the negative discourse that positions LGBTQ identity and spirituality as mutually exclusive is simply not true. LGBTQ individuals are deeply spiritual and some LGBTQ people experience spirituality within a religious context while many others do not.

LGBTQ Students. Within higher education research, the literature on LGBTQ student spirituality includes a variety of personal experiences with spirituality, but too often it takes a deficit approach to focus only on the ways religion has caused trauma and identity struggles (Pryor et al., 2017). A more limited body of research offers counternarratives to this discourse to emphasize the ways spirituality is described as a positive influence in the lives of LGBTQ students, and those studies are highlighted in this section.

Love et al. (2005) contributed a widely-cited study on the spiritual experiences of seven lesbian and five gay college students at two Midwestern public universities and concluded that spirituality is dynamic and complex. For some participants, spirituality is distinct from religion, as one student described:

> Spirituality is almost an inner peace with yourself ... a general belief in a force that's stronger than you, just some force that's stronger than a human hand and believing in that with your heart and soul, and finding your own answers...Religion tells you that this is what it is and you just blindly accept what people say. (p. 200)

Other participants used phrases like "helping others grow" and a "higher power" to describe spirituality (pp. 200-201). Further, while some participants had viewed religion and spirituality as synonymous earlier in their lives, many also now viewed them as different. This differentiation occurred as part of spiritual development and in reconciling religious teachings with acceptance of their LGB identity. For many participants, spirituality was a positive influence and an integral part of their identity, which counters other research that ignores this possibility.

Evidence of LGBTQ spirituality is found in the research of Birch (2011) and

McGrady (2011) too. In his qualitative, interview-based exploration of spirituality among eight LGB undergraduate students at a mid-sized comprehensive institution in the Midwest, Birch (2011) asked participants how they would describe or define spirituality. Some students spoke about a relationship with God, while others connected spirituality to positive energy in the universe. For example, one student explained, "I believe in God. And I pray," while another reflected, "I believe in the universe, and I believe in positive energy. I believe that good things come to people who do good things…I believe in me" (p. 55). Most students also believed that spirituality is a separate concept from religion. One student referred to religion as "the political part of the spirit," describing how he thinks that most people believe in a higher power and a "sense of rules or laws" (p. 56). He went on to say that most people will then choose a religion that aligns closest with what they believe (akin to choosing a political affiliation). This portrayal is similar to other descriptions of religion and reflects the more rigid, doctrine-based characteristics of religion compared to the expansive, meaning-making views of spirituality. Another participant captured this differentiation: "Religion is a set standard. It's something that's codified, but spirituality does not have to be codified – it's just broad. It's as broad as you can make it" (p. 56). For this student, spirituality was a "constant search for enlightenment and growth and direction" (p. 56).

A common theme in the descriptions of spirituality among participants in Birch's (2011) research was the belief in humanity and in being a good person, which manifests through connection and relationships. McGrady (2011) discussed a similar theme in her mixed methods survey research of a predominantly white group of LGB college students from six midwestern colleges and universities. Specifically, study participants conceptualized spirituality as a path for connecting with others and with nature, as well as developing self-

awareness and self-exploration. When asked, "What does the word 'spirituality' mean to you?" (p. 81), participants generally emphasized concepts of connectedness and awareness. For example, one participant described, "Spirituality is feeling connected to something bigger than yourself – can be nature, humanity, anything beyond yourself" (p. 81). Conversely, when asked about religion, participant responses generally referenced rituals and practices, an organization, and "specific adherence to a certain set of principles and traditions set by other individuals over time" (p. 82). The word "religion" tended to elicit negative responses and feelings of oppression, and one student even referred to religion as "organized oppression" (p. 82).

While the research previously discussed (Birch, 2011; Love et al., 2005; McGrady, 2011) provides examples of how LGBTQ students define and experience spirituality, it is important to note that most of the studies' participants were white. As such, the complex and nuanced spiritual experiences of LGBTQ individuals who also identify as People of Color are difficult to ascertain, and they are nearly absent from the already small body of literature. Nonetheless, one study by Means et al. (2016) offers insight into how Black LGBTQ students define and practice spirituality. Their qualitative case study included four Black students at a predominantly white institution in the southern US and asked, "How do Black LGBTQ undergraduate and graduate students define spirituality?" Of the four participants, three were graduate students and one was an undergraduate. Three themes emerged in the ways Black students defined spirituality: a) internal congruence, b) a relationship with a higher power or spirit, or c) connectedness with other people. One student explained that "spirituality is finding that place within myself most times where I feel comfortable and where I can reflect on who and what I want," while another noted, "me and my connection

with God is how I would define my spirituality" (p. 620). Students also emphasized self-care and nourishment, which is different than reflections from white LGBTQ students in other research that asked similar questions. Black students may consider their race and racism in combination with their LGBTQ identity to describe spirituality and spiritual experiences. Subsequently, self-care may be important for Black LGBTQ students to practice their spirituality amidst oppressive religious, heteronormative, and racialized environments. White LGBTQ students do not indicate that their race is a contributing factor to their definitions and experiences with spirituality in the ways that Black students do. Certainly, the experiences of Black and other LGBTQ Students of Color warrant further exploration to better understand how intersecting identities contribute to making meaning of spirituality.

To summarize, spirituality and religion carry different meanings for LGBTQ individuals and the term "spirituality" is a concept with which more LGBTQ people identify. This is true for LGBTQ individuals in general and among LGBTQ college students specifically (Birch, 2011; Love et al., 2005; McGrady, 2011). Further, LGBTQ students not only relate more to the term spirituality compared to religion; they also claim spirituality is an important part of their identity (Love et al., 2005). Yet, the way spirituality intersects with other identities is not the same for all LGBTQ students. For example, Black LGBTQ students indicate that their race contributes to their spiritual identity and their spiritual practices (Means et al., 2016), while white students do not generally discuss their race alongside their other identities. As such, race, spirituality, and LGBTQ identity intersect in different and unique ways for students.

The importance of intersecting identities is the next area of literature to be reviewed. Beyond understanding the words and phrases LGBTQ individuals use to ascribe meaning to

spirituality, it is critical to interrogate the ways identities intersect in LGBTQ and spiritual identity development. These intersections begin to frame the spiritual needs of LGBTQ students, which campus leaders can use to foster healthy spiritual environments for LGBTQ students.

LGBTQ Identity(ies)/Identity Development and Intersections with Spiritual Identity(ies)

The second section of the literature review provides a brief historical overview of LGBTQ identity development theories, as well as the ways spirituality intersects with sexual identity. After providing a foundational backdrop of LGBTQ identity development theories, I delve into the complexities and nuances of identity intersections. Notably, the vast majority of LGBTQ identity development theories do not consider the influence of spirituality, although, for many students, spirituality is important in their sexual identity development. As discussed previously, spirituality is not mutually exclusive from LGBTQ identity, nor is it solely a source of harm and negativity in the lives of LGBTQ college students. The literature reviewed provides evidence for the alternative view that describes spirituality as an asset and source of strength for LGBTQ students.

Theories and Models of LGBTQ Sexuality Identity Development

Over the last forty years, scholars have theorized LGBTQ sexuality identity development in a variety of ways, mostly without recognizing the role of spirituality in that developmental process. In its earlier years, spanning the early 1980s to mid-1990s, LGB identity development models described different stages, and progression through stages was assumed to be linear (Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1982; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Snow, 2015). For example, Cass (1984) described six stages of identity formation while McCarn and

Fassinger (1996) posited that LGB identity development happens in four stages. A third linear stage model comes from Coleman (1982) and focuses on the coming-out process. Notably, all of these models suggest that identity development is progressive with movement occurring through stages in only one direction. The assumption that sexual identity development fits neatly into progressive stages is problematic because sexual orientation unfolds in different ways for different people. Not everyone will progress through specific stages, and some people will move back and forth between stages, too. These models also fail to consider the full range of sexual identities (beyond the straight/gay/bisexual trichotomy) and other influences on identity development, such as spirituality.

Alternatives to stage/progression models of LGB identity development appeared in the works of D'Augelli (1994), Savin-Williams (1998), and Rhoads (1997b), all of which allow for organic and fluid movement of sexual orientation identity development and the coming-out process. These models improve upon linear models because they acknowledge non-heterosexual identity development as a fluid and complex process that does not always align with specific stages. D'Augelli's (1994) model of LGB development is still widely cited today for its recognition that identity is a social construction and that "images of identity are transient and malleable" (p. 312). She moved beyond using stages in her description of non-heterosexual identity development and instead noted six different *identity processes*, which are independent of each other and not sequential.

Savin-Williams (1998) introduced the argument to study sexual orientation specifically among college students, and he pointed out flaws in previous research that did not include ethnicity, religious affiliation, or gender as contributors to LGB identity development. Rhoads (1997b) also believed that sexual orientation development varies based

on race, ethnicity, and bisexuality. Instead of stages, Rhoads (1997b) proposed *webs of connection* and *points of tension* in his model, which contrast with rigid stage-based models. Rhoads' (1997b) research, however, focused only on cisgender[1] college men, so its applicability to ciswomen, transgender folks, or those who are queer or questioning is unknown. Most recently, LGBTQ identity development has been conceptualized by combining pieces of one or more of the earlier models previously discussed while also accounting for a wider range of sexual and gender identities and experiences (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; King & Biro, 2006). While this approach advanced understanding, it still failed to consider spirituality as a factor in identity development.

In 2009, Eliason proposed a four-quadrant AQAL model of LGBT identity development. AQAL stands for *All Quadrants, All Levels* and considers four perspectives in every situation, including the inside and outside of the individual and the collective. The top left quadrant considers the interior of the individual (e.g., values, beliefs, ethics, worldview), and the top right is the individual as seen from outside (e.g., behaviors, actions, skills). The bottom left includes cultural influences (e.g., collective values, paradigms, and worldviews), and the bottom right is the social environment (e.g., social structures, policies, systems). Each quadrant contains characteristics that do or do not affirm LGBT identity, and this is the only model to specifically include spirituality as a factor in LGBT identity development. Eliason (2009) included spiritual development/experiences as an affirming characteristic in the interior (individual) top left quadrant (see Figure 2). She explained:

The concept of spiritual development might be particularly useful in understanding

[1] Cisgender refers to the alignment of gender identity with the sex assigned at birth.

> LGBT identity formation, as many studies have noted that "coming out" is associated with feelings of greater authenticity, meaning and purpose in life, and a higher quality of life. (p. 80)

Further, she defined spirituality as "a set of qualities that can be experienced at any level or stage of development; qualities like compassion, love, unity, integrity, and kindness" (p. 80).

Few studies on LGBTQ student spirituality explicitly make the connection back to Eliason's (2009) work, but there is evidence to support her view that spiritual development/experiences have a positive impact on LGBTQ identity development, especially in the coming-out process (Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005). However, although this model proposed a more comprehensive view of identity development, it still does not include the full range of sexual orientations found in extant literature.

Figure 2

Four Quadrant Model of the Origins of LGBT Identification

Interior (Individual)	**Exterior (Individual)**
LGBT-nonaffirming: • Immorality • "Weak-willed" • Fixation of development (e.g., Freud) **LGBT-affirming:** • Stage models of identity formation • Lines and levels of development • Internalized oppression (shame, guilt)[a] • Spiritual development/experience	**LGBT-affirming or non-affirming:**[b] • A "gay" gene • Hormone differences • Brain differences • Somatic differences (e.g., body types) • Evolutionary trait (sociobiology)
Interior (Collective)	**Exterior (Collective)**
LGBT-nonaffirming: • Role of family: dysfunctional families, poor parenting role models (distant father, overprotective mother) • "Seduction" (perceived influence of gay culture as sexual predators) **LGBT-affirming or neutral:** • Diverse cultural view of sex and gender • Cultural script theories • Role of support from family, community, local religions • Role of LGBT communities	**LGBT-nonaffirming:** • Religious dogma (e.g., Papal directives) • Gendering of language • Hierarchies of power • Laws that prohibit same-sex behavior or relationship • Media that supports stereotypes • Educational systems (e.g., abstinence only sex education) **LGBT-affirming or neutral:** • Political rhetoric about human rights • Political organizing • Inclusive laws, media, education

Notes. [a]As described by Eliason (2009): "These negative emotions and mental health problems are major obstacles to higher human growth and development, and can hinder

efforts toward transpersonal development, unless people learn to turn their suffering into motivation for transformative change" (p. 82). [b]From Eliason (2009): "These five biological influences have the potential to be interpreted as LGBT-affirming if they are viewed as normal variations of human behavior, or as LGBT-nonaffirming if they are interpreted as disease or disorder" (p. 78).

The variety of LGBTQ identity development theories and frameworks presented in this section demonstrates the evolution and complexity of understanding sexual identity development. A significant consideration is missing from most of these theories, however: How do spiritual identities and experiences influence LGBTQ identity development? In the next section, I explore how spirituality interacts/intersects with the sexual identity of LGBTQ college students, which reveals the positive aspects of spirituality for LGBTQ students and disrupts the discourse that attempts to portray spirituality as incompatible with LGBTQ identities. The discussion of literature also demonstrates nuances in the interaction of spirituality and sexual identity when other social identities, such as race, are considered too.

Intersections of Identities and Identity Development for LGBTQ College Students

As demonstrated in the previous section, LGBTQ sexual identity development is not progressively linear, nor does it occur in isolation from other social and spiritual identities. As such, scholars have researched a variety of identity intersections, such as sexual orientation and spirituality (Gold & Stewart, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Love, et al., 2005; Snow, 2015) and race, religion, and LGBTQ identity (McGuire et al., 2017; Means, 2014; Means & Jaeger, 2016). These different intersections display a snapshot of the varied, complex, and greatly personal spiritual journeys of LGBTQ college students, and collectively they elicit a few common themes. The first of these themes recounts the coming-out process for LGBTQ

college students in the contexts of both sexuality and spirituality. The second theme relates to how experiences with organized religion contribute to or arrest LGBTQ student spiritual development. The last theme highlights how LGBTQ students use spirituality as a source of strength. Importantly, racial identity also contributes to more nuanced differences in the interaction of sexual and spiritual identities, and these differences are woven into the discussion.

Coming Out: Sexual Orientation and Spirituality. The coming-out process is frequently discussed in research that focuses on intersections of LGBTQ identity and spirituality and it includes coming out as LGBTQ as well as coming out as spiritual. Recalling the common discourse that posits a mutual exclusivity of LGBTQ identity and spiritual identity, it is not surprising that LGBTQ college students find themselves in a position where they need to come out as both LGBTQ and spiritual. In addition, scholars contend that coming out as LGBTQ may actually be a catalyst for exploring spirituality and spiritual identity (Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005).

In Love et al.'s (2005) influential research, all of the participants were white and considered themselves to be out (in the context of sexuality) on their campus. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews explored participants' experiences with spirituality and the challenges they faced related to the intersections of their LGB and spiritual identities. Study participants emphasized being out as both gay/lesbian as well as being out as a spiritual person. For example, outwardly expressing both spiritual and sexual identities was a way for one student to help others expand their thinking about the supposed dichotomous relationship between sexual orientation and spirituality. He reflected that "it really challenges other people, when they come to realize that I am both gay and spiritually-focused" (p. 201).

Another student emphasized the value of openness in embracing multiple aspects of identity. In particular, she believed that "people who are on more of an open spiritual journey tend to be on a more open sexual journey as well" (p. 201).

Further, Love et al. (2005) explained how the process of coming out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual can be a motivator for exploring spiritual identity:

> In some cases, the coming out process serves as a significant stimulus for spiritual development... The stimulus for spiritual growth may be due to the conflict inherent between religious teaching, [students'] emerging awareness of their sexual orientation, and the dissonance that this awareness generates. (p. 206)

In the 15+ years since Love et al. (2005) published their research, scholars have continued to connect the coming-out process to LGBTQ spirituality. For example, Gold and Stewart (2011) asked, "How do LGB undergraduate students anchor themselves in a sense of spirituality during the coming-out process?" (p. 243). The 47 students who participated in their qualitative survey-based study were overwhelmingly white or Caucasian (95.8%), and all self-identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The intersections of sexual identity and spiritual identity were described using five different statuses/positions: 1) irreconciliation, 2) progressive development, 3) arrested development, 4) completed development, and 5) reconciliation. These statuses illustrate a variety of student experiences, such as a complete disconnect between spiritual identity and sexual identity (irreconciliation), compared with a "harmonious restoration of spiritual identity and sexual identity" (reconciliation) (p. 251). All five statuses represent intersections of spirituality and sexual orientation, but they range from experiences of conflict and oppression to experiences of strength and support. Given the wide range of experiences and statuses of the study's participants, the authors stated, "[I]t is clear

that various levels of reconciliation, growth, and development are foundational to understanding spiritual and sexual identities simultaneously" (p. 251).

In addition to degrees of spiritual reconciliation and growth in the outward expression of LGBTQ and spiritual identities of college students, race is also an important identity to be considered in the spiritual and sexual coming-out process. An emerging body of literature on LGBTQ student spirituality, led by Darris Means, highlights important differences in the spiritual journeys of Black LGBTQ students compared to their white counterparts, especially in the context of being out on a predominantly white campus. For example, Means et al.'s (2018) research focused on Black LGB students' experiences with developing and practicing spirituality at a large, public, predominantly white university in the Southern US. Data were collected through student and staff interviews, an interview with a local pastor, as well as field observations, and document analysis. One of the main findings was the challenge experienced by Black LGB students in finding spaces on campus where they could be their whole selves – LGB, spiritual, and Black. One participant, who self-identified as Christian, gay, and Black did not find a space where they could be affirmed in all three identities. Particularly, religious spaces that displayed the rainbow flag to indicate they were welcoming to LGBTQ students were largely white-centered and unwelcoming for a Black gay student. As such, finding community and a sense of belonging in a predominantly white LGBTQ campus community can be challenging and uncomfortable for many Black LGBTQ students. As a result, Black students may be more alone in the sexual and spiritual coming-out process than their white peers who can engage in this process in community with others.

In another study conducted by Means (2014), the focus was on the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men at predominantly white institutions. Means (2014) encountered

similar experiences to the stories told by the participants in the previously discussed Means et al. (2018) study. One participant explained how it was difficult to be out and affirmed:

> There was only me and one other person who was Black in the LGBT group and everything. And I didn't say anything, but it really felt uncomfortable. I was uncomfortable because I didn't know any other African American LGBT people that went to the group. It was just me and him. (p. 176)

This same student experienced homophobic and racist slurs on campus by white men students. So, like many of his Black gay peers, he found comfort and peace in time alone, during which he could connect with his spirituality. The on-campus isolation experienced by Black spiritual LGBTQ students appears to present an added layer of challenge and a significant obstacle to overcome in coming out as LGBTQ and spiritual. White LGBTQ students do not generally experience marginalization because of their race, signaling that white students may have fewer points of resistance in their journey to be out on campus as their full spiritual and LGBTQ selves. Black LGBTQ students may experience oppression because of both race and sexual/gender identity in ways that their white peers do not. Campus leaders need to acknowledge these racialized differences and understand their implications for improving campus climate for LGBTQ Students of Color.

Linking Experiences with Organized Religion to LGBTQ Spiritual Development. A second prominent theme identified across the literature on LGBTQ spiritual identity intersections is the role that organized religion plays in helping or hindering spiritual development/identity. For many LGBTQ individuals, organized religion has been a source of trauma and harm in their lives (Bozard & Sanders, 2011; Love et al., 2005), yet it still may inform whether and how they choose to integrate spirituality into their identity. As a

reminder, some LGBTQ individuals may describe their spirituality as aligned with a specific religion, but often spirituality is a distinct concept for LGBTQ individuals and it is completely separate from religion. The literature discussed in this section captures both experiences.

Commonly, LGBTQ students recall childhood experiences with organized religion to make meaning of their current spirituality. Sometimes these childhood experiences align with an affirming faith community and signal a close connection between religion and spirituality, while other students describe the ways their spirituality evolved in contrast to their experiences with religion. Love et al. (2005) noted that nearly all of their research findings were linked to students' relationships and past experiences with religion. For example, one student realized both their spirituality and their sexuality at church. By contrast, another student described spirituality as completely separate from religion.

In another study, Johnson (2013) researched the relationship between spirituality and sexual identity among lesbian and gay undergraduate students. She interviewed 24 self-identified lesbian and gay (10 lesbian and 14 gay) undergraduate students to better understand whether spirituality influenced their sexual identity development. The author found that spirituality was an "evolving experience" (p. 129) and that students described their spirituality as something that changed as they learned more about themselves. When students spoke about spirituality, they generally did so in two ways: first, they recalled religious beliefs from their childhood that created personal conflict and contradictions with their LG identity, and then they described spirituality as something they worked to define as young adults. For most of the students, college provided a time and place where they could reflect on childhood religious experiences and explore what spirituality meant for them, separate

from a specific religion. Johnson (2013) also linked students' evolving spirituality to their sexual identity:

> By allowing their spirituality to change and evolve, participants were also able to give reflective space for the emergence of, and transformation of, their sexual identities. The same language of "authenticity" and "wholeness" the participants used to describe their personal relationship to spirituality also accompanied the descriptions of their own sexual identities. (p. 144)

In addition to the research on LGBTQ students currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate institution, Snow (2015) conducted a two-phase mixed methods study of 10 former LGBTQ college students to explore how sexual orientation influenced their spiritual development during college. This study offered a retrospective view on the experiences of LGBTQ students, post-college. Similar to the research of Johnson (2013), Snow (2015) found that participants spoke about a spiritual struggle related to religious teachings and doctrine. However, Snow (2015) also posited that a spiritual struggle may be important for strengthening sexual orientation and spiritual development instead of leading to irreconciliation or spiritual arrest. This was exemplified in the experiences of one student who grew up in a conservative Christian faith that rejected his non-heterosexuality. He suffered from anxiety, panic attacks, and self-harm as this conservative belief system invaded his well-being. Instead of disowning the possibility of acceptance and alternative spirituality, he navigated the teachings of his childhood to emerge more confident in his sexual identity and more open to redefining what spirituality meant for him.

For this student, spirituality ultimately emerged as a source of strength and affirmation of his LGBTQ identity. Like many other LGBTQ college students, spirituality

can provide strength for rejecting harmful childhood religious teachings, persevering amidst oppression, and navigating unwelcoming campus environments. The ways spirituality is a source of strength for LGBTQ students is the third and final theme in this second literature review area.

Spirituality as Strength. Love et al. (2005) found that spirituality can be a source of strength for lesbian and gay students in their sexual identity development and in overcoming oppression related to their sexuality. This sentiment is exemplified by one of the participants' responses, as she spoke about oppression: "a lot of times, my spirituality is the only thing I have; it is my source of strength" (p. 200). Another participant spoke about the strength of their spiritual identity in practicing and growing their individual spirituality and for providing clarity of their identity(ies).

In 2011, McGrady noted similar connections in the ways students found strength in spirituality. Her quantitative, survey-based research explored the dimensions of spirituality in Caucasian LGB college students and she found that LGB students use spiritual experiences as a source of strength in self-discovery and identity development. Interestingly, the notion of doctrinal teachings was not connected with strength, and doctrinal teachings may be most associated with organized religion. The author posited that while doctrine may be helpful for increasing self-awareness, it may limit the meaning-making process of self-discovery for LGB students. Instead, sources of strength were related more to spiritual practices of self-awareness, connection, and understanding.

The research of Love et al. (2005) and McGrady (2011) included exclusively white participants. When research on Black LGBTQ college student spirituality is examined, spirituality continues to emerge as a source of strength, but in ways that are different than for

white LGBTQ students. For example, Means' (2014) case study dissertation titled, *Demonized no more: The spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at predominantly white institutions*, uncovered the ways nine Black gay man college students used spirituality to resist oppression, racism, and homophobia. They did this by creating spiritual counterspaces, such as time alone to pray and connect with their spirituality. Some students described time in nature, practicing music, or sitting beneath the night sky as spiritual counterspaces where they could reflect and "praise and worship" (p. 198). One student talked about how his bedroom was a spiritual space for him:

> [My bedroom] is obviously my sanctuary where I am alone and I pray every night [there] and just thank God for getting me through the day and pray that he wake[s] me up again in the morning. (p. 197)

The concepts of counterstories and counterspaces were central in the findings of Means' (2014) dissertation. The author explained:

> Counterstories are the stories told by marginalized individuals that resist master narratives or mainstream discourse about what it means to be part of a marginalized group, while counterspaces are sites where marginalized people can resist master narratives and can create and participate in a positive, self-enhancing and affirming space for their identities. (p. 16)

Focusing on counterstories and counterspaces for LGBTQ students who experience multiple marginalization because of their race, such as those portrayed in Means' (2014) and Means et al.'s (2018) research, is critical to disrupting the typical deficit perspectives of the spirituality of Black LGBTQ college students. As demonstrated, spirituality is not mutually exclusive from Black LGBTQ student identities, nor from white LGBTQ student identities.

Clearly, however, there are personal and nuanced differences in the experiences of LGBTQ spirituality depending on race, and I considered these nuances in my research.

The next section of the literature moves beyond how LGBTQ students make meaning of their spirituality to explore their on-campus experiences and the ways they thrive in unwelcoming environments. This final section adds an essential layer to build the case for my research: it demonstrates that while spirituality is often a central part of LGBTQ identity, it is rarely studied as a source of strength, nor is it discussed in the context of campus climate. Instead, the literature focuses on negative campus climate and the challenges LGBTQ students face to cope and persist. However, there is an important and often missing link between spirituality, LGBTQ student thriving, and the ways campus leaders can work to improve the campus climate for LGBTQ students. My research questions address this gap to explore whether and how campus leaders believe they foster LGBTQ spirituality and whether LGBTQ students experience a campus environment that fosters their spirituality.

LGBTQ Student Campus Climate Experiences Related to Sexual and Spiritual Identities

Over the last two decades, scholars and practitioners have underscored the importance of making college campuses inclusive and affirming of all genders and sexual identities, but research does not often consider the specific sources of strength that LGBTQ students call upon to navigate unwelcoming campus environments. Most especially, spirituality as a source of strength and resiliency has been missing from the discussion, until recently (Rankin et al., 2019). Therefore, the literature reviewed in this section describes the current state of campus climate for LGBTQ students and then focuses on the ways LGBTQ students

demonstrate resilience in the face of marginalization and oppression. An important source of this resilience is spirituality.

Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students

As a social construct, campus climate refers to the "current attitudes, behaviors, and standards and practices of employees and students of an institution" (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264). Research from the past three decades has revealed evidence that despite efforts to improve inclusivity, campus environments are often perceived as oppressive for LGBTQ students (Garvey et al., 2017; Lange et al., 2019; Rankin, et al., 2010; Rockenbach & Crandall, 2016). Descriptors like *chilly, negative,* or even *hostile* are used by scholars to explain campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff, and many studies also note threats to safety and well-being faced by members of the LGBTQ campus community (Rankin et al., 2010; Rockenbach & Crandall, 2016).

Two of the largest studies focused on LGBTQ students in higher education are Campus Pride's *2010 National College Climate Survey* (Rankin et al., 2010) and Lange et al.'s (2019) report on the state and status of LGBT and queer research in higher education. These two reports, alongside Pryor et al.'s (2017) *Pride and Progress? 30 Years of ACPA and NASPA LGBTQ Presentations*, are foundational to understanding campus climate for LGBTQ students and for driving the focus of LGBTQ research in higher education. LGBTQ students face harassment and discrimination at greater rates than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, and these negative experiences are frequently attributed to their sexuality (Rankin et al., 2010). In addition, over the last three decades, research presentations at the two largest national student affairs conferences have focused on various campus spaces, such as residence halls, LGBTQ resource centers, counseling centers, athletics, and Greek life, and

the efforts to make these areas more inclusive and welcoming for LGBTQ students (Pryor et al., 2017).

While efforts appear to be moving forward in educational programming and policy changes to improve campus climate for LGBTQ students, there is little evidence to show that campuses are actually taking steps to support the holistic development and wellness of LGBTQ students, including LGBTQ spirituality and spiritual development. Instead, progress has generally come in the form of training for non-LGBTQ campus members to learn how to be more understanding and inclusive of a wide range of genders and sexualities (Lange et al., 2019). The impact of these educational programs and trainings on improving campus climate has yet to be well-documented, but as Lange et al. (2019) noted, scholars and practitioners are moving away from the deficit view of LGBTQ students to "spotlight…how systems of oppressions require students to persist rather than locating the problem within students" (p. 516).

This shift in approach from deficit to asset-based is an important, although not yet widely adopted, step in improving the campus climate for LGBTQ students. In addition to recognizing systems of oppression, an asset-based approach also explicitly honors the resilience and strength of LGBTQ students in their ability to navigate negative campus climates. I take this asset approach when considering current scholarship on LGBTQ experiences with campus climate, which focuses on student resiliency and on campus climate and LGBTQ spirituality.

LGBTQ Student Resiliency Amid Negative Campus Climate Experiences

Hill et al. (2021) offered one of the few, and perhaps the only, study to use a positive psychology framework to describe how LGBTQ+ students succeed in college. Specifically,

they asked, “How do instances of LGBTQ+ college student thriving complement and complicate extant scholarship on LGBTQ+ college student experiences?” (p. 267). Their use of the word *thriving* was intentional to contrast the more common negative framing of the oppression that LGBTQ+ students experience on campus. The authors explained:

> … many scholars still embrace language of negative experiences, characterized by terms like *hostility* of campus climates, *exclusion* of LGBTQ+ students, and descriptions of deleterious effects of cisgenderism, heterosexism, and connected systems of oppression. Although negative framing has its place in naming oppression that LGBTQ+ students face, we embrace Tuck’s (2009) call for “desire-based research” and aim to understand LGBTQ+ college students’ experiences from an explicitly positive perspective. (p. 267)

Data for Hill et al.’s (2021) qualitative, multi-modal, mixed-methods exploratory study were collected at a conference for LGBTQ+ students and allies in the Midwest United States. A total of 60 individuals were interviewed, 80% were enrolled as undergraduates, 10% had recently graduated, and 10% were graduate students. Half of the sample was white, nearly a quarter identified as Black, 12% were Chicanx/Latinx, and 8% identified as Asian. The authors noted that their findings may be skewed toward a more privileged group of LGBTQ+ students since all participants were attendees at the conference. Students who were not aware of or did not attend the conference may have different on-campus experiences.

Nonetheless, LGBTQ+ students appeared to thrive in two ways: 1) by managing and experiencing support for identities, and 2) through LGBTQ+-specific connections, contributions, and curriculum. More than half of the students in the study showed their resilience by managing their identities. While non-LGBTQ+ students likely do not participate

in identity management in a heteronormative, cisgender-normative college environment, LGBTQ+ students make decisions about "being out, engaging in advocacy, and how they talk about themselves" (p. 273). Instead of talking about identity management as a struggle, however, participants remained optimistic in navigating oppressive campus climates by using identity awareness in making decisions. One student noted positive self-talk and how he reminded himself that he is a work in progress and that "you can be your own person" (p. 274).

Feeling support for multiple identities and building connections in LGBTQ+ spaces was important for participants, too. About a third of the study's participants discussed how they hold identities that are salient alongside their LGBTQ+ identity, and how important it is to be affirmed in all of their identities. For example, a biracial Christian gay cisman spoke about finding an LGBTQ+-friendly church near campus because "in the GSA [gay-straight alliance] here, being Christian is – it's not looked down upon, but it's not supported" (p. 274). Even though this student did not find the support for which he had hoped in the GSA, he persisted in finding an affirming congregation in the community.

However, student organizations, campus resources, and LGBTQ+-specific curriculum provided opportunities where many students did feel affirmed in their multiple identities. For example, an LGBTQ+ campus organization helped one student build confidence for coming out:

> [It] showed me a lot of growth and the potential that I could offer. Then I started becoming really, really big on campus. … I went from being just a wee bit out in high school to being fully out in college. (p. 276)

LGBTQ+ student organizations and resource centers were also emphasized in the research of Pitcher et al. (2018) as sources of support. A racially diverse group of 60 students was interviewed in Pitcher et al.'s (2018) mixed methods research, and similar to Hill et al. (2021), students were recruited at a large conference for queer and trans* collegians. Nearly half of the participants (*n*=25) described the value of their on-campus LGBTQ+ resource center and 39 students talked about the support they received from LGBTQ+ student organizations. Students made connections not only with other LGBTQ+ students, but also with LGBTQ+ center staff and student organization faculty advisors. As such, both physical spaces and people are important sources of safety, affirmation, and support for LGBTQ+ students to remain resilient and to thrive in college. For many students, the LGBTQ+ resource center was their first stop when they had a negative experience on campus, and for others, their GSA was the place where they could be fully embraced in all of their identities. One student explained:

> I never had people that actually listened to what I cared about and what my dreams were and all that kind of stuff, other than like my family. I've never had friends like that. I've never met anybody that actually cared about other people if they didn't know who they were. I mean, it was kind of awesome to realize that not, college isn't going to be—I was worried about college. (p. 12)

The importance of connection, validation, affirmation, and safety cannot be overstated in the campus climate experiences of LGBTQ students. As Rankin et al. (2019) summarized in their 30-year literature retrospective, when LGBTQ students feel safe, welcomed, and validated on campus, they are more likely to be involved and to persist toward degree completion. Nonetheless, while "campus climate research discourse presents a

grand narrative of progressive change, greater access to resources, increased programming, and growing multicultural competence" (Rankin et al., 2019, p. 442), LGBTQ students have also demonstrated their ability to thrive in campus environments that remain distanced from full inclusion of all students.

Campus Climate and LGBTQ Spirituality

In addition to the previously discussed research on LGBTQ+ student thriving, a small and growing body of literature considers campus climate in the context of spirituality for LGBTQ students (Means, 2014; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

The research of Rockenbach and colleagues presents an asset-based perspective to understand the complexities and different dimensions of LGBT student spirituality on college campuses (Rockenbach & Crandall, 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2017). In one study, Rockenbach et al. (2017) examined how LGBT college students experienced campus religious and spiritual climates, and how students' identities impacted their experiences. Using data from the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS) from 52 institutions across three academic years (2011-2014), their study included a total of 13,776 students. Of this sample, over three-quarters of students were white, and just over 10% identified as LGBT. Data analysis showed an interesting juxtaposition where LGBT students did not perceive their campus religious and spiritual climate as positively as their heterosexual peers, but LGBT students were also more active in formal and informal interfaith experiences on campus. The authors discussed how this finding is not surprising because "LGBT students of faith must often negotiate faith and sexuality. Exploration of different faith spaces to find a new religious or spiritual home may be the process by which

two sometimes conflicting identities are reconciled" (p. 504). In this sense, spirituality and faith development may provide strength to build confidence in identity and ultimately to navigate unwelcoming campus environments.

In another study, Rockenbach et al. (2016) used quantitative survey methods to "corroborate that affirming religious and spiritual experiences reinforce positive relationships with self-authored identity in spite of the challenges posed by structural inequality" (p. 512). This research considered how campus climate and interfaith engagement influenced LGBT students' pluralism orientation and self-authored worldview commitment. A pluralistic orientation was defined as the "ability to see multiple perspectives; ability to work cooperatively with diverse people; ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues; openness to having one's views challenged; and tolerance of others with different beliefs" (Engberg, 2007, p. 291). For my study, pluralism orientation considered religious, spiritual, and ideological contexts. A self-authored worldview (in the context of religion, spirituality, and ideological self) was described as "an informed, critical understanding" of one's worldview and the alignment of that understanding in how one relates to others (Rockenbach et al., 2016, p. 500).

Findings revealed that LGB students were more likely to demonstrate a self-authored worldview commitment and pluralism orientation than their heterosexual counterparts. Contributing to this finding were differences in how LGB and heterosexual students experienced campus climate, and how experiences with religious/spiritual diversity influenced spiritual development. In particular, when LGB students perceived higher levels of religious diversity on campus, they were more likely to embrace a pluralistic orientation and become less committed to their own worldview. For heterosexual students, the same

perceived religious diversity did not have a significant impact on expanding their worldview or embracing a pluralistic orientation. Further, for LGB students, interacting and engaging with peers with different religions, spiritualities, or worldviews helped to deepen their understanding of their own sexual identity and worldview commitments. This consideration of personal interaction is reminiscent of research previously discussed on LGBTQ+ resource centers and student groups. With the addition of Rockenbach et al.'s (2016) research, the importance of connecting with others as a way to navigate negative campus environments extends to developing LGBTQ spirituality, pluralism orientation, and worldview.

Notably, the data for the two Rockenbach et al. studies (2016; 2017) represented a predominantly white sample of LGBT students. Recalling the importance of race in the spiritual and sexual coming out process for Black LGBTQ students discussed earlier, it is equally important to honor the differences in campus climate experiences for LGBTQ Students of Color. A very limited body of literature focuses on LGBTQ Students of Color, and it captures the stories of only Black LGBTQ students. For example, for many Black LGBTQ students, racial identity is just as salient as gender, sexual, and spiritual identities, and adds another layer of marginalization through which they must navigate (McGuire et al., 2017; Means, et al., 2017; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Means et al., 2018). In particular, Black LGBTQ undergraduate men experience isolation, homophobia, and racism and, as several participants in Means and Jaeger's (2016) study indicated, rely on their understanding of spirituality and personal purpose to stay motivated in college. One student explained, "I have gone through so many times where I just want to quit everything and then I pray about it. And then I'll come back stronger; I'm more determined than ever to make what I want

happen" (p. 34). In fact, for several students, the support they felt from their spirituality allowed them to "keep pressing on" (p. 35) amid negative campus climate experiences.

Finding physical space to safely practice personal spirituality is also important for Black LGBTQ students. As Means et al. (2018) discussed, affirming spiritual/religious spaces are non-existent for many Black LGBTQ students so they create their own counterspaces to fulfill spiritual needs. Sometimes these counterspaces involved time alone, such as in a dorm room or music practice room, while other times, they were found in spending time with other people. Counterspaces were not always on campus either, as some students sought places of worship outside of campus boundaries (Means, 2017; Means et al., 2018). Further, Means et al.'s (2018) research demonstrates the importance of spirituality in the lives of Black LGBTQ students as they overcome barriers to create personal spiritual counterspaces. In turn, the spirituality with which they are able to connect provides strength for navigating campus climates that marginalize their racial and sexual identities. The strength of spirituality is never-ending; as one student described, spirituality is "a personal connection with a higher being that understands me, loves me regardless of who I am, and is there to support me through my life" (Means, 2017, p. 241).

Synthesis of the Literature Review

This literature review demonstrates that the prominent discourse that attempts to portray LGBTQ identities and spirituality as incompatible is patently false. LGBTQ individuals, and more specifically LGBTQ college students, ascribe deep and personal meanings to spirituality and they call on spirituality to develop their identity(ies) and to make meaning of their experiences. In the ensuing paragraphs, I synthesize the main points of each area of the literature review and why they were important for my dissertation study. Notably,

nearly all of the literature reviewed includes qualitative methodologies. This selection of research was intentional to center individual voices, experiences, and personal truths, as amplifying voices and honoring lived experiences of marginalized groups is important to me as a critical researcher.

The first literature area reveals the varied and deeply personal definitions and experiences with religion and spirituality for LGBTQ individuals and includes research beyond the field of higher education (Brennan-Ing et al., 2013; Gandy et al., 2021; Goodrich et al., 2016; Halkitis et al., 2009; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Tan, 2005). It also captures the limited but powerful descriptions of LGBTQ college student spirituality with a strengths-based approach instead of the more common deficit focus of existing research (Birch, 2011; Love et al., 2005; McGrady, 2011; Means et al., 2016). When considered in its entirety, the literature reviewed emphasizes how each person's story is unique and spirituality is often described as a positive influence in the lives of LGBTQ students, and more broadly LGBTQ adults in the United States. For example, participants in Tan's (2005) research experienced "spiritual nourishment" (p. 142), while Gandy et al. (2021) reported "healing authenticity" (p. 103) among participants in their research. Relatedly, within higher education research, students in Love et al.'s (2005) research described spirituality as "an inner peace with yourself," and a belief in a "higher power" (p. 200). In addition, LGBTQ individuals consistently preferred the term "spirituality" to describe their belief system, as compared to the more doctrine and dogma-based term of "religion." For many LGBTQ people, religion has presented conflict in their sexual identity development, while spirituality has offered an opportunity to reflect and connect with oneself, others, nature, and a sacred or divine being (Birch, 2011; McGrady, 2011).

As the first area of literature transitions to the second, the importance of considering the complexity of multiple social identities in the spirituality of LGBTQ students becomes apparent. An extremely limited body of research shows that for LGBTQ Students of Color, and more specifically Black LGBTQ students, spirituality is embodied in self-care and personal nourishment, which is different from their white peers. As demonstrated by Means et al. (2016), Black students consider their race in combination with their LGBTQ identity to describe spirituality and spiritual experiences. In my research, I was able to recruit one LGBTQ student of color and I paid particular attention to intersecting identities and racialized experiences that demonstrate multiple marginalization.

Intersecting identities and LGBTQ identity development is the focus of the second literature area. The discussion begins with an overview of the evolution of LGBTQ identity development theories and models, noting the limitations of linear, stage-based models. In particular, stage models, such as those of Cass (1984), Coleman (1982), and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) fail to acknowledge the fluid and complex process of identity development. D'Augelli (1994), Savin-Williams (1998), and Rhoads (1997b) advanced the scholarship on LGBTQ identity development by offering models that allow for movement among different stages or processes while considering other factors such as race, relationships, and community. Only one scholar, Eliason (2009) focused on spirituality as a central factor in LGBTQ identity development, which signals that there is more work to be done to understand the intricacies and nuances of how spirituality contributes to LGBTQ identity development.

Next, in the second literature area, three themes emerged when considering identity intersections: the intersection of sexual orientation and spirituality in coming-out, the role of

religion in LGBTQ spiritual development, and spirituality as strength. Most notably, spirituality is a source of strength, affirmation, and resilience in the lives of LGBTQ students and for many students it is an integral part of their coming-out journey (Gold & Stewart, 2011; Love et al., 2005). For example, Love et al. (2005) observed that for some LGBTQ students, the coming-out process acts as a stimulus for spiritual growth and development. This may be related to conflicts LGBTQ students experience between the teachings of their childhood religion and their non-heterosexual identity. Importantly, however, previous experiences with organized religion (even when those experiences are negative or hurtful) can inform whether and how LGBTQ students incorporate spirituality into their identity (Love et al., 2005; Snow, 2015).

With a spotlight on the ways spirituality is a significant part of LGBTQ student identity and coming-out in a limited body of literature, campus leaders can begin to understand the importance of creating spaces and resources to support spiritual development. This is particularly important since LGBTQ students must navigate an unwelcoming and even hostile campus climate, and for many LGBTQ students, spirituality provides support and motivation to persist, as discussed in the third literature area (Love et al., 2005; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Rockenbach et al., 2017). Currently, however, it appears that campuses are not providing spaces or resources for LGBTQ students, especially LGBTQ Students of Color, to develop and practice their spirituality. As such, LGBTQ students must create their own counterspaces and communities to explore spirituality (Means, 2014; Means & Jaeger, 2016). Counterspaces provide refuge from oppressive environments for marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ Students of Color, while also offering a space to resist dominant narratives and experience affirmation of multiple identities (Means, 2014). For LGBTQ Students of Color,

the creation of spiritual counterspaces is especially important as they often do not find affirming spaces on campus where they can be their whole selves, particularly with respect to their racial, spiritual, and sexual identities (Means et al., 2018). In my research, I focused on the complexities of multiple identities and considered the impact of race and other identities in students' campus climate experiences. LGBTQ students seek spaces where they can be out as their whole selves and campus leaders have a responsibility to foster an environment where students feel safe and supported to do so, including a focus on spirituality.

Lastly, while there is a small body of scholarship that examines the positive interactions of non-heterosexuality and spirituality for college students, there are still gaps to fill to understand the intricacies of experiences when other social identities are considered. In particular, research on LGBTQ Students of Color is limited to a handful of studies on Black LGBTQ students, and the findings of these studies emphasize the nuanced spiritual journeys of LGBTQ students when race is centered in the research (McGuire et al., 2017; Means, et al., 2017; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Means et al., 2018). My case study honored the individual experiences of LGBTQ students and magnified the importance of considering multiple identities in LGBTQ students' spiritual needs.

When considered in its entirety, the literature review develops the argument for my research by illustrating the complexity and centrality of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ students and the lack of research to demonstrate whether there are campuses that meaningfully foster LGBTQ spirituality. National rankings for LGBTQ-friendliness address many areas of LGBTQ inclusion on campus, but spirituality is not one (Campus Pride Index About Us, n.d.). A focus on LGBTQ spirituality also appears to be missing from efforts to improve LGBTQ campus climate experiences (Lange et al., 2019). Therefore, my study

explored whether and how a campus that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promotes a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my research emerged from three sources: 1) Hurtado et al.'s (2008) assessment of campus climate research, 2) Winkler et al.'s (2021) study of campus climate as a multi-dimensional construct, and 3) the LGBTQ-friendliness factors that are part of the Campus Pride Index rankings. I drew on these sources to bring together concepts related to dimensions of campus climate, the different areas of campus that signal a commitment to affirming LGBTQ identities, and whether and how LGBTQ students experience support for their spirituality.

Foundationally, the framework includes *structural*, *psychological*, and *behavioral* climate dimensions as described in Hurtado et al.'s (2008) influential assessment of campus climate research. The *structural* dimension includes structural diversity, or the presence of previously underrepresented groups. It also includes programs and policies that focus on advancing values of diversity and inclusion. The *psychological* dimension describes how individuals "perceive institutional support/commitment to diversity" (p. 208) and where there are instances of conflict, discrimination, or isolation. Lastly, the *behavioral* dimension includes "interactions between and among different groups, participation (or lack thereof) in campus programs and diversity activities…" (p. 209). These three dimensions embody the different elements of campus climate that I used in my research. For example:

- The structural dimension includes the presence of LGBTQ students and staff who identify as spiritual and the programs and policies that aim to foster LGBTQ spirituality.

- The psychological dimension captures whether LGBTQ students perceive spiritual or religious conflict and discrimination on campus, or if/when they feel isolated because of their LGBTQ and spiritual identities. It also includes how LGBTQ students perceive institutional support and commitment related to their spirituality.
- The behavioral dimension includes how LGBTQ students interact with different groups, such as campus housing or health services, and the participation (or lack thereof) of LGBTQ students in campus programs related to spirituality.

To explore each dimension, I drew on two additional conceptual sources. For the structural dimension, I used the eight factors considered in the Campus Pride Index. The Index aims to assess campus policies, programs, and practices for evidence of a safe learning environment in which LGBTQ students can thrive. While it is not meant to replace other campus climate research, the Campus Pride Index is promoted as "the premier LGBTQ national benchmarking tool for colleges and universities to create more inclusive campus communities" (Campus Pride Index About Us, n.d.). I used the eight factors as contexts to examine whether and how a campus that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promotes a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. The criteria for each Campus Pride Index factor, along with examples of LGBTQ-specific criteria I looked for in my research are found in Table 1.

Table 1

Campus Pride Index Factors and Criteria

Campus Pride Index LGBTQ-Friendly Factors	Campus Pride Index Criteria for each Factor	Examples of LGBTQ-Spirituality Criteria
LGBTQ Policy Inclusion	• Non-discrimination statement inclusive of sexual orientation • Non-discrimination statement inclusive of gender identity • Health insurance coverage to employees' same sex partner • Accessible, simple process for students to change their name on university records and documents • Accessible, simple process for students to change their gender identity on university records and documents • Students have option to self-identify sexual orientation on admission application or post enrollment forms • Students have option to self-identify gender identity/expression on admission application or post enrollment forms	• Non-discrimination statement inclusive of religion and spirituality
LGBTQ Support & Institutional Commitment	• Resource center/office with responsibilities for LGBTQ students • Paid staff with responsibilities for LGBTQ support services • Ally program or Safe Space/Safe Zone • Actively seek to employ diversity of faculty & staff including visible, out LGBTQ people • Standing advisory committee that deals with LGBTQ issues • LGBTQ alumni group	• Inclusion of ecumenical, interfaith, and LGBTQ-affirming spiritual language and symbols on campus, such as in invocations and welcoming remarks at campus events
LGBTQ Academic life	• LGBTQ studies program • LGBTQ specific course offerings • Actively recruit faculty for LGBTQ-related academic scholarship • New faculty/staff training opportunities on sexual orientation issues • New faculty/staff training opportunities on gender identity issues • LGBTQ faculty/staff organization	• LGBTQ spirituality course offerings • New faculty/staff training opportunities on LGBTQ spirituality

LGBTQ Student Life	• LGBTQ & Ally student organization • LGBTQ & Ally graduate student organization • LGBTQ social fraternity/sorority • Regularly plans LGBTQ social activities • Regularly plans educational events on transgender issues • Regularly offers educational events surrounding intersectionality of identities for LGBTQ people • LGBTQ-inclusive career services	• LGBTQ spirituality student organizations • Dedicated, LGBTQ-affirming spaces on campus for spiritual practice • LGBTQ spirituality-affirming symbols and language • Educational events surrounding intersections of identities for LGBTQ people that includes spirituality
LGBTQ Housing & Residence Life	• LGBTQ living space, theme floors and/or living-learning community • Roommate matching for LGBTQ students to find LGBTQ-friendly roommate • Gender-inclusive housing for new students • Gender-inclusive housing for returning students • Gender-inclusive/single occupancy restroom facilities in campus housing • Gender-inclusive/single occupancy shower facilities in campus housing • Trains residence life and housing staff at all levels on LGBTQ issues and concerns	• LGBTQ-affirming spaces for meditation/prayer • LGBTQ-affirming spirituality programming • LGBTQ roommate matching that includes spiritual identities
LGBTQ Campus Safety	• Procedure for reporting LGBTQ related bias incidents and hate crimes • Active ongoing training for hate crime prevention • Active outreach to LGBTQ students and student organization • Trains campus police on sexual orientation issues • Trains campus police on gender identity/expression issues • Supports victims of LGBTQ sexual violence and partner violence	• Trains campus police on LGBTQ experiences of religious trauma • Offers professional development training for faculty and staff to recognize and refer students who may need pastoral care and/or spiritual support
LGBTQ Counseling & Health	• LGBTQ counseling/support groups • Trans-inclusive trained counseling staff • Free, anonymous and accessible HIV/STI testing • LGBTQ-inclusive health information and safer sex materials available	• LGBTQ religious trauma support groups • Inclusion of LGBTQ-affirming spiritual resources

	• Trans-inclusive student health insurance policy which covers ongoing counseling services • Trans-inclusive student health insurance policy which covers hormone replacement therapy	in student health and wellness services
LGBTQ Recruitment & Retention	• Annually participates in LGBTQ admission fairs • LGBTQ student scholarships • LGBTQ mentoring program to welcome and assist LGBTQ students in transitioning to academic and college life • Special Lavender or Rainbow Graduation ceremony for LGBTQ students and allies • Admission counselors receive LGBTQ-inclusive training and resources	• Discussion of LGBTQ-affirming spiritual resources on campus during prospective student tours

I added a ninth context to those found in Table 1: *Spiritual Life*. This is an area of campus separate from the Campus Pride Index, and whether and how spiritual life fosters LGBTQ spirituality was central to answering my research questions.

In considering the psychological and behavioral dimensions, I layered in the campus climate dimensions of *provocative*, *productive*, and *nonproductive* from Winkler et al. (2021). These three "mutually-reciprocal, yet distinctive, climate dimensions" (Winkler et al., 2021, p. 566) are critical for understanding how students experience campus climate in the context of fostering their spirituality. Productive encounters may not always be described as positive, but they lead to student growth and learning. For example, LGBTQ students may find their spirituality challenged by others in spaces on campus that provide support for spiritual expression, and these encounters can strengthen individual spirituality. Nonproductive encounters may include experiences of conflict and divisiveness between individuals with differing spiritual or religious views, resulting in LGBTQ students taking a

more guarded, cautious approach to spirituality. Winkler et al. (2021) explain how "[i]n productive climates, the discomfort engendered by exposure to an interaction with difference leads to growth and learning. In nonproductive climates, this discomfort results in psychological retreat" (p. 566). Further, "[d]iscomfort is often misappropriated and artificially reduced to positive or negative, even if the challenging experiences lead to learning in some capacity" (p. 557). This understanding aligns with research on LGBTQ student spirituality that describes how previous experiences with religion, whether initially thought to be positive or negative, contribute to LGBTQ student spiritual development (Love et al., 2005).

The third climate dimension, provocative, complicates the productive and nonproductive dimensions by acknowledging that not all encounters can be readily classified as good or bad, positive or negative, or helpful or harmful. When LGBTQ students are entrenched in developing their identity and spirituality, the impact of encounters may not be realized until some time in the future. These encounters, which can be initially viewed as productive or nonproductive, have the capacity to actually embody a third dimension: provocative. The authors explain:

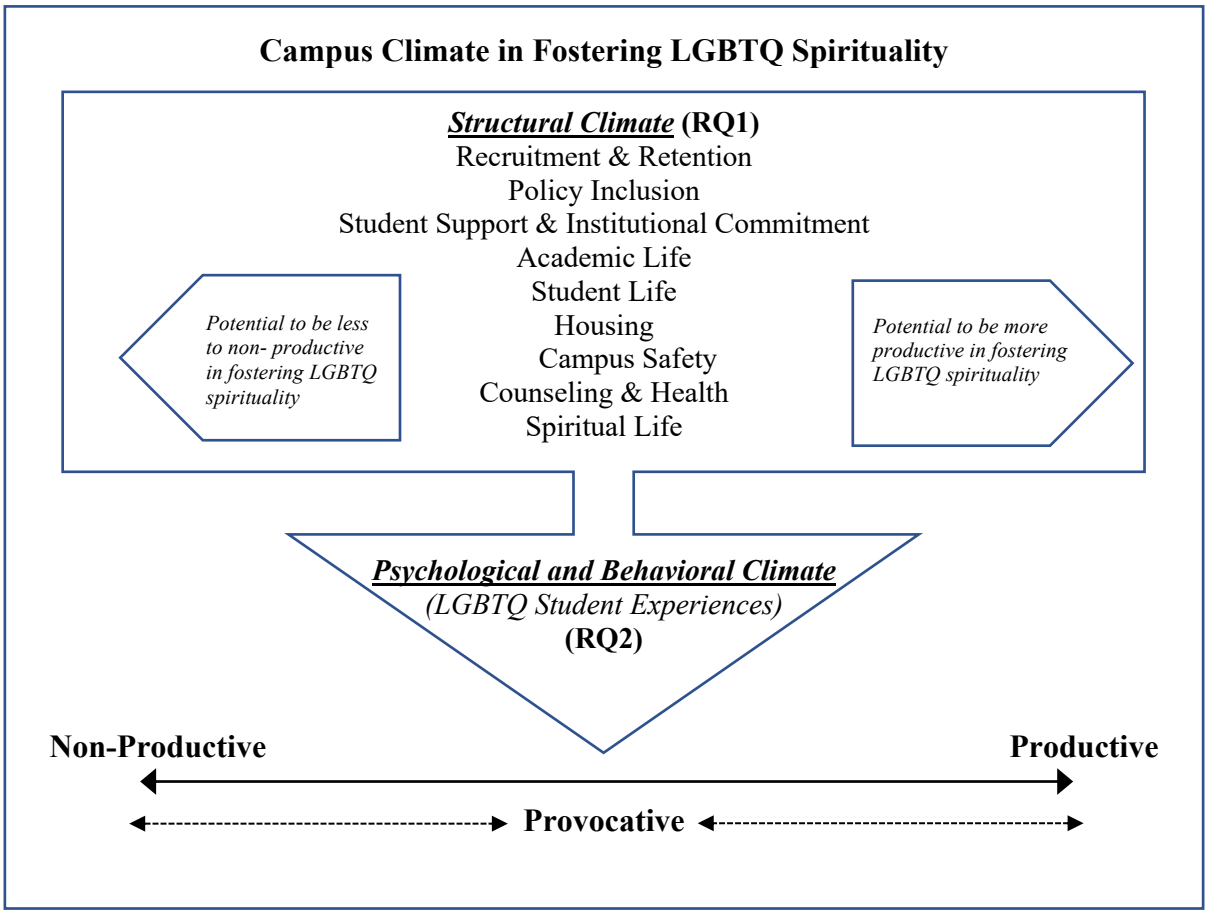
> After all, the process of rethinking one's assumptions about their own and others' worldviews as a result of challenging discussions, disagreements, and even criticism may not be read by students as "productive" in the moment. Reconsidering assumptions and stereotypes in light of new information is cognitively and emotionally demanding—despite the promising outcomes that these worthwhile efforts often produce.

In my study, the reference to worldviews in the preceding quote would be replaced with spirituality.

A visual representation of my conceptual framework is found in Figure 3. The structural climate was used to collect and analyze data for my first research question (RQ1): In what ways, if any, does an institution that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promote a campus environment that fosters the spirituality of LGBTQ students? Policies, programs and services, university messaging, and interviews with university leaders all provided critical data to answer this question. Then, the psychological and behavioral climate was used to explore LGBTQ student campus climate experiences in fostering their spirituality (RQ2) (via student interviews and focus groups). In addition, Winkler et al.'s (2021) climate dimensions are illustrated as a continuum in the framework and were used as part of data analysis for RQ2. Notably, the provocative dimension can align with either productive or nonproductive. I center provocative on the continuum and on its own line because there may be provocative experiences that students do not associate with being productive or non-productive – or at least not yet. The learning that results from provocative experiences may be revealed after the conclusion of my study.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

My dissertation research explored whether and how a campus that is known to support LGBTQ students promotes a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. To accomplish this goal, my research process was flexible and inductive. I focused on a single university because I wanted to provide a deep and rich understanding of the relationship between LGBTQ student spirituality and campus contexts in one setting rather than examining multiple campuses for similarities and differences. That is, I was less interested in comparing and contrasting campuses than I was in telling a single story to explain a phenomenon.

A qualitative approach best suited my study. As Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight, qualitative research is used when:

- A complex, detailed understanding of the issue is needed
- A desire to empower individuals exists
- A literary, flexible style of reporting is appropriate
- An understanding of the contexts in which participants in a study address a problem is warranted (p. 46)

This chapter begins by addressing ethical considerations in qualitative research, followed by a reflexivity statement in which I discuss how I arrived at my decision to pursue case study methodology, including my axiological, ontological, and epistemological beliefs.

Then, I outline in detail the methods of case study design and how I ensured trustworthiness in data collection and data analysis. Lastly, I address the limitations of my study.

Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research

Ethical considerations arise throughout the qualitative research process, and I referred to Creswell and Poth (2018) for guidance in mitigating possible issues. Prior to conducting research, I submitted a UMass Boston institutional review board (IRB) application for approval. I also sought IRB approval at my research site. Upon approval from both boards, I reached out to two administrators at my research site who helped to recruit students for my research. They shared information about my research in the LGBTQ Resource Center and Interfaith Center on campus, and also sent individual emails to students who they thought may be interested in my research. This outreach and publicity included a QR code and/or link to the screening survey (see Appendix A). Then, I emailed students who completed the survey and who 1) met my sampling criteria, and 2) responded 'yes' or 'maybe' to participating in an interview or focus group.

I emailed a total of 15 prospective student participants in which I disclosed the purpose of my research and invited them to participate in an LGBTQ student focus group. Students were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and confidential (see Appendix B for the Consent Form). Seven students replied and I was able to successfully schedule and meet with six of them. In addition to student interviews/focus groups, I invited six university staff to meet with me for a one-on-one interview; five accepted. Specific sampling strategies are discussed later in this chapter, along with the list of student participants in Table 3 and the list of staff participants in Table 4.

In all of my interviews, I sought to respect cultural, religious/spiritual, gender, and other differences by using inclusive language and body language that was welcoming and relaxed. This included smiling, nodding, honoring personal space, dressing comfortably in modest clothing, and making eye contact when appropriate. I minimized disruption on campus by meeting with students in quiet study spaces and with administrators in their on-campus offices. I was also mindful of perceptions of power imbalances between participants and me. To alleviate power imbalance, I sought to establish trust with participants by being transparent about the purpose of my research, limiting leading questions, and refraining from sharing personal impressions of responses. My role in interviewing was to listen and understand, and to capture individual experiences in rich detail. In addition, I asked participants to select pseudonyms to keep their identity confidential. Lastly, and importantly, I report multiple perspectives in Chapter 4 to ensure that I do not demonstrate a bias toward a particular narrative.

In addition to these general ethical considerations throughout the research process, I detail specific issues related to trustworthiness under the Research Design heading. First, however, I offer insight into my researcher reflexivity.

Reflexivity Statement

One of my dissertation research goals was to illuminate the personal spirituality(ies) of LGBTQ students in the context of their on-campus experiences. Too often, non-heterosexuality and spirituality are seen as mutually exclusive constructs, which may explain why the two topics are seldom studied together with a strength-based approach. With the addition of my research to the field of higher education, I hope to change the ways campus

leaders think about sexuality and spirituality by providing an in-depth exploration of LGBTQ student spirituality on one university campus.

As a queer woman who also identifies as spiritual, I understand the negative discourse surrounding LGBTQ spirituality and the impact of oppressive religious doctrine because I experience it firsthand. I live in systems of power and oppression in American society that uphold conservative, hegemonic, Judeo-Christian values that are contrary to the beliefs I hold. My spirituality has been suppressed, my experiences brushed aside, and my faith questions ignored because of my sexuality. As such, I have a commitment to honoring the spiritual journeys of LGBTQ college students and working for change to improve the ways campuses foster LGBTQ spirituality.

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe goals that "change ways of thinking" and "convey the voices and experiences of individuals who have been suppressed" as aligning with postmodern and queer interpretative frameworks (respectively) in qualitative research (p. 34). Further, a postmodern research perspective confronts dominant narratives that perpetuate systems of power and oppression and seeks to uplift the experiences of marginalized identity groups. Similarly, using queer theory as an interpretive framework centers identity intersections and values diversity of experiences and values. In my research, I enacted these frameworks by staying committed to examining spiritual campus climate through the experiences of LGBTQ students and reconciling structural climate elements with how students perceive and interact with those elements. Critically, I listened to and uplifted the diverse and complex experiences of LGBTQ students.

In addition, embodying postmodern and queer paradigms in my research relates to my ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs. Ontology refers to the nature of reality,

epistemology is the nature of knowledge, and axiology encompasses ethics and values (Creswell & Poth 2018). Ontologically, I believe that reality is always contextualized based on systems of power and privilege. Reality is not merely a phenomenon that we can objectively understand; it is constructed based on privilege, oppression, and social identities. As such, epistemologically, I believe that knowledge is created in multiple ways and understood by studying the systems and social structures that uphold dominant narratives while they suppress others. Lastly, I hold axiological beliefs to respect and defend the values of marginalized communities. For the LGBTQ community, this means I embrace identity fluidity and an unbounded view of spirituality.

My positionality, values, and paradigmatic lens are inseparable from my research. At times they were especially evident, such as in my commitment to amplify the experiences of LGBTQ college students, but at other times they served as a less obvious backdrop in my writing. Overall, they also informed my selection of case study for my research design and the approaches I took to collect, organize, analyze, and report data. The details of case study design are discussed in the next section.

Research Design: Case Study

Yin (2018) defines a case study in terms of its scope and features. The scope includes investigating "a contemporary phenomenon ("the case") in depth within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 15). For my research, context was critically important as LGBTQ spirituality is rarely studied in the context of campus climate, and more specifically, whether and how campus climate fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

The second part of Yin's (2018) definition highlights features such as the emphasis on in-depth inquiry and the consideration of contextual conditions. Case study research relies on multiple sources of evidence, results in a large number of variables, and uses triangulation to interpret data. In my research, I collected data from student interviews/focus groups, interviews with university administrators, campus observations, and campus documents (print and online). I believe fostering LGBTQ spirituality can manifest in many ways, including personal interactions, online resources, and the presence/absence of spiritual symbols on campus. Therefore, an expansive approach that examined all of these possibilities was central to being able to answer my research questions.

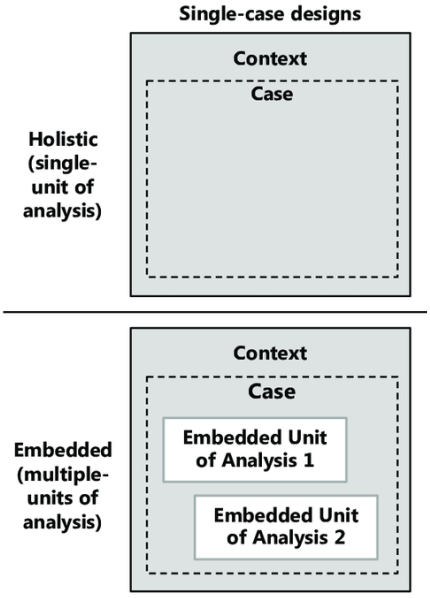
Single Case Study

Case study research has two basic designs: single-case and multiple-case design. Since I was interested in deeply exploring whether and how a single university promotes a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality, I used single-case design. As Yin (2018) explains, a single-case study is appropriate when the researcher "has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science inquiry" (p. 50). In the case of LGBTQ spirituality in the context of university support and campus climate, the topic has not necessarily been inaccessible; rather, it is contrary to the more dominant, negative study of the incompatibility of non-heterosexuality and spirituality. Yin (2018) calls this type of single-case study a *revelatory* case.

Single-case study research has two basic types of design: holistic, in which there is a single unit of analysis, and embedded, in which there are multiple units of analysis. These two designs are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Single-case Study Design Types



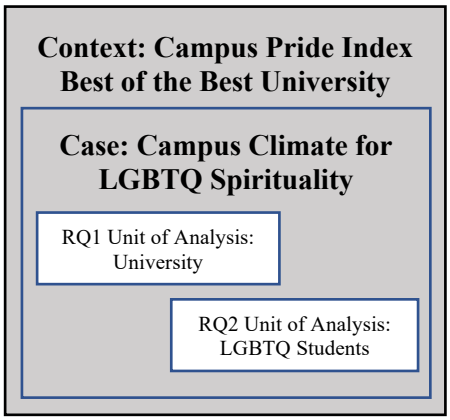
Note. Adapted from *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed., p. 48), by R. K. Yin, 2018, Sage Publications.

The purpose of my study was to understand whether and how a university that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promotes a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ student spirituality. To accomplish this, I studied multiple dimensions of campus climate, as described in my conceptual framework. Campus climate includes a structural dimension (policies, programs, and services) for which the university was the unit of analysis. Campus climate also includes psychological and behavioral dimensions, for which LGBTQ students were the unit of analysis. Together, these units of analysis enabled me to analyze the structural components of the climate and how LGBTQ student perceive and interact with those components. Further, in honoring my commitment to queer interpretative framing, I center the voices of LGBTQ students in the discussion of the impact of structural climate

components on LGBTQ spirituality. Using Yin's (2018) illustration of an embedded single-case study, I demonstrate how my research aligned with this design in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Research Design



Methods

This section reviews the specific methods I used to collect, organize, and analyze data. It begins by discussing criteria for site selection, followed by sources of data and participant sampling techniques. Then, I detail data analysis strategies. Lastly, I address limitations of my study.

Site Selection

For site selection, I considered Yin's (2018) one-phased approach, which is used when there are relatively few possible sites that meet site selection criteria. I had four criteria (see Table 2) which were met by seven institutions. Of the seven possibilities, I secured a mid-size public university as my research site. To protect the actual name of the university, I assigned it the pseudonym of *Lakeside University (LU)*. In March 2023, I spent a week doing

fieldwork on campus, including conducting interviews, recording observations, and gathering other data for my study.

Table 2

Site Selection

Site Selection Criteria	Rationale
A 2022 Campus Pride Index *Best of the Best* Institution in the New England or Mid-Atlantic Region (there are 12 between the two regions)	The Campus Pride Index *Best of the Best* list claims to include the most inclusive and LGBTQ-friendly campuses, considering benchmarks for policies, programs, and practices (Campus Pride Index About Us, n.d.). While LGBTQ spirituality is not a factor in creating the list, the institutions on this list have demonstrated a commitment to fostering a safe and affirming campus environment for LGBTQ students. I narrowed my geographic criteria to be in reasonable proximity to where I reside.
An institution with an Interfaith Center (or similarly named department) with services of spiritual guidance and/or pastoral care	The presence of an Interfaith Center with services of spiritual guidance and/or pastoral care signals that the university values student spirituality in general.
An institution with a racially diverse student population	Research has demonstrated that LGBTQ students practice spirituality and experience spiritual resources in different ways when racial identity is considered. In addition, LGBTQ Students of Color may experience multiple marginalization on campus in ways that white students do not (McGuire et al., 2017; Means, et al., 2017; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Means et al., 2018).
An institution with an LGBTQ Resource Center (or similarly named department)	LGBTQ Resource Centers are often a go-to for LGBTQ students when they have questions or need help (Hill et al., 2021). It may be integral for the center to include resources and programs for LGBTQ spirituality.

Data Collection

In general, case study data come from six possible sources: 1) documentation, 2) archival records, 3) interviews, 4) direct observations, 5) participant observation, and 6) physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). I used all of these sources to collect evidence of whether and how LU supports a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. In the sections to follow, I explain my different data sources, including sampling procedures and data collection protocols.

Participant Sampling. I used purposive criterion sampling for student interviews/focus groups and criterion and snowball sampling for administrator one-on-one interviews. Purposive sampling begins "with an identification of groups, settings, and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur" (Mertens, 2020, p. 336). Criterion sampling simply means that I was only interested in interviewing people who met specific criteria.

For the LGBTQ student interviews/focus groups, I had three criteria for my sample:

1) Currently enrolled LGBTQ student, who also
2) Identifies as spiritual, and who
3) Has spent at least one full semester on campus

The third criterion was particularly important to focus on students who have experienced the campus environment for an extended period of time. While new students may be able to speak to their personal spirituality and the resources they plan to seek at LU, they will have fewer firsthand experiences than a student who has been on campus for several months or years.

In collaboration with LGBTQ Resource Center and Interfaith Center staff, I solicited LGBTQ student participation via a screening survey that asked about LGBTQ student experiences with religion and spirituality. The purpose of this survey was to identify students who met my three sampling criteria and who also indicated diverse understandings of spirituality. The specific protocol for the survey is found in Appendix A. This survey yielded 15 students who met my three criteria and who also responded 'yes' or 'maybe' when asked whether they would be interested in participating in an LGBTQ student focus group or interview. I emailed those 15 students to invite them to participate in a focus group with the goal of recruiting six to eight students to participate in my research. Seven students responded and I ultimately met with six. Brief demographic profiles for each of the six student participants are in Table 3.

Table 3

Student Participant Demographic Profiles

Name	Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Student Status
Cal	She/They	Pansexual[a]; Panromantic[b] demisexual[c]	18	White	White	Undergrad Freshman
Dana	She/Her	Gay trans woman; Lesbian; Queer; Asexual[d]; Sapphic[e]	19	White/Korean	White/Korean	Undergrad Freshman
Matty	She/Her	Queer woman	23	Black	Black	1st year Grad
Sage	She/They	Lesbian	22	White	Ashkenazi Jewish	Undergrad Senior
Wren	They/Them	Queer	28	White	Dutch	2nd year Grad

Xander	He/Him	Queer; Asexual[d]; Ace[d]/Aro[f]	22	White	White	Undergrad Senior

Note. Students self-described their race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Terms that were not included in the Note on the LGBTQ Acronym are defined in the subsequent table footnotes. These definitions come from the PFLAG LGBTQ+ Glossary (n.d.).

[a]Pansexual: refers to a person whose emotional, romantic and/or physical attraction is to people inclusive of all genders.

[b]Panromantic: refers to an individual who is romantically attracted to people of all genders, but does not notice their partner's gender.

[c]Demisexual: describes an individual who experiences sexual attraction only after forming an emotional connection.

[d]Asexual: sometimes abbreviated as ace, the term refers to an individual who does not experience sexual attraction.

[e]Sapphic: drawn from the Greek lesbian poet Sappho's name, a term used to refer to lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or otherwise same-gender loving women.

[f]Aromantic: Sometimes abbreviated as aro (pronounced ā-row), the term refers to an individual who does not experience romantic attraction.

The other participants in my study were university administrators. In the first round of interviews, the initial criterion was only that the people I interviewed serve in roles that align with the positions I identified, which were:

- Director of Interfaith Center
- Director of LGBTQ Resource Center

I selected these roles because they represent university administrators who work directly with LGBTQ students and whom I expected would have the greatest involvement in fostering LGBTQ spirituality. I also hoped to meet with an administrator from Residence Life, but the person to whom I reached out declined to participate in my study. In consultation with the Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center and the Director of Interfaith Center, I did not identify another representative of Residence Life who would be likely to contribute to answering my research questions.

In the first round of administrator interviews, I used snowball recruitment to determine if there were other individuals on campus with whom I should speak who may have perspectives relevant to my research questions. As a result of this question, I also interviewed the Program Manager for Mindfulness and a Social Worker from Counseling and Health Services. In addition, I interviewed a senior administrator who works in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The five staff/administrators I interviewed are in Table 4.

Table 4

Staff/Administrator Participant Profiles

Name	Pronouns	Race	Ethnicity	Professional Role	Years worked at LU
Anne	She/Her	White	Non-Hispanic	Director of LGBTQ Resource Center	6 years
Joy	She/Her	White	Not disclosed	Director of Interfaith Center/Chaplain	7 years
Jude	He/Him	White	Greek, German, English	Social Worker/Counselor	22 years
River	They/Them	White	Eastern European Jewish	Program Manager for Mindfulness	7 years
Saleem	He/Him	South Asian-American	South Asian-American	Senior Administrator, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)	2 years

Note. Staff/Administrator participants self-described their race and ethnicity.

Interview and Focus Group Protocols. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe several steps to prepare for and conduct interviews. They also explain how qualitative research interviews co-construct knowledge in the social interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. A researcher's goal is to understand the lived experiences of the interviewee and to uncover the meaning-making process in those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also believe that part of my role as an interviewer/researcher is to create a safe and trusting environment in which interviewees feel comfortable to speak freely and without hesitation. To foster this environment, I conducted all interviews in-person during a week of field work in late March 2023, with the exception of my interview with the DEI senior administrator, which I conducted virtually via Zoom in May 2023.

The steps Creswell and Poth (2018) outline for interviewing are summarized in Table 5, along with comments specific to my research.

Table 5
Procedure for Interviews

Steps (Adapted from Creswell & Poth, 2018)	Comments
Determine the research questions that will be answered by interviews.	RQ1: In what ways, if any, does an institution that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promote a campus environment that fosters the spirituality of LGBTQ students? a) How do university leaders foster LGBTQ spirituality? (Administrator one-on-one Interviews) b) What programs and services are available for LGBTQ students to explore and practice spirituality? (Student Focus Group and Administrator one-on-one interviews) RQ2: How do LGBTQ students experience campus climate in the context of fostering their spirituality? (Student Focus Groups/Interviews)
Identify interviewees who can best answer these questions based on purposeful sampling procedures	Purposeful criterion sampling was used for all interviews, and detailed in this proposal under the subheading *Participant Sampling and Interview Protocols*
Distinguish the type of interview by determining what mode is practical and what interactions will net the most useful information to answer research questions.	All but one interview was conducted in person. One was conducted via Zoom.
Collect data using adequate recording procedures when conducting one-on-one or focus group interviews.	I obtained permission from interviewees to record interviews on my phone. The audio file was only kept until it was transcribed; then it was deleted.
Design and use an interview protocol, or interview guide.	Interview protocols are found in the appendices of this proposal.
Refine the interview questions and the procedures through pilot testing.	I piloted the student focus group interview questions with LGBTQ college students with whom I am acquainted and I piloted the administrator interview questions with a clergy member and also with a student affairs professional. I made minor revisions based on

	their feedback, such as defining campus climate and providing context of the Campus Pride Index.
Locate a distraction-free place for conducting the interviews.	I secured an accessible student space on campus for the focus groups/interviews. Administrator interviews were conducted in the individual's office or via Zoom.
Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study.	All interview protocols outline obtaining informed consent.
As an interviewer, follow good interview procedures.	I practiced active listening, stayed within the agreed upon timeframe for the interview, and used my protocol to guide questions. In the focus groups, I was also mindful to ensure everyone had the opportunity to share their thoughts.
Decide transcription logistics ahead of time.	I used Otter.ai transcription software and then read the transcription while playing the recorded audio to ensure accuracy. Then, I deleted the audio file.

My study included two focus groups with two students in each, two one-on-one interviews with students, and five one-on-one interviews with various university staff/administrators. All interviews and focus groups lasted 60 – 90 minutes. Initially, I chose to pursue a focus group with students instead of one-on-one interviews to alleviate the possible power dynamic in a researcher-participant interview. Focus groups are designed to facilitate conversation between participants and often result in more people sharing multiple points of view (Mertens, 2020). For LGBTQ students, a focus group also "allow[s] for the opportunity to validate their experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies" (Mertens, 2020, p. 406). However, scheduling conflicts and time constraints required flexibility to accommodate student schedules and I ended up meeting with two students in a one-on-one setting. Ultimately, the students with whom I met one-on-one were just as reflective and open as the students who met in the focus groups.

The focus group protocol is in Appendix C. I used this protocol to guide both the student focus groups and the one-on-one student interviews. It included questions that sought to understand how LGBTQ students define and experience spirituality, whether and how they feel supported on campus in their spiritual identities, and what types of experiences contributed to productive, provocative, and nonproductive spiritual encounters on campus.

For my interviews with university administrators, a one-on-one format made the most sense since they each work with students in a different capacity and have the potential to foster LGBTQ spirituality in a variety of ways. I also anticipated less of a power dynamic in these interviews than there would be between LGBTQ students and me. Since I engaged in this research as a doctoral student, I expected university administrators would not experience my presence as a researcher as intimidating or authoritative.

The interview protocols for the first two administrators (Director of Interfaith Center and Director of LGBTQ Resource Center) focused on understanding how they perceived the structural climate for LGBTQ spirituality (see Appendix D and Appendix E). I asked questions about programs and services on campus that they thought contributed to productive, provocative, and nonproductive student experiences, as well as what they thought their role was in fostering LGBTQ spirituality. Coincidentally, the Director of the Interfaith Center and the Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center both hold LGBTQ identities, so they ended up being able to speak firsthand to how they experience spirituality on campus as well. These unexpected data proved to be helpful in triangulating student experiences with staff experiences.

Similar to my interviews with the Director of the Interfaith Center and the Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center, the goal of my second-round administrator interviews was to

understand how different staff at LU perceive elements of the structural climate and whether they have an active role in fostering LGBTQ spirituality. I interviewed Saleem, a Senior DEI Administrator, about six weeks after my week of fieldwork on campus, after I completed some initial data analysis. In this way, I was able to adjust the questions I asked him to reflect some of the information that was shared in the other interviews. The intentionality to conduct data analysis during data collection procedures was helpful to identify patterns and incorporate those into subsequent interview questions.

Direct Observations. I participated in a prospective student tour/info session to collect data about whether support for spirituality is part of student recruitment. Recalling that one dimension of my conceptual framework is *recruitment and retention*, I used a prospective student tour to collect data on the physical environment and messaging that signaled whether and how the campus fosters LGBTQ spirituality. My role was *participant as observer*, in which I participated in the tour and info session as any other attendee would (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Taking field notes was a bit challenging as we walked around campus, so I captured photos during the tour and also planned time for reflection and data recording immediately after. The observation of a prospective student tour/info session was the first point of data collection for my study. As I became familiar with the campus environment, I revisited student spaces on campus, such as the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Interfaith center, and student gathering spaces to gather data on structural climate elements like symbols of spirituality and resources and programs for LGBTQ spirituality.

Similar to preparing for and conducting interviews, Creswell and Poth offer a series of steps for successful observations. These are summarized in Table 6, along with comments related to my observation of a prospective student tour as an example of procedures specific

to my research. In addition to the campus tour, I observed a class panel discussion and a program hosted by the Interfaith Center. Both of these opportunities emerged from my interview with Joy, the Director of Interfaith Center and Chaplain, and proved to be useful data collection points to observe how LGBTQ students engage in dialogue about spirituality and where they find support on campus.

Table 6

Procedure for Observation

Steps (Adapted from Creswell & Poth, 2018)	Comments
Select a site to be observed.	Prospective student tour/info session.
Identify who and what to observe, when, and for how long.	I observed the tour guide and campus environment for the duration of the tour.
Determine role to be assumed as observer.	Participant as observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Design and use an observational protocol as a method for recording notes in the field.	Observation Protocol is in Appendix G.
Record aspects such as portraits of the participant, the physical setting, particular events and activities, and your own reactions.	I did not need portraits of any people. I took photos of my surroundings.
Build initial rapport by having someone introduce you.	I asked the tour guide to disclose my purpose and presence on the tour.
As an observer, follow good observational procedures.	I was present but not intrusive or disruptive in any way during my observation.
Prepare timely notes that are thick and rich in narrative description after the observation.	I scheduled 60 minutes immediately following the tour to write reflections and detailed notes.

Documentation and Archival Records. Documents were collected throughout the course of my study. They included university policies and program information that related

to student spirituality, flyers from around campus that contained spiritual symbols or messaging, brochures/rack cards from the Interfaith Center, webpages that contained student resources for religion and spirituality, and other spirituality-related documents that I found on campus or on the university's website. Archival records included student newspapers and university publications, as well as social media posts and news stories from off-campus media outlets. I used these data sources to look for where and how the university included spirituality in their student messaging and if this messaging affirmed and fostered LGBTQ spirituality. In addition, I looked for language that signaled institutional commitment to spirituality (e.g., "reflection", "spiritual practice", "make meaning") as well as other structural evidence that could be analyzed via my conceptual framework.

Prior to engaging in document analysis, I evaluated potential documents using Rapley and Rees' (2018) four criteria:

1. Authenticity: Is the document what it claims to be?
2. Credibility: Can the document be trusted to be an accurate account of the phenomenon of interest?
3. Meaning: Is the information clear and relevant to my research questions?
4. Representativeness: Does the document represent only the dominant discourse and are there other documents that reflect a contradictory view?

I maintained a database and annotated bibliography of all documents. An annotated bibliography provided a concise overview of the documents I collected and also served as an index for easy retrieval during the data analysis phase of my research (Yin, 2018).

Physical Artifacts. I was interested in collecting symbols, icons, and other visual data that represented religion and spirituality. These data included physical spaces on campus

like the Interfaith Center and outdoor spaces where students gathered to reflect and meditate. Physical artifacts are an example of the structural climate, which is a key concept in my conceptual framework. I captured these artifacts with photos and kept them indexed in a database for retrieval during data analysis. I also used them to inform additional data collection during student interviews. For example, I was able to ask questions about specific physical spaces on campus and whether LGBTQ students felt affirmed in their spirituality there. My process for collecting physical artifacts was similar to that of documentation as I used authenticity, credibility, meaning, and representativeness to guide my data search.

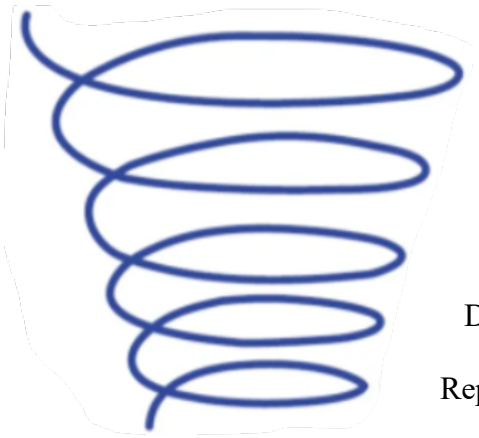
Data Analysis

Analytic strategies for case study data can take many forms and rely heavily on the researcher's empirical approach, the depth, richness, and clarity of data, and the researcher's consideration of multiple interpretations (Yin, 2018). Unlike quantitative research, there are no fixed formulas or statistical procedures to use in data analysis. Broadly, my data analysis strategy embodied *the data analysis spiral*, as depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 6

The Data Analysis Spiral

Data Collection



Managing and organizing the data

Reading and memoing emergent ideas

Describing and classifying codes into themes

Developing and assessing interpretations

Representing and visualizing the data

Account of Findings

Note. From *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed., p. 186), by J. K. Creswell & C. N. Poth, 2018, Sage Publications.

The data analysis spiral is a visual representation of the fluid and malleable nature of case study data. At the top of the spiral, the researcher enters data, and then, using a series of analytical strategies, the researcher exits the spiral with a case narrative.

To assist in classifying codes into themes (the third step in the spiral), I used Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. My data analysis strategy centered queer interpretive framing to be able to emphasize individual voices and meaning-making, especially the voices of LGBTQ students. One of my data analysis goals was to disrupt traditional assumptions about what spirituality is and to dispel the common discourse that LGBTQ people are not spiritual. I view spirituality as a personal journey of meaning-making and something that is shaped by individual experiences. Gender, sexuality, and spirituality all

exist beyond rigid definitions or exclusive categories, and I sought to blend personal conceptualizations of LGBTQ and spiritual identities as a way to dismantle exclusionary ways of thinking and knowing that are more common in American society.

In addition, I consulted Merriam's (1998) data analysis recommendations to help stay focused on meaning-making and knowledge construction. While her guidance is more constructivist-oriented than postmodern, I found it especially helpful as I used early data analysis to shape interview questions for subsequent conversations. Merriam (1998) explained the importance of doing data collection and data analysis simultaneously because:

> The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating. (Merriam, 1998, p. 162)

Using the Conceptual Framework in the Data Analysis Spiral

Throughout the first three layers of data analysis spiral (managing and organizing the data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, and desribing and classifying codes into themes), my data analysis approach was directly informed by my conceptual framework and my research questions. As I began to gather and organize potential data, I realized that there would not necessarily be alignment in aspects of the structural climate that appeared to be more productive in fostering LGBTQ spirituality (RQ1) and the actual experiences of LGBTQ students and staff (RQ2). For example, LU offers yoga and mindfulness programs, which can be examples of spiritual practices, but during my interviews with LGBTQ students

and staff I learned that these programs are not readily experienced in that way. Instead, they are viewed as programs for the mind and body, without mention of the spirit.

With this early recognition of the complexity of whether and how LU supports a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality, I knew it would be important to approach data analysis so I could capture 1) the overlap between structural climate elements that had the potential to foster LGBTQ spirituality and how LGBTQ students and staff experienced those elements, and 2) the experiences of LGBTQ students and staff that expanded beyond the boundaries of the structural elements I identified. Therefore, I used three steps in data analysis:

Step One: **Capturing the potential of LU to foster LGBTQ spirituality.** In this step, I used descriptive coding to analyze my reflective memos, notes from observations, documents, artifacts, and staff/administrator interviews for evidence of whether and how the campus structural climate has the potential to foster LGBTQ spirituality. The five staff/administrator interviews were first transcribed using Otter.ai, a web-based transcription software. I then read the transcript for accuracy while I listened to the audio. As I listened and read, I also made notes of thoughtful pauses in the conversation, changes in voice inflection, and other impressions that could not be gleaned from the written transcripts alone. I uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose for descriptive coding. The primary codes were the nine elements of the structural climate from my conceptual framework and secondary codes were productive, nonproductive, and provocative. My transcript codebook is found in Appendix H. Lastly, I made meaning of the data in this step by writing a narrative of the potential of the structural campus climate to foster LGBTQ spirituality, which is the crux of my first research question: In what ways, if any, does an institution that is known for

supporting LGBTQ students promote a campus environment that fosters the spirituality of LGBTQ students?

Step Two: **Exploring how LGBTQ students experience the campus spiritual climate.** I used the narrative from step one to guide my analysis of student interview transcripts to see whether and how LGBTQ students experienced programs, services, or resources that appeared to be supportive of their spirituality. Similar to my process for analyzing staff/administrator interviews, I transcribed all student interviews using Otter.ai, listened back to them for accuracy, and made notes of changes in tone, thoughtful pauses, and other impressions. Using the same descriptive codes as I did for the administrator transcripts, I coded the student transcripts in Dedoose. Then, I wrote individual narratives for each student, framed around their behavioral and psychological campus climate experiences.

Step Three: **Telling the story of support for LGBTQ spirituality at LU.** Now that I had two detailed narratives that were linked directly to my research questions, I needed to take data analysis one step further to be able to tell the story of whether and how LU promotes a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. In this third step, I looked for emergent themes in the narratives. Initially, I had at least 6 themes, but as I worked through the data and triangulated narrative data with my observational notes and physical artifact data, I combined themes that shared common traits. For example, while I initially coded all of my data with the same descriptive codes, I looked for thematic codes within elements that I coded as productive or provocative. A good example of this is the emergence of Joy and Anne as *pockets of people* in which students found support. They both appeared in the structural climate codes as well as in codes that signaled productive experiences for

LGBTQ students. In the end, three primary themes emerged, which frame the case narrative in chapter four and the discussion in chapter five.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative inquiry, trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in research methods, data analysis, and report of results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure a study is trustworthy, a researcher:

> must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible. (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1)

In my research, I used peer debriefing of methods, thick descriptions, triangulation, and member checks to enhance trustworthiness. Peer debriefing of methods included sharing my data collection protocols and interview questions with LGBTQ students and higher education colleagues to solicit feedback on clarity and detail. I made revisions to the phrasing of some interview questions based on this feedback in an effort to make them easier for study participants to understand.

When analyzing data and presenting findings, I focused on triangulating data to explain a particular theme or illustration. For example, whenever possible, I included multiple sources of data (e.g., documents, physical artifacts, field notes, and interview transcripts from student and staff participants) to bolster evidence. In triangulating data, I was also able to provide thick, detailed descriptions of context and experiences, including direct quotes, for the three themes in chapter four. Thick descriptions offer the reader an

opportunity to interpret findings through their own lens and to decide whether the current case is relatable or transferable to their own experiences (Mertons, 2020).

Lastly, I pursued member checking in writing the final manuscript by sharing chapter four with all of my study participants, along with a request for them to acknowledge that I accurately captured their experiences and reflections. No significant revisions were made after consulting with study participants, although I was able to refine Dana's racial identity based on her reply. Other participants confirmed receipt of chapter four but they did not reply with any clarifications or revisions.

Limitations

The decision to pursue single-case study research for my dissertation was essential to provide a deep, thorough, and holistic portrayal of whether and how a university that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promotes a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. However, the narrow and in-depth scope of this research design has some limitations. For example, the use of thick description and triangulation in data analysis provides detailed context, but it also may limit the transferability of findings to other contexts. I also relied on purposive criteria sampling and snowball recruitment to capture the perspectives of individuals on campus who have the greatest insight into whether and how the campus environment fosters spirituality. As a result, I may have unknowingly excluded individuals who may have been beneficial to my research.

In addition, my research site was a public research university in the northeast, which has characteristics unique to its mission and the state in which it resides. LGBTQ student experiences at other types of universities, especially those with religious affiliations and in other parts of the United States, may be very different than those at my research site. While

the methodology may be replicated at other universities, the results could be vastly different, especially at institutions with more diversity in ethnicity and race. My research site was a predominantly white institution (PWI), which privileges the white racial majority and traditionally Judeo-Christian belief systems. As such, the experiences of Students and Staff of Color (e.g., Matty and Saleem) were situated within a campus environment that may not fully embrace or welcome their racial identities and spirituality(ies). A historically black college or university (HBCU) or a religiously-affiliated institution would likely center different identities and contribute to different experiences with support for spirituality.

Lastly, my decision to spend one week on campus, during which I collected the majority of my data, captured a snapshot of whether and how LU fosters an environment that supports LGBTQ spirituality. My case study included data from only a finite period of time and from a finite number of participants. I acknowledge that additional perspectives may be omitted from this dissertation, and that I was unable to experience how support for LGBTQ spirituality may ebb and flow during the year. As an organizational case study, this dissertation offers my interpretation the data collected, including the unique and personal experiences of the study participants. Their experiences and my interpretations of meaning could be different with a different sample of participants, especially student participants.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I invite you to journey with me to Lakeside University where I explored whether and how a university that is known to be welcoming for LGBTQ students supports a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. Considering structural, psychological, and behavioral aspects of the spiritual climate, I learned from firsthand experiences of LGBTQ students and university staff. To begin this journey, I describe the case context, and then I introduce you to the people I met during my research and describe how they understand and experience LGBTQ spirituality at LU. Then, the journey continues to unfold as I describe three key themes related to the campus climate for LGBTQ spirituality.

Case Context: Lakeside University

In case study research, the case is situated in contexts that lie within and outside of the case (Stake, 2006). These contexts inform how a case is described and how meaning is made from data. In analyzing whether and how LU promotes a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality, I considered contexts that were within and outside of the case. Specifically, I focused on historic, geographic, demographic, and spiritual contexts. The historic context was important to acknowledge patterns and precedence in whether LU and the surrounding community demonstrate inclusion of LGBTQ people, while the geographic context provided insight into the social and political landscape of the region. Further, the

demographic context helped me to recognize identities that were under-represented on campus, and populations that may experience marginalization and isolation (e.g., Black students at a predominantly white institution).

Demographically, the student and staff population of LU is 80% white and nearly two-thirds of students identify as women, which is more racially diverse than the broader state demographics (about 90% of state residents are white and about half are women). Anne, Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center, sees LU as "homogenous in a lot of ways, so representation is a huge challenge," and Wren, a graduate student who identifies as trans, experiences their sorority home as a space "traditionally for straight white women."

LU boasts a commitment to social justice, service-learning, and dozens of student clubs that are justice or service-focused, like Generation Conscious (advocates for environmentally-sustainable products), Active Minds (focuses on destigmatizing mental health), and Best Buddies (fosters inclusion, friendship, and diversity). In addition, LU is located in a state that is known to rank highly in national surveys on LGBTQ safety and legal protections. The state in which it resides also generally holds more secular values than religious ones.

Historically, LU has a reputation for being LGBTQ-friendly in national rankings and in the national media. Dana, a freshman who identifies as trans, reflected on her college search as she felt a lack of safety for LGBTQ people in her home state:

> Campus Pride was one of my main determiners when I was looking at colleges. Also, there was some trans legislation that was being passed, and I felt like I wasn't safe in [my home state]. I tried searching for other states, and the state that I'm in right now is pretty progressive.

Rainbow flags are visible around campus, prospective students are greeted by staff and students who include pronouns on name tags, and diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of a university-wide action plan for inclusive excellence.

The University has a non-discrimination policy that prohibits discrimination or harassment against any person because of their race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, place of birth, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, positive HIV-related blood test results, genetic information, gender identity or expression, and other protected categories as defined by the state's robust anti-discrimination law. The state's anti-discrimination law is one of the most expansive in the nation and includes protections beyond those covered under federal law. LU also has a *lived names and pronouns* policy by which students, staff, and faculty can use their chosen name and pronouns in university records where a legal name is not required. Among other LGBTQ-friendly campuses, this type of name policy is increasingly common, although it not yet universally implemented at LGBTQ-friendly universities.

Around campus, queer staff are out and visible as their authentic selves, including their LGBTQ identities. For example, two of the staff I interviewed (Joy and River) talked about being open about their LGBTQ identity on campus and how they do not feel the need to shield being gay or nonbinary (two identities they hold). River believes "a lot of LGBTQ students are getting engaged in my program *because* I identify as queer and nonbinary". And Joy is "grateful" to be an "out, queer minister". Additionally, when I interviewed Jude, who works as a counselor, he could not recall a time when an LGBTQ student came to him because they did not see their queer identity represented in the broader LU community.

Within academic and student life, LU has a gender and sexuality studies minor as well as LGBTQ-specific course offerings, such as Sociology of Sexualities, LGBT Politics

and History, Studies in Gender and Religion, and Language, Gender, and Sexuality. LU also offers educational programs each semester focused on LGBTQ identities, and the campus has several affinity groups and student organizations for LGBTQ students and allies, including the LGBTQ Resource Center. The Interfaith Center holds a monthly dinner and dialogue series and the LGBTQ Resource Center has weekly programs for LGBTQ students to connect, reflect, and learn from each other. Both the LGBTQ Center and Interfaith Center reflect values of inclusion and LGBTQ affirmation in the way their spaces are furnished with progressive pride flags and décor that celebrates queer artists. In campus housing, LGBTQ students can be matched with an LGBTQ-friendly roommate, and residence life staff are trained on how to respond to LGBTQ student issues and concerns.

Nearly all of the students in this study remarked on the progressive, inclusive, and LGBTQ-affirming environment at LU. Sage said she knew LU "was a queer-friendly campus", and "queer spaces are typically very progressive, which is good." Likewise, Cal said they find LU to have queer "vibes" and "LU especially sort of goes out of their way to be friendly to queer people." Having easily-accessible gender-inclusive restrooms was just one example Cal gave, recalling the contrast of LU to her high school:

> I was the treasurer of the GSA [Gay/Straight Alliance] and we worked to fix a bunch of stuff, like the gender-neutral bathroom situation was not good because there were two and they were far away from the main building. So, for all four years, we were like 'please just convert one of the staff bathrooms in the main building.' And they did it, but it took all four years. And there were a bunch of other things too. And those things are all things that LU already has.

When considering the campus context for LGBTQ spirituality, LU has an Interfaith Center where a *coexist* rainbow flag with over a dozen religious symbols flutters in the breeze above the front door. The Interfaith Center opened in 2016 under the leadership of Joy, a queer ordained clergy person, although her role is devoid of a religious or spiritual title. Instead, she holds the title of Director. She reflected on her title:

> I have more struggles…being seen…in terms of minister than I do as a queer person, because of the culture…that's kind of [this region of the country]…and assumptions about a public institution and where religion or spirituality is recognized and considered within this kind of environment.

Joy was also a graduate student at LU in the late 1990s, and she reflected on her own experiences as a student back then:

> It was pretty awful as a queer person and also hard because I was right in that developmental place of trying to make sense of spirituality and sexuality. And there really wasn't anything here for either of those identities.

In fact, she says that "part of the lure to come back [to open the Interfaith Center in 2016] was to be the resource I didn't fully have in a visible, strong way."

Despite the challenge to bring religion and spirituality into a highly secular culture, Joy is persistent in creating opportunities for conversations about faith, spirituality, and meaning-making. Most of the non-denominational spirituality programming comes out of the Interfaith Center, and often in collaboration with other affinity groups and offices on campus. There are several religious organizations that serve as campus affiliates, and student groups are places where students of faith find community, such as Hillel and Chi Alpha. Both Hillel and Chi Alpha have LGBTQ student members, too. None of the student groups that are

registered through Student Life, however, are explicitly focused on LGBTQ spirituality. The last time an LGBTQ spirituality club was active was over two years ago, before the COVID pandemic, which ultimately contributed to the club's demise. Even before the pandemic, this club was relatively small while it attempted to gain traction in supporting LGBTQ spirituality in a more visible way.

When woven together, the historical, geographic, and demographic contexts of LU depict a university that is generally welcoming, supportive, and safe for students and staff who hold LGBTQ identities. However, people hold multiple identities, including race and spirituality. While there is evidence of support for LGBTQ identities, the contexts alone do not demonstrate whether and how the campus fosters a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ students who hold spirituality as a central part of their identity. To fully examine the case of LGBTQ spirituality at LU, the story must continue. Next, I describe the campus setting as I experienced it on my first day, and then I introduce you to the people who helped to shape the case narrative for LU.

Throughout the remaining sections of this chapter, I ground meaning-making in my conceptual framework. This means that I focused my data analysis on the nine structural elements of campus climate (recruitment and retention, policy inclusion, student support and institutional commitment, academic life, student life, housing, campus safety, counseling and health, and spiritual life), and whether and how they contributed to a productive, provocative, or nonproductive environment for LGBTQ spirituality. Additionally, I called on queer and postmodern interpretative frameworks to examine the spiritual campus climate through the experiences of LGBTQ students and to reconcile structural climate elements with how students perceived and interacted with those elements.

Arriving on Campus

On my first day on campus, I participated in a half-day prospective student information session and campus tour. I intentionally scheduled this session as my first point of data collection so I could experience my first impressions of the structural climate through the lens of a prospective student who is visiting campus for the first time. As I walked to the student center, giant rocks lined the pathway and they were carved with value words, many of which represented words of welcome and inclusion (e.g., openness, justice, and respect). Upon entering the lobby, I was greeted by students and staff who wore nametags with their pronouns, immediately signaling an acceptance and affirmation of gender identities.

The first 15 minutes of the info session consisted of a presentation on academic and student life, including the University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A slide in the presentation contained photos of a rainbow flag, a nighttime candle lighting ceremony, and listed the Interfaith Center and LGBTQ Resource Center as resources on campus. I was encouraged to see this slide because the presentation was relatively brief and certainly did not cover all the services and resources on campus. The inclusion of the LGBTQ Resource Center and the Interfaith Center within my first half hour on campus showed promise for how LU may provide a supportive environment for LGBTQ spirituality.

After the presentation, and while waiting for the campus tour to begin, I reviewed the tri-fold welcome guide I was given when I entered the auditorium. This guide, along with a campus map and a coupon for the bookstore, were the only items given to me. As I skimmed the welcome guide, I noticed that it was an academic marketing piece, without mention of any student services. I tucked it away and we embarked on the campus tour.

My campus tour guide was a friendly and energetic sophomore. His script was heavily focused on academics and residence life, although he did mention athletics, club sports, and student clubs and organizations. We toured only a small portion of the campus, and after about an hour we made our way back to the student center. He did not mention the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Interfaith Center, or any spirituality resources.

I soon learned that the LGBTQ Resource Center and the Interfaith Center are located on a different part of LU's sprawling campus from the area of the campus tour. Still, I do not think the geographic location was the reason neither of these places were mentioned; I think they were not mentioned because the focus of the tour was generally on academic programs and highlighting the newest and most innovative buildings. We toured only a small portion of campus that included a few academic buildings, the library, and a student dorm. My tour guide talked about academic program options, especially the sciences because that was his area of interest, and only touched upon student clubs and athletics.

By midday I was done with my prospective student tour, and I made my way to other parts of campus. My self-guided tour brought me to the LGBTQ Resource Center, which I found quite easily because a half dozen or so LGBTQ pride flags were flying on the second-floor balcony of a stark brick building. One of the first things I noticed upon entering the LGBTQ Resource Center was a flyer advertising a queer meditation group, and then a few other flyers with Interfaith Center programs. In addition, I was able to briefly meet in person with Anne, the Director, and Joy from the Interfaith Center, both of whom offered me a warm welcome to campus. Anne and Joy are key individuals in my study to learn whether and how LU supports a climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality; I discuss more about what I learned from them later in this chapter.

I navigated the rest of campus that afternoon in search of symbols, spaces, and program flyers that would signal a commitment to LGBTQ spirituality. Beyond the flyers in the LGBTQ Center, I did not find much until I arrived at the Interfaith Center. The Center is adjacent to the Catholic Center, which has a sign that says *All are Welcome* by the entry. I walked past it and up to the door of the Interfaith Center, where the rainbow *coexist* flag greeted me. Inside the building, I found a walking labyrinth (for meditation) on the floor of the main fellowship hall and another large room with a fireplace and shelves of books. These books included a wide variety of religious texts, novels, and resource books on dozens of religions and spiritualities. I also found books that affirmed the positive intersections of LGBTQ identities and spirituality with titles like *Queer Magic,* and *Queer Spiritual Spaces*.

I left campus shortly after visiting the Interfaith Center with curiosity and hope for my interviews in the days to follow. If I was a prospective student in search of a campus that fosters LGBTQ spirituality, I would want to learn more about what LU has to offer. As a researcher, I found enough evidence of support for LGBTQ spirituality that I was excited to learn more. Elements of the structural climate (e.g., the rocks with value words, the queer meditation group, and the coexist flag at the Interfaith Center) showed promise for how LU may be a place that supports LGBTQ students in their spiritual journeys, but I still needed to learn from firsthand experiences of students and staff. I wanted to know how they make meaning of LGBTQ spirituality at LU and whether and how they experience institutional support. Collectively, these data sources (structural climate data and personal stories) fill in the case of support for LGBTQ spirituality at LU. Join me now in meeting the study participants and what LGBTQ spirituality at LU means to them.

Study Participants

While the structural elements of campus climate (e.g., policies, places, programs, spiritual artifacts and symbols, etc.) provided a roadmap for the focus of my research, the people I met were the source for meaning-making and understanding the lived experiences of staff and LGBTQ students at LU. I interviewed a total of 11 people (six students and five staff). In this section, I introduce you to them in the same order I interviewed them to offer a chronological storytelling of the case of LGBTQ spirituality at LU. For the students, the introductions include how and/or why they decided to attend LU and how they describe their spiritual and/or religious identity. For the staff, I introduce them by the role they serve, how long they have been at LU, and their general perceptions of the campus climate for LGBTQ spirituality.

Joy

Joy (she/her) has been at LU since the summer of 2016 as the Director of the Interfaith Center, which is one of four different identity centers on campus (the others are the LGBTQ Resource Center, an identity center for Students of Color, and one for women and gender equity). She is a graduate alumna of LU's Higher Education and Student Affairs program, in which she earned her master's degree 20 years ago. She recalled that back then "it was pretty awful to be a queer person and hard also because I was right in that developmental place of trying to make sense of spirituality and sexuality." When she had the opportunity to return to LU in 2016, she was excited to "be the resource that I didn't full have in a really visible, strong way."

Joy sometimes feels like a "unicorn" on campus in her dual identities as a queer person and a minister because the campus culture does not outwardly embody the

coexistence of these two identities. She also finds that "spirituality feels very heteronormative here and queerness feels very secular." Over time, she hopes to reshape the discourse that divides spirituality and queerness. I discuss more on how this is unfolding at LU later in this chapter.

Sage

Sage (she/they) is a 22-year-old senior who transferred to LU from a university in the central part of the United States. They grew up in an area where their Ashkenazi Jewish identity was well-represented in the local population and then they experienced a "culture shock" at their first university because there were not many other Jewish students. They felt isolated and discouraged by this experience and ended up looking to transfer to a university that was queer and Jewish-friendly. LU, although hundreds of miles away, fit the bill and they moved across the country with hope for connection and opportunity for spiritual growth.

Connection is the word Sage most closely aligns with spirituality. She seeks "connection with others; connection with the world and your place in it." The religious doctrine and rituals of her Jewish faith are foundations of her personal spirituality, but right now she is seeking community and connection as a spiritual practice.

Anne

Anne (she/her) has been the Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center for six years and she is the predecessor to the center's founding director. There have been many changes to the Center in her tenure, including a new name, a new location, new personnel, and most recently, a shift in the types of programming the center offers. For example, Anne has forged partnerships with the Interfaith Center and other affinity groups on campus to offer a more intersectional approach to programming for LGBTQ students and the multitude of identities

they hold. In addition, Anne is instrumental in advancing policy and structural changes on campus that promote justice and equity for LGBTQ students. She has been a fierce advocate for improvements to housing accommodations for transgender students and also for collecting identity data from students so LU can be better prepared to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Anne generally perceives the climate for LGBTQ spirituality to be relatively closeted, and programs and resources to be limited. For example, she sees missed opportunities for student wellness programs to incorporate spirituality. She asserted, "[w]e don't talk about spirit; we talk about mind and body. But we don't talk about spirit. And we should be." In addition, the campus does not currently collect any data on student spirituality, and this is a point of frustration for Anne. She feels like she could be reaching out to students who are seeking an LGBTQ-friendly spiritual community, but she has no way of knowing who those students are unless they come to her.

Cal

Cal (she/they) is an 18-year-old freshman who consulted the Campus Pride Index when applying to college. She chose LU, in part, because of its reputation for being "very friendly to queer people" and for the variety of academic programs it offers. Support for spirituality was not part of her decision-making process, as she explained:

> I was raised Catholic. And by the time I was applying to colleges, I was pretty much completely disconnected from that. And I hadn't really begun to get in touch with my own form of spirituality at that point. So I wasn't really thinking about it.

Now that Cal is on campus, they have experienced a new independence to explore what spirituality means to them, beyond their Catholic roots. They describe spirituality as a

"life philosophy" that offers the purpose "to enjoy the world and to help others do the same." In fact, the phrase "life philosophy" is often preferred by Cal instead of spirituality. Cal is very curious about spirituality and open to learning new ways of making meaning and connecting to people, nature, and a divinity. In our interview, she spoke mostly about how she observes friends practice spirituality rather than describing her own practices. In part, this is because Cal is just beginning their spiritual journey as they transition from a teen living at home with a very Catholic family to a new phase of independence at LU.

Wren

Wren (they/them) is a 28-year-old, second-year graduate student. The primary reason they chose LU was because of its positive reputation for graduate school. Their former partner had also attended LU as an undergrad and really enjoyed it, so when Wren was accepted, they knew they wanted to make the move.

Spirituality is an important part of their identity and when asked what spirituality means to them, Wren thoughtfully replied:

> At its most basic sense, spirituality is just a relationship to that which is beyond me. I was raised very Protestant, Christian, in the Reformed Church of America and had maybe a more narrow view of what spirituality was and entailed. And I think the Protestant ethos is a lot around doing like, what do you do to maintain that relationship with God? What practices do you have? But now I think I no longer identify as Christian that way. But I think to me, spirituality is more about being and like, how can I embody a way of having this relationship with that which is greater than me, and sustain that relationship and nourish that part of myself?

Wren considered university support for spirituality in their decision to attend LU, and in particular they sought a university that was not religiously-affiliated but that offered opportunities for spiritual growth. They explained why:

> I went to undergrad at a small Christian liberal arts college. And the overall Christian emphasis at that place was pretty anti-support for LGBT students. A lot of the queer student groups just couldn't be funded by the institution because of a clause in the code of conduct --- that [they] believe people are made in the image of God. And that means marriage between a man and a woman. So as an undergraduate student, I felt very disillusioned with faith. I wasn't out as a queer student. But I was really interested in being a really good ally and seeking that out. But then, when I came out, I really lost a connection with Christianity. And I wasn't very religious, maybe spiritual in some kind of vague sense, but nothing that I could articulate or identify. So I think I really had that longing at the time that I was ready to go to grad school to re-identify and get in touch with what that means for myself.

Wren perceived LU to be one of the least religious campuses in the United States and they were “intrigued” by the Interfaith Center, which is where they work as a graduate assistant.

River

River (they/them) has worked at LU for seven years and holds two roles: one as a Health Educator and the other as the Mindfulness Program Coordinator. They host several mindfulness classes throughout the week, all with different foci. For example, one class is a queer and trans drop-in class, another is focused on chronic pain or illness, and another is for Students of Color. They train students to be mindfulness facilitators and they seek to foster students’ individual growth and well-being.

River did not know that LU is ranked a *Best of the Best* in the Campus Pride Index, but they also said they are not surprised because LU is in a state that has been at the "forefront of LGBTQ rights" and is "known as a place where there is safety and welcoming for queer people." In addition, River thinks LU has done a good job of having queer people represented in the ranks of faculty and staff and having policies to ensure students' chosen names are in the campus registration system.

When considering support for LGBTQ spirituality, River hesitates to say that LU is fostering a productive campus environment. They find spirituality to be a taboo topic that people do not openly discuss on campus. In their work as the Mindfulness Program Coordinator, River hopes to be a resource for LGBTQ students who want to dig deeper into spirituality.

Matty

When she was applying to graduate school, Matty (she/her), a 23-year-old first-year graduate student, prioritized finding an academic program and university that would affirm her Black racial identity and lesbian sexuality. She is a first-generation college graduate who spent the first 21 years of her life in her home state in the Midwest until she was ready to "get out" and "see anywhere else." She is not familiar with the Campus Pride Index rankings and did not consult them in her graduate school search. LU was not her first choice, but it ended up being the school that accepted her application and also offered her funding to attend.

Matty did not contemplate support for spirituality in the factors she considered in choosing to attend LU, but spirituality is an important part of her identity. She thinks of spirituality as a "guiding light" and a "divinity in life," and holds faith, service, and love as core tenets. She regularly attends a Christian church (virtually), prays, meditates, and listens

to music to practice spirituality. And, while she identifies as Christian, she is also drawn to practices of Hoodoo, African spirituality, and astrology.

Xander

Xander (he/him) is senior in the religion program, although he started his academic career at LU with a different major. As a freshman, he was failing several classes and put on academic probation when he started to have the feeling "that God was calling me to ministry." By the end of his freshman year, he switched programs to religion and after his graduation from LU he plans to enroll in seminary to become an ordained Episcopal priest.

The Campus Pride Index was not part of his decision-making process to attend LU, although he knew that LU and the state in which it resides has a reputation for being safe and welcoming for LGBTQ students. He also did not consider support for spirituality in his decision.

For Xander, spirituality is somewhat different from religion, as he explained:

> We [Christians] don't typically use the word spirituality because it's often associated with non-Abrahamic traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism - get labeled as spiritual - when Islam, Judaism, Christianity get labeled as religion.

Because of his understanding of spirituality and religion, Xander tends to use the word religious to describe his own identity and journey instead of spiritual/ity. Still, he holds value in the term spirituality and defines it as an "internal processes of transformation."

Dana

Dana (she/her) is an 18-year-old freshman who came to LU for its *Best of the Best* Campus Pride Index ranking and because she could find medical providers in-state that accepted her dad's out-of-state health insurance. Dana is a trans woman and being able to

continue medical transition procedures while she is in college is critically important to her. Moving out of state was also a main factor for where she chose to attend college because of anti-trans legislation that recently passed in her home state.

Support for spirituality was not a consideration in Dana's decision-making process as she is now just beginning to explore what spirituality means to her. She was not raised in any religious tradition, for which she feels thankful, but now seeks a connection to the wider community and to the earth. She understands the term spirituality to mean "in connection with a soul," and "spirituality is meant to either enhance or better your soul or yourself."

Jude

Jude (he/him) has worked as a counselor/psychotherapist at LU since 2001, although the first few years were in a part-time or per diem capacity. He identifies as Catholic, although he acknowledges professional boundaries that prohibit him from discussing faith with students.

Jude sees LU as a safe and welcoming campus for LGBTQ students and reflected on the last 20 years of working with students:

> Have I ever had a student in my office say that a major problem was coming out at LU? No, no. So usually when it comes up, it's quite matter of fact; it's just like, this is me. And I'd almost go as far as to say it often doesn't even come up.

On the contrary, he says that LGBTQ spirituality, and even spirituality more generally, is a "blind spot" for LU. Beyond Joy and the Interfaith Center, Jude does not see a symbiotic relationship between queer and spiritual identities on campus. He is eager, nonetheless, to be a resource for LGBTQ students who are wrestling with issues of faith and spirituality and knows he can turn to Joy and Anne for wraparound student support.

Saleem

Saleem (he/him) has served LU since 2021 as a senior administrator for diversity, equity, and inclusion. He sees his role as a collaborator in the work to foster a culture of belonging, and he is "proud of our broad culture of commitment to inclusion of LGBTQ students and identities." The Interfaith Center and LGBTQ Resource Center fall under his supervision on the university's organizational chart, and he believes that an intersectional approach to supporting students provides the richest opportunities for growth and personal exploration. He offered this reflection about the Interfaith Center:

> Since I've arrived [to LU], I've found [the Interfaith Center] to be an LGBTQ-affirming space and it's the way they work with the LGBTQ Resource Center and our other identity centers with an intersectional lens that conveys to our students and other community members that it is a space for LGBTQ-identified individuals to reflect and question and navigate and explore their religious or spiritual identity, or lack thereof.

Saleem sees LU as being "a bit further along" than other public institutions in fostering LGBTQ spirituality but also knows that there is "plenty of work to do still." He talked about how religion and spirituality are going to be centered in an upcoming retreat for student affairs staff:

> …we're going to be talking about the role religion and spirituality plays in our students' identities. And whenever we present that kind of content, because of the way our Interfaith Center works here at LU, we make that clear that that's within the context of creating LGBTQ affirming spaces as related to religious and spiritual identity…because I do think that in our culture that is very, overwhelmingly

> politically progressive and social justice-minded. A lot of times there's strong points of view about religion and spirituality in relationship to that. And maybe not always a recognition of the impact that has on LGBTQ students who want to be able to reconcile their religious and spiritual identity in relationship to their LGBTQ identity.

Key Participant Takeaways

The 11 study participants were critical contributors to understand how individuals experience inclusion of and support for LGBTQ spirituality at LU. Within the first few interviews, I noted that participants found LU to be a place that is safe and supportive for people who hold LGBTQ identities, and this finding ended up being a common thread throughout all the interviews. Conversely, support for spirituality was less evident, and when it was mentioned, the people and places who provided support were varied and disconnected. For example, Cal found support with her friends on campus, but not with any particular resource or person on campus, and she had not heard of the Interfaith Center until our interview. On the other hand, Wren spoke at length about the centrality of the Interfaith Center in her spiritual journeying at LU and the meaningful relationship she has with Joy. These experiences, along with other detailed reflections, are discussed in the next section of this chapter, which focuses on three emergent themes. These three themes conclude the story of whether and how LU fosters an environment that supports LGBTQ spirituality by connecting sources of data across interviews, observations, and structural climate elements.

The themes are: 1) *Closeted Spirituality,* 2) *Blind Spots*[2]*, and* 3) *Pockets of Support: Places and People*.

Themes

The case of whether and how LU fosters an environment that supports LGBTQ spirituality is as complex and nuanced as understanding spirituality itself; however, three key themes emerged at the end of my journey at LU. The first two, *Closeted Spirituality* and *Blind Spots,* point to areas in which LU can improve its commitment to supporting LGBTQ spirituality. The third theme, *Pocks of Support: Places and People* highlights promising practices and examples of people and places that are providing spiritual care and support for the LGBTQ student participants in this study. In the sections to follow, I detail each theme with triangulated data from documents, physical artifacts, archival materials, observations, and interviews.

Closeted Spirituality

I describe the first theme that emerged from my research as *Closeted Spirituality* and it highlights the ways spirituality is hidden or hard to find in the broader campus climate for LGBTQ students at LU. Nearly all the participants in my research – both students and staff – talked about the negative or deficit-oriented discourse they experience related to spirituality. For example, when thinking about her spiritual experiences on campus, Matty initially struggled to capture her feelings in words. Eventually, she was able to offer this heartfelt and vulnerable reflection:

[2] I used the phrase blind spots to describe my second theme because it is the exact phrase used by one of my study participants. While it is used as a metaphor, I also acknowledge that it may be perceived as ableist language because the theme does not involve vision impairment.

> I feel like my faith, my spiritual identity, is very hard. And I'll find myself in spaces, in the way that politics are going, it's becoming this like, not taboo to be Christian because I don't wanna sound like a Republican, but like, there's this tension that I know exists in my faith and with my identities. And so a lot of times, I'll be in spaces where people are like, 'Oh, you practice this, that and the third – that's stupid'. Or like, 'You do this? Like, that's bad or that practice is demons'.... And it's like, oh, okay, so there's not really a lot of spaces here that I'm like oh yay, I feel so celebrated.

Contributing to the feelings of isolation that Matty experiences is the subversive and sometimes blatant criticism of spirituality and religion. Several of the participants in my study said that LU is not a place that invites conversations about spirituality and religion and the campus strongly holds secular values. These values come from the public identity of the campus, the progressive, mostly democratic state in which the university resides, and the university's espoused commitment to innovation, justice, and responsibility. Among the staff I interviewed, River described: "It seems to be like there's a coming-out process of like, people being like, 'I don't want this to seem woo-woo, but I'm like, having this spiritual thing.'" Similarly, while Jude talked openly with me about his Catholic faith, he feels "closeted" on campus because of the lack of spiritual and religious acceptance at LU. For Joy, even in her role in the Interfaith Center, she believes "it is provocative in this environment to talk about religion at all."

In alignment with my conversations with River, Jude, and Joy, Matty experiences a hesitancy to have dialogue around religion and spirituality on campus. More broadly, she asserted that, "we invite diversity into how we think about everything in higher ed except for religion and spirituality." She questioned why "we don't consider religion or spirituality a

core identity like we would race?" and gave a consequential example of how this is displayed at LU:

> You wouldn't ever be like, 'don't be Black in here'. But like, you also wouldn't have a problem. But people will go to Jewish students and be like, 'Oh, don't be too Jewish', you know, people will go to Muslim students and like, 'don't say a lot', and so I think there's a lack of really needed conversation. So there's this like, I don't know, lack of maybe not even discourse, but just like acknowledgment, or like, I'll even hear people - my colleagues in the program - be like 'oh if you're a person of faith in 2023, that's dumb.' It's like, you're gonna have students of faith, that's just not gonna go away. And so I think there's a way to have a critical spirituality, but I feel like people lean in this direction of like, 'oh, faith doesn't need to be critical.' I think that's a very dangerous place to be.

This quote from Matty speaks to a culture on campus that pushes faith and spirituality into the closet. Layered within closeted spirituality are intersections of identities, including race, gender, and sexual orientation. While LU is praised for its inclusive climate for a variety of genders and sexual orientations, it fails to engage in critical discourse that acknowledges the complexities of how gender, sexual orientation, race, and spirituality intersect. As a result, LU generally seems to have a one-dimensional approach to identity in which queerness is seen as secular and separate from spirituality (recall Joy's reflection on being seen first as a queer person and then only secondarily as a minister). However, Joy also talked about opportunities for 'a-ha!' moments for people to see that LGBTQ identities and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. For example, she shared:

> We had a student newspaper reporter coming in… she was just like, wait, wait, you're, wait, you're a lesbian? And, and you're also like, [a minister]? Her mind was blown. And just last week I had a student from another college wanting to talk to me because they were just so sure that there was there's no connection between religion and LGBT in an affirming way. And then they're so surprised, right?

The closeted nature of spirituality at LU, especially for people who identify as LGBTQ, means that experiences like the one Joy described are commonplace. Spiritual and LGBTQ identities do indeed coexist, but according to the participants in my study, LU has yet to foster a campus climate that affirms spirituality as a core identity among its community. Further, the culture at LU lacks a critical understanding of spirituality as Matty discussed, and as a result, there are few places where students and staff feel affirmed in all of their identities. Simply put, LU has many 'blind spots' that lead to missed opportunities to foster LGBTQ spirituality. I discuss those blind spots next.

Blind Spots

In thinking about how to categorize this second theme, I wrestled with different illustrations to capture the absence of programs, resources, and people that take a critical approach to understanding intersections of gender, sexual orientation, race, and spirituality. Then, I recalled Jude's comment that LU has a "blind spot" when it comes to LGBTQ spirituality. The more time I spent analyzing data, I found there are actually a few significant blind spots in the climate for LGBTQ spirituality and in the ways LU attempts to foster a productive spiritual environment. These metaphorical blind spots are shortcomings that may be overcome by exploring different viewpoints, or by removing barriers that contribute to obstructed views. This is especially evident in the stark separation of secular views from

spiritual views. I unpack this separation in the second blind spot, which I call the *When-Secular-Meets-Spirituality* blind spot. First, however, I discuss the most obvious blind spot, the *Intersecting Identities* blind spot, which signals the absence of an intersectional approach to supporting students in their multiple identities.

Intersecting Identities Blind Spot. Aside from the exemplary work of Joy and Anne (to be detailed in the third theme), I did not find widespread evidence that LU takes an intersectional approach to understanding and supporting identities, especially when considering racial, LGBTQ, and spiritual identities. Although Saleem praised Joy for approaching her work with an intersectional lens, the more apparent approach to fostering a diverse and inclusive campus environment leans toward identity siloes rather than toward identity intersections. For example, the division of diversity, equity, and inclusion outwardly celebrates its four different identity centers, but it does not mention identity intersections or the concept of intersectionality at all on their webpage, and the latest action plan for inclusive excellence only mentions the concept of identity intersections twice (in descriptions of the women's center and a professional development center for faculty).

The concept of intersectionality, as coined by critical race feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), focuses on the interlocking, systematic oppression faced by individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities, such as Women of Color. For example, Black women face oppression and discrimination because of two marginalized identities (race and gender). For Matty, layers of oppression stem from her gender, race, and spiritual identities (Christian and Hoodoo). She perceives a lack of critical discourse around identity intersectionality, which she says has made finding a spiritual community at LU difficult. She described:

> I find a lot people who...Yeah, I guess it is kind of performative spirituality in this way of like, well, 'my God works for me'. And like, if someone's down bad and you're not having any critical lens, or any genuine compassion for people who are really struggling. And I think that's been something that has also made me hesitant find a spiritual community here. Because I find it so openly, like, people were just like, 'oh, well there's no reason to talk about race in church', or like, 'there's no reason to talk about LGBTQ identities', or 'if you're really spiritual, then you should transcend labels'… and shit like that. Like, no, that's just wrong. You're wrong. That's not true.

As the only Black participant in my research, Matty's experiences are important to emphasize. While they cannot (and should not) be used to generalize the experiences of other Black LGBTQ students at LU, Matty's experiences offer critical insights into what LU could be like for Black, lesbian graduate students like her. Matty spoke candidly about what she called "performative spirituality," which she described as an outward display of spirituality that is self-centered and that lacks apparent values of community, care, and compassion. She expected to find a sense of spiritual belonging at the identity center for Students of Color, but instead found a lack of affirmation of all of her identities – a Black, queer, spiritual graduate student. At LU, she may be seen for any one or two of these pieces of her identity, but there is not anywhere on campus that she feels wholly accepted for who she is, which contrasts with the safety and acceptance felt by Dana, a white-passing LGBTQ student. In Dana's college search, she "tried to find a place where I could feel like I could be myself all the time. And I feel like LU has been that place."

Matty's experiences suggest that LU misses the mark in demonstrating institutional commitment to supporting students in their multiple identities. Jude, who has worked in the counseling center at LU for over 20 years, offered a longitudinal perspective on this matter. He reflected on how LU has only sporadically addressed many issues of diversity. He named several identity groups, including spirituality, as areas in which he believes LU can improve its approach to foster a safe and welcoming campus environment. Notably, he did not mention that social identities intersect, and that students and staff hold multiple identities:

> When I think of all the issues of diversity that we've tried to talk about in 20 years, there's others that I think we haven't done great on - socio economic, class, but every once in a while we've touched upon it. We talk about race all the time, as bad as we are at it…we talk about it all the time. Sexuality stuff, we certainly have talked about, but it's almost like maybe we are good enough at it. I mean, we've always got blind spots. But religion and spirituality? Almost never.

He also went on to talk about the lack of religious organizations on campus, and the unwillingness of mainline Christian denominations to reconsider how they serve a young, vibrant student body. These denominations have blind spots, too, in their reluctance to adapt to the spirituality(ies) of college-age students and an expansive acceptance of gender and sexual identities. Jude teared up as he lamented:

> I think our society is abandoning our young people, as far as real emotional connection, real emotional support. I was in the Episcopal Church and someone said to me, 'oh, yeah, we used to be up on campus'. And I was like, 'and why aren't we anymore?' And I actually kind of concluded -- and no one said this to me -- but they're not quite sure they have enough to offer, which is a little unsettling. If you're

> worshiping within a denomination and you work with young people like I do…[long pause] like, huh, the domination I'm worshiping within doesn't think the students I sit with every day could get enough from them.

Jude wishes that mainline Christian denominations and other religious groups on campus would take a more active approach to get to know the current generation of college students. He is frustrated with the reluctance to adapt and respond to the spiritual needs of a largely queer and progressive student body.

Anne also recognized LU's intersecting identities blind spot as she explained the university's approach to health and wellness:

> When we talk about wellness for our students, we don't talk about spirit; we talk about mind and body. But we don't talk about spirit. And we should be. And to think about visuals on a lot of campuses, right? There's banners and things going on. Like, we don't have that kind of visual representation anywhere. So we don't have it. We're not doing that in a way that reflects our queer and trans communities, with or without, their faith identities being a part of it.

In this quote, Anne illustrates how even health and wellness at LU neglects supporting students in a holistic way that is inclusive of mind, body, *and* spirit. She believes that such a narrow approach contributes to an inadequate spiritual environment for LGBTQ students.

Yet, despite the lack of inclusion of spirituality in student support offices like health and wellness, there is evidence of LGBTQ spiritual practices on campus. Sometimes these practices are not connected to a campus resource or to a specific faith or religious tradition. For example, as noted earlier, Dana was one participant who was not raised in a religious tradition. Of her need for spirituality, she reflected:

> I do also kind of feel a need to connect with my wider community. And I see that more through like, more of either like a secular… or a what's the word… like connection to the earth? Moreso than, like, a religious doctrine or a higher power.

Dana practices spirituality in "feeling myself in nature" and in "sitting and looking out on the scenery." She recalled being a kid and walking the track during recess and contemplating questions about how she was connected to the earth. Yet, she also does not have anyone on campus with whom she can discuss spirituality, as she said, "I think it's just something kind of weird to talk about… or not necessarily, like, I feel comfortable talking about it. I don't feel comfortable necessarily going into deep discussion with it."

As an institution, LU does not readily embrace the possibility that spirituality and secular values co-exist, although Dana's understanding of her personal spirituality embodies this secular approach. This blind spot is discussed next, and while it addresses the separation of spirituality and secular values on campus, it also challenges the belief that students at LU are not leaning into spirituality.

When-Secular-Meets-Spirituality Blind Spot. This second blind spot adds a plot twist to the separation of spirituality and secular values at LU. I call this the "When-Secular-Meets-Spirituality" blind spot and it focuses on some of the contradictions I experienced on campus, especially in the context of a spiritual/secular dichotomy. Thinking back to my first impressions during the campus tour, I noted the clearly espoused values of community, connection, and inclusion. In addition, throughout campus, there are grassy knolls where students laid out on the ground to soak in the sunshine, and a patch of trees across from the Interfaith Center had at least a dozen hammocks where students listened to music, read, or just relaxed in nature. Programs like yoga and the queer meditation circle are well-attended,

and the campus takes an active approach to caring for the environment and promoting sustainable solutions. Thinking back to Jastrzębski's (2022) expansive definition of spirituality in chapter two, all of these examples can be described as spiritual experiences and spiritual practices, but they are not readily labeled as such at LU.

At LU, opportunities to embrace spirituality are evident throughout campus, but the culture leans so heavily toward its understanding of secularism that the opportunities are often missed. For example, Jude praised River and her work in connecting students to mindfulness and yoga practices, but he also referred to these practices as "adjacent to spirituality". These missed opportunities are the result of a blind spot that fails to recognize that secularism and spirituality can coexist, much like LGBTQ identities and spirituality. Recalling that spirituality is an expansive concept that extends beyond organized religion to include things like connecting with others and with nature, LU offers a pristine setting to foster a secular spirituality in its commitment to sustainability, environmental justice, and diversity and inclusion.

For the students I interviewed, time in nature and caring for plants and animals was a common spiritual practice. Wren talked about repotting plants as spiritual renewal, and how filling their birdfeeders helps them feel "spiritually in tune." For Cal, taking care of plants and watching them grow feels spiritual, especially when they bring back life from dying roots. And for Dana, sitting in the warm sun on a campus bench where she can draw feels "beautiful", "meditative", and "spiritual." Productive spiritual encounters are happening on campus for LGBTQ students, but they are overlooked in the narrowly secular climate.

Pockets of Support: Places

Perhaps the most common thread throughout my time at LU was that there is not *actually* a common thread that connects support for LGBTQ spirituality across the campus. Where resources for LGBTQ spirituality exist, there are often missed opportunities to collaborate and expand the breadth and depth of support. I met with staff from the Mindfulness Program, the Interfaith Center, the LGBTQ Resource Center, and the Counseling Center, and while they all could be working in tandem to support LGBTQ spirituality, they more often operate independently of each other. For example, Jude is thrilled to have Joy as a spiritual resource on campus, but he rarely works with her to provide wraparound support for LGBTQ students. Similarly, River is aware of Joy, but she is not familiar with specific programs offered by the Interfaith Center. Even geographically, the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Interfaith Center, and the Center for Counseling and Health are all located in separate buildings across campus.

At LU, there are pockets of institutional support for LGBTQ spirituality, but if a student is not looking for them, they can be easily missed. In my own research, I missed some of the religious and spiritual places and student organizations that are inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ identities too. Their webpages do not include any statements of welcome or affirmation of LGBTQ students, and there are not rainbow symbols of pride apparent in their spaces on campus. For example, Chi Alpha, which Xander discussed at length, does not indicate any acceptance of LGBTQ students in their charter or on their club webpage. I only learned of the affirming role of Chi Alpha in supporting LGBTQ spirituality when I met with Xander. In this section, I highlight two programmatic/organizational pockets of support for LGBTQ spirituality (the Interfaith Center and religiously-affiliated spaces) and

a third pocket of support: student-created spaces. Then, I discuss how people and relationships are essential to fostering LGBTQ – perhaps more than any university program, religious affiliate, or resource center on campus.

The Interfaith Center. Several study participants discussed the Interfaith Center as a place where LGBTQ students can go to find affirmation of their multiple identities and a central place to explore personal spirituality. Wren, who is both a student and graduate assistant at the Center, explained its importance:

> No matter what you believe, or what your spiritual ethos, the goal of the Interfaith Center is to just encourage dialogue and create space for people to feel like they can embody and explore whatever spirituality they have and feel safe in the company of others.

To Wren's point of creating space for safety and exploration, all programs at the Interfaith Center begin with an assertion of inclusion called *We in this Room*. It is read aloud and states:

- *We in this room are gathered on colonized land, stolen from first nations people who are continuing to fight for their rights.*
- *We in this room may be documented or undocumented.*
- *We in this room come from various ethnic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as different experiences.*
- *We in this room may identify as gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questions, or none of the above.*
- *We in this room have identities that are invisible.*

- *We in this room may be entering the conversation with experiences of hurt and oppression because of our identities.*
- *We in this room are at various stages of understanding our privilege and oppression.*
- *We in this room are at various stages in becoming better communicators.*
- *We in this room will each take something different from this experience, something applying to our own lives and the decisions we make.*
- *We in this room understand we will likely learn something new about ourselves by listening to one another.*

The power of the *We in this Room* declaration is palpable, and I experienced its impact when I attended the Center's dinner and dialogue event. The monthly dinner and dialogue series brings together people from different religious, spiritual, philosophical perspectives to talk about a particular theme. In spring 2023, the theme was *revolutionary love*, which, according to Joy, "invites folks to love oneself, love others, and even one's opponents, to change the world." We stood in a circle in the main fellowship hall of the Interfaith Center and people took turns reading the statements, each person speaking with confidence and emphasizing the different identities we hold. In that moment, I was able to experience the safety, welcome, and support that Joy and the Interfaith Center foster to support LGBTQ spirituality. I felt trust, assurance, and vulnerability; many of the students I met at the event told me they felt the same way, using words like "grateful," "safe," and "comfortable" to describe their experience.

A key piece of evidence of the productive environment fostered by the Interfaith Center came during the dinner and dialogue event. At least a dozen of the students in attendance identified as LGBTQ and they wholly participated in the program, sharing

personal experiences and the ways they found joy in their lives. I interacted with Cal and Wren at the event too, and it was Cal's first visit to the Interfaith Center. She told me that she was really glad that she came and that she planned to continue to participate in other programs offered by the Interfaith Center. At that moment, I observed how productive the Interfaith Center can be in fostering an environment that supports LGBTQ spirituality.

There are a host of other programs and events that Joy and the staff at the Interfaith Center offer, such as workshops that "equip and empower" the LU student community to engage in dialogue and learn about spirituality and pluralism. Joy explained why fostering a culture of pluralism is important:

> We talk about the difference between diversity and pluralism. Diversity is just a fact, right? We're coming from these different identities and cultural backgrounds and perspectives. But pluralism, according to Diana Eck, is an achievement.

Pluralism takes work and learning, and an appreciation for how different identities coexist. To embrace pluralism, the Interfaith Center helps students to articulate core values and to learn how to listen deeply to learn the values of others. Joy believes that through this engagement students learn more about themselves while also creating space for others.

Joy is committed to providing space for LGBTQ students to explore the expansive and complex manifestations of personal spirituality. She described:

> We really talk about spirituality as meaning-making, and all of us are doing that, right? So, all of us trying to answer those questions of 'Who am I? Why am I here and what is my connection to that which is beyond me?' And so the resources we may use to wrestle with those questions may be religious, right? Like, story, symbol, community; they may be philosophical, like humanism. Whether or not there's a

> divinity - irrelevant, right? - or I'm wrestling with it. But I know that my survival is tied up with yours. And so that's going to shape how I spend my time and my energy and how I relate. Or I look outside and I'm like, okay, somehow, things are born, and they grow and they die, or either come back and feed what's next, or come back on its own.

Other annual events include an interfaith pride campus event, and Joy leads an interfaith student leadership retreat where students "build community, develop skills for facilitating interfaith conversations, and reflect on [your own and others'] religious and philosophical worldviews." The Center also hosts a winter service and a festival of light and dark that celebrates different religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions and their rituals as the seasons transition from fall to winter.

Finally, the Interfaith Center also stands out for its expansive inclusion of students from different spiritual backgrounds and LGBTQ identities. Wren reflected on conversations she has had at the Interfaith Center about the complexity of identity intersections and faith. They gave an example of a conversation related to their trans identity and Christianity:

> I think being trans is really specifically an interesting thing with Christianity, because it's one of the only marginalized identities that people will just fully negate the existence of, you know, like, you can be sexist, but you can't say that women aren't real. But yeah, to be trans is interesting because people really do say like, "Well, that's just like, that's not even a real way of being." And it's like, how can you be who you are, and know who you are, and live in a community that doesn't even see you or recognize you? Yeah, I've been able to have a lot of those great conversations here.

Whether through formal programs like the dinner and dialogue event, or celebrations of different spiritualities, or one-on-one conversations with Joy, the Interfaith Center is an integral pocket of support for LGBTQ students. The space, filled with symbols of at least a dozen faiths and spiritualities and a robust library of resources, layered with the warmth and welcome provided by Joy and her staff, exemplifies a supportive environment for fostering LGBTQ spirituality.

Religiously-Affiliated Spaces. Two religiously-affiliated spaces were talked about by study participants: Chi Alpha and Hillel. At the national level, Chi Alpha Campus Ministries is an Assemblies of God student group that appeals to conservative evangelical Christian theologies, including beliefs that homosexuality is a sin and marriage is the union between one man and one woman (Assemblies of God, 2014). Yet for Xander, the Chi Alpha chapter at LU has been impactful for his spiritual growth. When pressed about the exclusionary beliefs of Chi Alpha as a national organization, Xander emphasized that he has had "no issues" being fully accepted in the LU chapter of Chi Alpha, including his trans identity.

At Chi Alpha, Xander finds opportunities to engage in complex and provocative dialogue around questions of Christian faith and spirituality. He attends worship and Bible studies throughout the week, and he shared what he takes away from these experiences:

> I really like the discussion aspects. Because the questions are pretty open-ended, based off of whatever we were talking about before. And it's good to hear other people's opinions back because it's not, like, a black and white. Religion is complicated. Spirituality is complicated. People will have very different personal experiences with these types of things.

Xander's openness to engage with people who have different experiences and opinions than him fosters provocative spiritual encounters. He talked about a time on a trip with Chi Alpha that helped him unpack personal struggles with his faith. He said:

> Okay, if God is so good, why are Christians so awful? Not all of them, obviously, but like, I'll hear things in the news, like, the Christian fascism, Christian nationalism, and I'm like, why is this a thing? Like, why are there people who confess that they believe this but go so against everything that Jesus said? So that's been hard for me, but that trip really reaffirmed my faith. So that was helpful.

These two experiences signal productive and provocative opportunities for LGBTQ students like Xander to grapple with their personal spirituality. Xander asked some challenging questions about people who claim to align with his Christian faith, and Chi Alpha has been an important place for him to explore the answers.

I learned from Sage that Hillel, a Jewish student organization with branches at over 800 colleges and universities in Canada, Israel, and the United States, is especially supportive of LGBTQ identities and in helping students explore intersections of identities and the Jewish faith. For Sage, Hillel at LU has been hugely influential in providing productive encounters for them to grow in both their queer and spiritual identities. They described the structural climate elements that signal to them that they are wholly accepted, such as pride flags with Jewish stars and staff who have pronouns on name tags. They also reflected:

> When I went on birthright last summer with Hillel, genuinely, it's like 90% of the people there were queer in one way or another. So I don't know if it's just kind of a coincidence or what have you, but there has always been a strong queer presence within Hillel.

Sage attributes the strong sense of belonging she feels to the representation of people who are both queer and Jewish at Hillel. Through Hillel, she finds a community of friends to talk with about spirituality, and programs that invite dialogue about the intersections of LGBTQ and Jewish identities. For example, Hillel offers 10 – 12 week learning retreats to explore different contemporary topics or existential types of questions and explore answers in Jewish texts. One of these retreats focused on sex, love, and romance while another sought to answer big questions, like "What's my place in the world?" Sage has participated in these retreats and values the way they explore questions about how to connect Jewish texts to contemporary life. In her own words, "How can we bring this [Jewish texts] into modernity? How can we apply this to a 2023 college student's life?"

Representation is a foundational component of the structural climate for LGBTQ spirituality that fosters a safe and inviting environment for students like Sage and Xander to challenge traditional interpretations of religious texts. The inclusion of programs that encourage intersectional dialogue is also productive for LGBTQ students to make meaning of their personal spirituality.

Student-Created Spaces. In addition to formal institutional spaces like the Interfaith Center, Chi Alpha, and Hillel, students in this study also created their own spaces to practice spirituality. For example, Cal finds her dorm room to be the place where she feels safest to have conversations with her friends about spirituality. Wren emphasized time in nature and in caring for plants. As noted, they especially find spiritual connection in repotting plants and in filling their bird feeders. And Dana described a place on campus where she creates a spiritual refuge: "There's a fountain and a bunch of benches and just to sit down there sometimes and either draw, or just like, be in the moment with everything around. It's just so beautiful."

For Matty, however, creating a safe space to discuss and practice spirituality has been difficult. Recalling that she does not have anywhere on campus where she feels affirmed in all of her identities, she also experiences isolation in her search for spiritual connection. She reflected:

> I have a couple of friends who sometimes I'll find I have pockets of stuff [in common with] because I do identify with multiple things. And so sometimes I'll find friends who are more tightly tied to one thing and so I think we can talk from that direction. Like, tarot and astrology are like sort of tight and so I have friends who read tarot and I will talk from that lens or like, but yeah, I don't really have very deep....I take it back... I do have friends who are spiritual in other religions like Muslim friends, Jewish friends. Having certain guidelines for faith do match up in a lot of ways. But definitely not places where I'm like, 'here's what I genuinely believe'. We aren't having conversations like that.

While Matty longs for a connection with others to talk about questions of faith and spirituality, she creates moments for spiritual practice at home by praying, listening to music, meditating, reading the Bible, journaling, and attending church virtually on Sunday mornings. Even with church, however, she said, "I really do like church. It's the people in it that really, that's where it gets dicey."

Physical spaces are certainly important for fostering spirituality, but when participants in this study talked about people, I could see a deeper emotional response to whether and how relationships and personal connections supported their spirituality. At times, the emotional response was disappointment and frustration, like in Matty's experience

at church. At other times, people provided key pockets of support for productive and provocative conversations. These examples are discussed next.

Pockets of Support: People

While safe and affirming physical spaces are important for fostering LGBTQ spirituality, students in this study generally emphasized people and relationships as the most supportive in their spiritual journeys. For example, Xander, who encountered productive and provocative experiences in Chi Alpha, said there are not any other places on campus where he felt he could engage in deep and reflective conversations about the intersections of religion, spirituality, and LGBTQ identities. The one person on campus with whom he felt the most comfortable speaking was his academic advisor, who recently retired from LU. She helped him discern his personal beliefs and values. She also helped him navigate a challenging time in his life. He explained:

> We've talked about my spiritual journey of going back to church and how I got sick. I have lots of medical complications, chronic pain since I was 10. Now I have issues with my liver, like, all this stuff. And that was really hard for me. So then I was asking the existential questions of like, 'Is this it? Am I just gonna suffer for the rest of my life?' And that's what started bringing me back. So we talked about that a lot and about her experiences because she coincidentally was also Catholic and then became Episcopal because of the Episcopal Church's liberal viewpoints on things like queerness.

It is not especially surprising that relationships are key sources of support since most of the students who participated in this study described spirituality using words like *connection* and *community*. For Xander, the strongest connection was with his academic

advisor; for Dana and Cal, their friends and partners were the primary source to engage in spiritual dialogue and to ask meaning-making questions about spirituality. Notably, the people with whom Dana and Cal find a spiritual connection are not directly tied to LU or any LU-sponsored program. Dana shared that she admires her partner's spirituality and,

> I think it's really beautiful how they see the world and how they see nature, and that's something that aligns with me a lot. So I like learning from them about how they perceive the world.

For Cal, spirituality is a new, confusing, and exciting journey, and they will often ask questions of their friends. Two of Cal's friends practice witchcraft, one is Jewish, and another is Catholic, so they feel like they can learn a variety of perspectives to shape their own meaning of spirituality. In addition, at the time of their interview, Cal was unaware of the Interfaith Center or the work of Joy and her staff in fostering LGBTQ spirituality. Cal actually ended up attending a dinner and dialogue event because Wren introduced her to the Interfaith Center and Joy during my week of fieldwork on campus.

While all of the staff with whom I met are interested in fostering LGBTQ spirituality, only two – Joy and Anne – were mentioned by name by students in my study; not only were Joy and Anne mentioned by students, they also emerged as key advocates, allies, and mentors for LGBTQ students and LGBTQ spirituality among their colleagues.

Joy and Anne. According to study participants, Joy and Anne set a remarkable example of what it means to be productive and collaborative in finding ways to invite LGBTQ students into conversations about faith and spirituality. For example, in the recent past, Joy and Anne brought a speaker to campus to discuss intersections of spirituality and LGBTQ identities. Anne reflected on how this speaker impacted LGBTQ students:

> We hosted someone who was talking about that intersection -- proudly, a person talking about their faith tradition and their queer identity. And then students are like, "Oh, I didn't know that those things could coexist," or like, "I've never met anyone," or they share a story about harm in their faith community. And they just assumed that that's how it was gonna be; they haven't explored or hadn't encountered an affirming tradition or a positive experience. So it just shifts their thinking about it, and we start hearing them as they process like, oh, "new ideas, new possibility models for me."

From a student's perspective, Wren appreciates the commitment of Joy and Anne to invite speakers to campus who proclaim that spirituality is a source of joy and strength for LGBTQ people, and Wren is actively seeking dialogue that is grounded in spirituality. In my interview with Wren, they raised questions like: "Where does our source of joy come from? How do we express gratitude? How can we incorporate gratitude practices into our lives?" For Wren, these questions can be answered by exploring spirituality and engaging in dialogue with Joy.

Joy's presence on campus as a queer clergy person is critical to signaling that LGBTQ and spiritual identities are not mutually exclusive. Joy finds that often she is seen by students in her queer identity first, and then they see her in her role as a spiritual leader. She described:

> [I am] trying to be visible as that queer religious presence because that intersection [is important]. I started using the honorific of *Reverend* Joy just because it was not being seen or recognized, even for my supervisor or the people I work with. I'll be read as queer, but need to use the Rev. to signal the spirit.

While this may not seem especially important, for LGBTQ students who arrive on campus with religious trauma, they may not know there are other ways of being spiritual that welcome and affirm them in all of their identities. Joy shows them that another path for spirituality is possible. Recall Hurtado et al.'s (2008) campus climate research that was discussed in chapter two; the structural dimension includes structural diversity, or the presence of previously underrepresented groups. Joy is the representation of queerness and spirituality at LU. As Wren stated, having Joy on campus is "special and beautiful."

Anne also outwardly embodies intersections of queerness and spirituality and engages in conversations with LGBTQ students who are grappling with questions of faith. In particular, Anne talked about questions queer Jewish students have asked her, such as "Can you believe in queer liberation and be pro-Israel?" and "How can you be a queer person on campus who doesn't feel supportive of Israel?" In the context of these two questions, Anne said, "There's been a lot of tension between students who are supportive of Palestine and students who are very pro-Israel, and that has become a deeply divided, entrenched binary." Anne recognizes how important it is for students to be able to come to her with difficult and deeply personal questions of faith and spirituality and works to build relationships and trust so students can "explore those deeper things" with her.

While Anne and Joy are sources of support and people with whom some LGBTQ students in this study feel they can discuss questions of faith and spirituality, they are also regarded as key leaders in fostering LGBTQ spirituality by their colleagues. For example, River praised Anne for:

> …a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff that, if you're not within the [LGBTQ] community, you wouldn't necessarily see or know how important it is. There's a lot of things that

> Anne and other allies on campus have done to get to the details of things that really actually matter, and they're not just performative.

An example of this behind-the-scenes work is an ongoing petition for LU to collect identity information on incoming students, including spiritual and/or religious beliefs. Anne and Joy are both instrumental in this work and they see it as especially valuable to be able to proactively reach out to LGBTQ students who indicate that spirituality is important to them. Without this information, Anne and Joy have no way of knowing who may need or want opportunities for spiritual growth and support.

Jude also credits the work of Joy for making the Interfaith Center "explicitly LGBTQ-friendly" and he brings LGBTQ students there who raise questions of faith and spirituality in his counseling sessions. And Saleem, who is at the helm of diversity and inclusion at LU, immediately spoke about Joy and Anne and their respective centers when asked about how LU fosters LGBTQ spirituality. He described:

> I've found [the Interfaith Center] to be an LGBTQ-affirming space. And it's the way [Joy] works with the LGBTQ Center and our other identity centers with an intersectional lens that really conveys to our students and other community members that there is a space for LGBTQ-identified individuals to reflect and question and navigate and explore their religious or spiritual identity.

Indeed, Joy and Anne are the foundation of spiritual life at LU, and their work is recognized, appreciated, and invaluable for students and staff who seek to make LU a campus that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

A Brief Reflection on the Findings

In this chapter, I documented the structural, psychological, and behavioral climate elements and the ways they contribute to an environment that fosters (and at times fails to foster) LGBTQ spirituality. The word *potential* keeps coming to mind, and it begins to describe my conclusions of my research. LU demonstrates several areas in which there is *potential* to foster LGBTQ spirituality. These areas include pockets of support in people, places, and programs, as well as outward signs of social justice and inclusion in student recruitment materials and in espoused university values. Indeed, there are also examples of productive and provocative student experiences that support LGBTQ spiritual growth, such as Wren's relationship with Joy and the programs of the Interfaith Center, Sage's participation in Hillel, and Xander's conversations with his peers in Chi Alpha. Still, the greater takeaway is that LU is poised to boldly assert its commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality even though the campus culture does not readily recognize the centrality of spirituality in the lives of many of LU's LGBTQ students.

In the fifth and final chapter of this dissertation, I extend the discussion of my findings to respond to my research questions, to use the lessons learned in this research to recommend ways LU and other universities can improve efforts to foster LGBTQ spirituality, and to offer directions for future research. In the words of Matty, "you're gonna have students of faith, that's just not gonna go away," so now is the time to improve how colleges and universities foster an environment that supports spirituality, especially for LGBTQ students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I begin this final chapter of my dissertation the same way I started the first: with a look at news headlines. After a quick internet search, some of the top results in my news feed were, “Right-wing extremists amp up anti-LGBTQ rhetoric online” (Boone, 2022), “Queer and transgender college students struggle to cope with anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, rhetoric, and violence” (Sanchez, 2022), and “Religious freedom and LGBTQ rights are clashing in schools and on campuses” (Russo, 2022). In addition, from January to the beginning of May 2023, a record 540+ anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced in state legislatures. This number is greater than any of the past five years and it is not even halfway through the year (Peele, 2023).

Now, imagine you are a college student who identifies as LGBTQ and you are searching to find safety and hope amidst the barrage of attacks against you because of your gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Where do you turn? For many LGBTQ students, including those in this study, spirituality is one foundation to transcend fear and to connect with self, others, the earth, and a divine (Love et al., 2005; McGrady, 2011).

The findings of my research often aligned with previous scholarship on LGBTQ spirituality. For example, support for spirituality was found in various places across campus, including the LGBTQ Resource Center (similar to Hill et al., 2021), the Interfaith Center, and in student-created spaces (as in Means, 2014). Intersections of identities, especially racial

identity, complicated whether and how students perceived a supportive environment for LGBTQ spirituality at LU, which is also evident in Means et al.'s (2018) findings. Further, students in this study defined and practiced spirituality in several ways, including religious rituals and non-religious practices of contemplation and connection. Supporting previous scholarship that describes expansive and personal meanings of spirituality (Birch, 2011; Brennan-Ing et al., 2013; Gandy et al., 2021; Halkitis et al., 2009; Love et al., 2005; McGrady, 2011; Tan, 2005), my research re-enforced the insufficiency of a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting LGBTQ spirituality.

In this chapter, I revisit my findings to respond to my two research questions and then offer three lessons that can be learned from my research and used to inform meaningful change in the ways universities foster a campus environment that supports LGBTQ spirituality.

Considering Research Question 1

My first research question asked: In what ways, if any, does an institution that is known for supporting LGBTQ students promote a campus environment that fosters the spirituality of LGBTQ students? This question also had three sub-questions that focused on university messaging, programs and services, and university commitment. Like the concept of spirituality, my response to this first research question is complicated. At LU, efforts to foster LGBTQ spirituality are explicitly evident in places like the Interfaith Center and the LGBTQ Resource Center, but they are also masked behind a hesitancy to talk about spirituality, such as in the mindfulness program and in counseling services. In the discussion to follow, I consider the three the sub-questions to illustrate whether and how LU attempts to support LGBTQ spirituality.

University Messaging

LU presents messaging on campus and on their website that signals a commitment to diversity and inclusion and encourages curiosity, community, and sustainability. In some ways, messaging that speaks to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice overlaps with messaging that may be considered spiritual in a more secular sense. For example, spirituality can be experienced as liberation, as harmony with the earth and nature, or in connecting with people (Brady, 2019; Jastrzębski, 2022). Sometimes spirituality encompasses existential questions like "What is my purpose in life?" In this way, spirituality is not linked to religion, dogma, or a divinity; it is embodied in words like harmony, peace, freedom, and discovery. LU promotes values that align with a more secular understanding of spirituality as university messages demonstrate values of equity, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Recalling Jastrzębski's (2022) depictions of the relationships between religion and spirituality, LU is actually poised to embody spirituality as a concept separate from religion, but the campus community has yet to widely embrace this as a possibility.

For some LGBTQ students who experience spirituality in a secular, existential, esoteric way, university messaging may be productive in supporting their spirituality, such as for Dana and her contemplative experiences on her favorite bench on campus. Similarly, for LGBTQ students who identify with a faith-based or divinity-centered spirituality, LU may also offer spiritually-nourishing, productive experiences, as Xander and Sage described in chapter four. However, for other LGBTQ students, like Cal and Matty, LU misses the mark.

The absence of messaging that specifically affirms LGBTQ spirituality may contribute to a nonproductive environment because many participants in this study already feel like talking about topics of faith, religion, and spirituality are not welcome on campus. In

a time when spirituality and LGBTQ identities are typically portrayed as mutually exclusive, an absence of affirming messaging is not neutral; it only serves to reinforce the more common deficit discourse that LGBTQ and spiritual identities cannot coexist.

Programs and Services

The Interfaith Center is the hub for spirituality programming on campus and demonstrates a commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality in events, programs, and services. With a staff of only one full-time director, one part-time coordinator, and a graduate assistant, the Interfaith Center offers a remarkable number of programs for LGBTQ students to explore or deepen their spirituality. There are leadership retreats, dinner and dialogue series, weekly drop-in sessions, guest speakers, religious events and services, plus collaborations with the LGBTQ Resource Center and other affinity groups. Without Joy at the helm of spiritual life on campus, I am not sure if the Interfaith Center would have the same commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality. I say this not just because she represents a queer ordained clergy member, but also because she puts her espoused values of pluralism and inclusion into every program offered by the Center. As discussed in the *Pockets of Support* theme in chapter four, Joy encourages spiritual dialogue on campus that celebrates and affirms the many ways people find spiritual connection.

Embodying values of pluralism and inclusion signal a commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality because it leaves room for LGBTQ students to make meaning of spirituality that extends beyond Judeo-Christian understandings. For participants in this study, practices of Hoodoo, Wicca, and Pagan traditions were sources of spiritual curiosity, and a pluralistic environment invites these practices into the campus spiritual climate. At LU,

however, pluralism and inclusion of the many understandings of spirituality are scarcely apparent, except at the Interfaith Center and programs organized by Joy and her staff.

Beyond the Interfaith Center, the LGBTQ Resource Center is one of only a few places that students in this study found programs that explore and affirm identity intersections, including spirituality and LGBTQ identity. Similar to the findings of Hill et al.'s (2018) research, the LGBTQ Resource Center is a place for safety and support, and often a launching pad for other positive campus experiences, such as in Anne's reflection of students who find new possibilities for how being spiritual and LGBTQ can coexist. As discussed in chapter four, Anne and the LGBTQ Resource Center "shifts [students'] thinking" and introduces "new ideas, new possibility models" for their LGBTQ and spiritual identities.

University Commitment

Commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality is far from a universal truth at LU. The people doing the work to support LGBTQ spirituality and the programs and services they provide are relatively siloed, as described in the *Pockets of Support* theme. While the existence of the Interfaith Center signals at least a modest commitment to student spirituality, Saleem reflected that "there's still plenty of work to do." This finding is not surprising because I did not find any previous research that evidenced widespread support for LGBTQ spirituality in higher education.

Recalling my conversations with Joy, Anne, River, and Jude, I heard perspectives ranging from ambivalence to non-existence in their understanding of LU's commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality. Aside from the obvious connection of the Interfaith Center to spirituality, there are missed opportunities to bolster university commitment to student

spirituality in general, and especially LGBTQ spirituality. Consider the *Intersecting Identities Blind Spot* and Anne's comment about health and wellness at LU being devoid of consideration of the spirit. In part, this may be because LU reflects a culture that is skeptical of non-tangible components of wellness, such as spirituality. Relatedly, it may also be because the culture at LU does not consider that spirituality can exist in a secular context, and more importantly, that spirituality can be embodied in non-religiously-affiliated practices. As evidenced in this study, some LGBTQ students found spirituality when spending time in nature, in caring for plants, and in quiet reflective time. These are not religious experiences, but they are spiritual practices. Further, for LGBTQ students who are growing into their identity, spirituality may be an important facilitator in the journey of understanding oneself, as illustrated in Eliason's (2009) Four Quadrant Model in chapter two. In her model, Eliason (2009) highlights the connection between coming out as LGBTQ and spiritual experiences that can be described as "feelings of greater authenticity, meaning and purpose in life, and a higher quality of life" (p. 80). LU does not readily provide for spiritual support on the journey of LGBTQ and spiritual identify development, except for places like Chi Alpha, the Interfaith Center, and Hillel.

Relatedly, counseling services rarely works in tandem with the Interfaith Center to offer spiritual support and pastoral care for LGBTQ students who are seeking counseling or psychotherapy. In fact, Jude was clear that he does not bring up spirituality in any of his sessions with students, and even when he asks questions that may link to spirituality, they are veiled in non-descript language. River feels a similar tension in their work in the mindfulness program and only explicitly explores mindfulness as a spiritual practice when students

approach them with questions about it. These experiences illustrated the theme of *Closeted Spirituality* discussed in chapter four.

Spirituality was referred to as "taboo," "woo-woo," "dumb," and "performative" by participants in my research, not in their own understanding but in how they believe it is generally perceived at LU. The inclusion of religion and spirituality in a student affairs retreat is an important step to change the narrative so *taboo* is no longer a word used to describe what it is like to talk about spirituality at LU. It also offers a space for dialogue about the importance of fostering a supportive environment for LGBTQ spirituality and advancing religious and spiritual pluralism, which is a key concept from Rockenbach et al.'s (2016) campus climate research.

Recalling that Rockenbach et al. (2016) described pluralism as an openness to consider different perspectives and a willingness to discuss difficult topics with people whose beliefs differ from one's own, spiritual pluralism at LU appears to be more of an aspiration than current reality. There may be pockets of conversation happening between students (consider Cal and their friends), but the invitation to engage in spiritual discourse in a more public setting is scarcely evident. The exceptions are in siloed places like the Interfaith Center, Hillel, and Chi Alpha. As a result, LGBTQ students have few opportunities to explore different understandings of spirituality and to examine how their personal spirituality may relate to the spirituality of others.

Considering Research Question 2

My second research question asked: How do LGBTQ students experience the spiritual dimensions of campus climate? I was particularly interested in learning if LGBTQ students felt the university provided a supportive spiritual environment, and where and with

whom they explored and/or practiced spirituality. To further the discussion of this question, I revisit examples of places, people, and programs that illustrate productive, nonproductive, and provocative experiences.

Productive: Places, People, and Programs

I asked student participants in my study where on campus they can show up as their whole selves without shielding any parts of their identity, including their LGBTQ identity and spirituality. Responses ranged from nowhere, to everywhere, and all kinds of places in between. I asked this question because I wanted to know where on campus LGBTQ students felt fully welcome and open to talk about or practice their spirituality. Some of the specific gathering places on campus that contributed to productive encounters for LGBTQ students to explore spirituality were the Interfaith Center, the LGBTQ Resource Center, and Hillel. For Sage, Hillel provides a foundational place to explore her Jewish roots with a critical, contemporary lens and to ask questions about how historic religious texts can be relatable in today's society. For Wren, the Interfaith Center offers a similar opportunity in which they can ask questions about spiritual meaning-making, and how to connect with an abstract divinity.

More than particular places, however, people and relationships (recall the *Pockets of Support: People* theme) were at the core of productive encounters for student participants. For example, Wren spoke at length about her appreciation of Joy and the spiritual guidance she provides, Xander celebrated his relationship with his academic advisor in helping him through a tough time, and Sage talked about the affirming community of friends and mentors she has at Hillel. Relationships, and more broadly finding community and connections, aligns with much of the previous research on LGBTQ spirituality. Scholars like McGrady (2011)

and Birch (2011) found that LGBTQ students experienced spirituality in humanity and connecting with others. For the students who have not yet found a person or community of people with whom to talk about spirituality, like Matty, Dana, and Cal, there was more uncertainty in how they make meaning of the term spirituality and in identifying spiritual practices.

There is not a one-size-fits-all person who is the main resource for fostering student spirituality, although Joy is often viewed in this capacity by her colleagues and some students in this study. Sometimes students need peers to journey with them to make meaning of spirituality, while at other times they need a mentor like Joy who can help guide them in that journey. The general reluctancy at LU to talk about spirituality means that often the people who have the greatest positive impact on LGBTQ spirituality are not working together in a coordinated effort; they are engaging in conversation with students in siloes.

One area where the siloes are slightly less isolated is in programming. Collaborations between departments or offices exist, usually because Joy has initiated a dialogue to work together. The Interfaith Center has offered programs in coordination with campus religious affiliates, the LGBTQ Resource Center, and faculty, and these programs are some of the only offerings that bring together faith, spirituality, and LGBTQ identities at the focus of the program. The only other programming that I found to specifically talk about intersections of LGBTQ and spiritual identities came from Hillel, which has already been identified as an affirming space for Jewish LGBTQ students.

Nonproductive: Places, People, and Programs

The nonproductive aspects of campus climate for LGBTQ spirituality reflect the absence of places, people, and programs rather than specific experiences that are

nonproductive. For the students in this study who do not find anywhere on campus to be a wholly affirming place, a barrier to practicing and growing in personal spirituality was evident. For example, there is not anywhere on campus where Matty feels safe and welcome in her Black, lesbian, and spiritual identities (recall the *Intersecting Identities Blind Spot*). There was a heaviness and a sadness in her demeanor throughout our interview, which reflected the lack of community and belonging she experiences. This isolation is nonproductive for Matty's spiritual growth. Further, Matty's experience aligns with previous research that highlighted the challenge for Black LGBTQ students to find spaces on campus where they can be their whole selves (Means et al., 2018).

For Sage, a lack of university messaging condemning antisemitism (in the wake of antisemitic events on campus) left her feeling disconnected and disappointed in LU. Yet, she also found community in Hillel, which offered a place for Sage to discuss the frustrations she felt with university administration. This experience illustrates the *Pockets of Support* theme at LU, which positions support for LGBTQ spirituality in siloes and not in the common discourse across campus.

Programs occasionally contribute to nonproductive experiences for LGBTQ students, too. This may be especially true for LGBTQ Students of Color as Matty reflected on the role of race in her experiences at LU. In particular, programs like yoga and mindfulness tend to be very white spaces where Matty does not feel affirmed in all of her social identities. In addition, Matty talked about experiences with her peers in which students are asked to "tone down" their faith, especially Muslim and Jewish students. LU's discomfort in discussing faith and spirituality ends up creating nonproductive experiences for students who identify as

spiritual, and perhaps even more so for LGBTQ students whose mere alignment with spirituality is contrary to the popular discourse.

In my time on campus, I experienced the privileges of my whiteness and the acceptance of LGBTQ identities on LU's campus. I felt completely safe and welcome on campus, without any concern for how I would be perceived based on my physical appearance. I mostly fit the typical profile of a member of the LU community: a white, ciswoman. As a critical researcher, I took note of this experience because I learned from Matty and Sage that Students of Color or those who align with certain faith traditions are less likely to feel the same assurance of inclusion on campus. The privileges of the overwhelmingly white majority foster a culture of blissful ignorance for those who hold hegemonic identities, and a less-than-welcoming experience for anyone else. LU appears to be comfortably ignorant in acknowledging how the norms and privileges of the majority disenfranchise and exclude the minority.

Exclusion and marginalization are evident in other identities, too. For example, LGBTQ individuals may find LU to be a campus that welcomes their gender and sexual orientation but ignores (and even suppresses) their spirituality. At LU, it seems to be okay to be LGBTQ, but it appears it is not okay to be spiritual or religious. As a result, LGBTQ students, and especially LGBTQ Students of Color, who are seeking spiritual experiences may not find LU to be a place where they feel welcomed and affirmed as their whole selves.

Provocative: Places, People, and Programs

In my interview with Joy, she said, "It is provocative in this environment to talk about religion at all," and "spirituality *is* provocative." I think she is right; the campus climate and broader societal context of LU mean that any conversation about religion, faith, or

spirituality is uncomfortable for the majority of people on campus. Asking questions like '*What is my purpose?'* and '*How do I connect to that which is beyond me?'* provokes a dialogue that challenges acceptable topics of conversation. Spirituality is not one of these acceptable topics at an institution with strong secular norms. Leaning into conversations about spirituality *is* an act of provocation.

For LGBTQ students who are often assumed to not align themselves with religion or spirituality, provocative encounters occur when LGBTQ students discuss their spiritual identity or spiritual practices in typically heteronormative spaces like Chi Alpha or other more conservative religious affiliates. Within affirming faith groups like Hillel, provocative conversations also happen in programs that explore the relationship between contemporary questions about sexuality and ancient Jewish texts. Sage also talked about experiencing challenging conversations at Hillel about the oversimplification of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Even though many of her encounters were difficult, she was able to go deeper into her own spiritual values and grow in her own faith, which aligns with Eliason's (2009) model of LGBT identity development in which sexuality and spirituality are both part of understanding personal values and beliefs.

If any mention of spirituality is provocative, then LU has to do more than provide places, people, and programs to support an environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. LU needs a culture shift that brings conversations about spirituality out of the siloes and into the LU community. Spirituality seems to reflect a new version of *don't ask, don't tell:* LGBTQ students are spiritual, but they do not have many places to openly talk about their spirituality. Recall that even Jude (a cis heterosexual man) feels a process of 'coming out' when he

exposes himself as a spiritual person. Spirituality is not openly talked about, and people do not generally ask about it, either.

The LGBTQ students with whom I spoke reflected on shielding their spiritual identities but not their LGBTQ ones. In part, students feel safe to be open about their gender and sexual orientation because they see themselves represented among faculty and staff, as well as among the student body. According to Jude, very few students seek counseling because of challenges associated with coming out as being LGBTQ, and Wren said that more than half of students in their graduate program identify as queer. It appears that the LU is indeed a *Best of the Best* for LGBTQ students; except when consideration is given to LGBTQ spirituality.

Next, I offer three lessons to be learned from this research. While they are written with particular attention to LU, they may also be meaningful for other colleges and universities that are known to be welcoming for LGBTQ students. In particular, the other universities on the *Best of the Best* Campus Pride Index may find these lessons helpful to take a critical look at whether and how they are fostering a campus environment that supports LGBTQ spirituality.

Lesson #1: Provoke dialogue about faith and spirituality

Instead of *don't ask, don't tell*, I propose the provocation to ***ask*** and ***tell.*** LU, and other campuses like it, need to ask the meaning-making questions related to spirituality and provide people and programs to support ongoing dialogue. LGBTQ students in this study indicated that they are searching for connection and joy and a relationship with a divine. Spirituality is a source of strength, connection, and curiosity for LGBTQ students, and they are interested in talking about how they make meaning of the world around them. They are

asking the big questions of "Why am I here?" and "Who am I?" and "How do I connect with that which is beyond me?" It is time for LU and other institutions that are known to be inclusive of LGBTQ students to engage in the conversation more broadly across campus and to reframe these questions so LGBTQ students know that the university is committed to fostering a spiritually-supportive environment. Ask students: Why are *you* here? Who are *you*? How do *you* connect with that which is beyond you? More importantly, help them discover their own truths and answers.

Conversations about spirituality do not need to be taboo; they can be provocative and productive. LU needs to normalize the discourse of meaning-making, faith, and spirituality so that students and staff alike can openly ponder some of life's existential questions. To advance this work, I recommend that LU and other campuses across the United States take these initial steps:

1. Include information about support for LGBTQ spirituality in recruitment materials and incorporate a visit to the Interfaith Center on prospective student tours.
2. Ask new students about their spiritual beliefs and identity(ies), and use these data to provide outreach to LGBTQ students who indicate interest in spiritual support.
3. Strengthen partnerships between student wellness, campus life, and student spiritual life so there are seamless handoffs to support students who would benefit from spiritual guidance and pastoral care.
4. Adopt a holistic approach to student health and wellness that includes consideration of the spirit and spirituality.

5. Invest resources in people, programs, and services that provoke interfaith and spiritual dialogue; commit funding to programs that explore identity intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and spirituality.
6. Audit the campus environment for signs and symbols that affirm LGBTQ and spiritual identities and make support more explicit and evident across campus.

These items represent a sampling of steps LU and other campuses can take to improve the ways they support a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. In addition to these possibilities, senior leadership needs to invite LGBTQ students into a conversation about what they need on campus to feel safe and affirmed in all of their identities, including their spirituality. Then, the results of that conversation should be used to inform meaningful and substantive change. ***Ask*** LGBTQ students questions, listen to LGBTQ students ***tell*** their stories, and then ***do*** the work to support their spirituality.

Lesson #2: Visibility and representation matter

Student participants in this study were clear that being surrounded by people who openly identify as LGBTQ is critical to signaling a safe and affirming space for them to be who they are too. The Trevor Project's 2022 survey also emphasized the importance of representation and visibility as LGBTQ youth and young adults indicated they experience joy in "just knowing there's people out there like me" (p. 24).

On LU's campus, recall that Joy is often seen by students in her queer identity first, and then for her identity as an ordained clergyperson. Similarly, River believes that her nonbinary identity signals a welcome for LGBTQ students to fully participate in the mindfulness program. Now, if only LU had a campus culture that uplifted spiritual identities as much as they uplift LGBTQ identities, then maybe Joy and River could also be readily

seen as spiritual LGBTQ people, too. Concrete examples to advance this work at LU and at other campuses may include:

1. The addition of spiritual resources, such as pastoral counseling, to the list of services provided by Counseling and Health Services. For universities that employ clergy who are trained pastoral counselors, this action item also serves as a call to create intentional collaborations between counseling and health services and pastoral care.
2. Organizing an "Ask Me" social event with the Interfaith Center and the LGBTQ Resource Center. During this event, LGBTQ faculty and staff self-disclose the identities that they hold with "Ask Me" buttons (e.g., Ask Me about: gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, religion, ethnicity, race, etc.). LGBTQ students are invited to socialize with and ask questions of faculty and staff to learn about how their identities coexist, how they navigate unwelcoming environments, and how their identities fuel hope, confidence, and strength.

To be sure, visibility and representation are important for LGBTQ students to thrive and find support for their spirituality, but the campus climate must be one that is safe for people to come out as their whole selves. At LU, safety and affirmation of LGBTQ identities seems to be much more advanced than affirmation of LGBTQ spirituality. Asking LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students to be open about their spirituality is not a fair request without institutional commitment to honoring their experiences and promoting intersectional dialogue. To this end, support for LGBTQ spirituality must be more than a checkbox for DEI; it requires ongoing and sustainable commitment of resources to support people and programs.

Lesson #3: Integrate LGBTQ spirituality into ongoing DEI work

In my conversation with Saleem, I was struck by what I perceived to be a lack of urgency to improve efforts to foster LGBTQ spirituality. I understand that the work of campus DEI is extensive, and every marginalized group deserves the attention of senior administration to break down barriers and create more equitable and inclusive campus environments. When asked about the university's commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality, he responded in a way that addressed support for LGBTQ more generally, without mention of spirituality. This response suggests that LGBTQ spirituality is not even a check box in LU's DEI work yet. So first, LU needs to name LGBTQ spirituality in their DEI efforts, and then make sure it is part of ongoing work to foster a safe, inclusive, affirming campus environment for LGBTQ students.

LU is not unique in the way LGBTQ spirituality appears to only be in the shadows of the university's DEI work. Across the national media and political landscape, LGBTQ spirituality is rarely discussed and a campus culture like the one at LU is certainly not overwhelmingly spiritual. Still, the anti-LGBTQ movement that is sweeping across the United States is reason enough to expand the resources and services LU and other universities provide to support its LGBTQ students.

A good place to start this work is to critically examine the role of an Interfaith Center Director, the purpose of an Interfaith Center, and how they interact with the rest of the organizational structure. As previously mentioned, at LU Joy holds the title of Director, without any recognition of her ordained clergy status. She carries most of the load in advancing the university's efforts to foster student spirituality, yet she is also underutilized in her capacity to offer pastoral care and guidance for students. Supporting LGBTQ spirituality

needs to be a shared effort, not something that is siloed in the Interfaith Center. Further, at LU, and perhaps at other public universities, there appears to be an intention to clearly demonstrate the separation of church and state, but that intention can shift to honor spirituality while not imposing any spirituality, faith, or religion on the campus community.

Other steps that universities can take to demonstrate a commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality are:

1. Allocate additional resources to staff a variety of positions in student health and wellness, campus life, and the Interfaith Center, with particular attention to hiring LGBTQ people who also hold spiritual identities.
2. Create a regular channel of communication between LGBTQ students and senior administration so campus leaders can respond to student needs as they evolve over time.
3. Offer professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to learn about the role of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ students, and ways to be supportive.
4. Allocate resources to bring in campus speakers and programs that speak to the complexity and richness of intersecting identities, including spirituality.

There are many paths forward for LU to more openly and wholly support a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality, and this chapter offered several possibilities to do so. In the words of Saleem, “there’s plenty of work to do.”

Questions for Future Research

This dissertation research provided an in-depth exploration of how one university supports a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality. It captured the lived experiences of LGBTQ students and how they describe and practice spirituality. By centering

the voices of LGBTQ students, this study examined elements of the structural climate through the lens of the students who experience them. It is the first of its kind to consider support for spirituality as a central indicator of how LGBTQ-friendly a university is for LGBTQ students. So, while it answered two primary research questions, the findings also present opportunities to dig deeper and further explore LGBTQ student spirituality at colleges and universities across the United States. Future research would benefit from considering the following questions that emerged from my experience conducting this study:

1. What are the personal values and characteristics that support healthy campus relationships related to LGBTQ spirituality?

This question surfaced as I talked with LGBTQ students about the people they call on to help them understand and practice their spirituality. For example, Xander spoke at length about his academic advisor, and Wren reflected on her relationship with Joy. While my study did not seek to understand the personal values and characteristics of these relationships, additional research that focuses on relationships will further inform how universities approach efforts to foster LGBTQ spirituality.

2. How do LGBTQ students experience support for spirituality at religious affiliated institutions?

This question has been on my radar since I began my research. A public research institution reflects a different mission and values than a religiously-affiliated one. The research design and conceptual framework used in this dissertation may also be helpful to conduct a similar study at a religiously-affiliated institution, especially since the Campus Pride Index recently launched their Campus Pride in Faith coalition. This coalition aims

specifically to provide support and resources for LGBTQ students at faith-based colleges and universities.

3. What are the risks, if any, for a public university to meaningfully foster LGBTQ spirituality?

A common theme across my interviews with staff and students was a hesitancy to talk about spirituality at LU. Saleem also mentioned the work of being a public research institution that also seeks to provide spiritual support for students. Some of the recommendations I offer for LU to improve its efforts to foster LGBTQ spirituality may be difficult to implement because of the public designation of LU and the risks of challenging secular norms. Future research should examine the limitation of a public university in terms of resource allocation and how the university can support LGBTQ spirituality while also maintaining the separation of church and state.

4. How do identity intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and spirituality inform approaches to foster student spirituality?

The complexity of intersecting identities is evident in extant literature and also in the findings of my dissertation research. In particular, the intersections of race, spirituality, and LGBTQ identities appear to be the biggest challenge for LU. Many spiritual and LGBTQ spaces on campus are perceived to be very white-centered, which can present a barrier for LGBTQ Students of Color to feel safe and affirmed in all of their identities. While my research centered the experiences of LGBTQ students of a variety of races, I also believe it is critical to build on the research of Means and colleagues (2016; 2018) to center the experiences of only LGBTQ Students of Color in future research. The experiences of Students of Color may offer insight into ways to de-center whiteness in LGBTQ and spiritual

support at colleges and universities in the United States. Similarly, I recommend researching support for LGBTQ spirituality at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to explore how institutional context also plays a critical role in student experiences.

Final Thoughts

I began my dissertation research with an understanding of LGBTQ spirituality that was informed by my personal experiences and an extensive review of academic scholarship. At times during data collection, I felt that my own experiences were validated as I listened to the thoughtful reflections of participants in my study. At other times, I was surprised to learn from students about experiences with religion and spirituality that are contrary to my understanding. Now, as I look back on the entire journey of writing this dissertation, I am hopeful for what the future holds for LU and the ways this university can support a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

One particular moment of clarity in my research came from a conversation with one of my dissertation committee members. She questioned whether LU does in fact acknowledge and accept some secular forms of spiritual practice as part of the campus culture. She referenced the examples of caring for plants, spending time in nature, and sitting in silence on a park bench. While I agree that these examples are evidence of spiritual practices, as the student participants in this study conveyed, the connection to spirituality is in how the person experiencing the activity makes meaning of it, not in the activity itself. In this way, any activity can be a spiritual practice, but this does not mean that the broader campus culture readily embraces the connection of the activity to spirituality.

My conceptual framework was especially helpful to make meaning of the nuanced spiritual experiences of LGBTQ students at LU, although I am still wrestling with how the concept of provocative encounters/experiences relates to marginalized populations like LGBTQ people. Provocative encounters may be challenging and lead to spiritual growth, but I question whether LGBTQ students may be generally overburdened by provocative encounters because of their gender/sexual identities. Does adding provocative spiritual encounters just add another layer of emotional, mental, intellectual, and cognitive labor? The concept of provocative encounters should be further investigated to better understand how these encounters may stimulate learning in people who hold privileged identities, and how they may trigger emotional heaviness, and even trauma, in people who hold marginalized identities.

I hope that other universities will benefit from this research, perhaps by taking some of the lessons learned and applying them, or by advancing research on LGBTQ spirituality on college campuses. Either way, there are ample opportunities for colleges and universities to reimagine ways to support LGBTQ students and all the wonderfully complex intersections of their identities.

Lastly, the findings from this research may be of particular interest to the Campus Pride Index and other nonprofit organizations that seek to support full acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ students. To be sure, the original eight factors considered by the Campus Pride Index are essential to capturing how LGBTQ-friendly a campus, but now there is a nineth factor to consider: support for spirituality. Indicators for support for spirituality may include:

1. Non-discrimination statement inclusive of religion and spirituality

2. Inclusion of ecumenical, interfaith, and LGBTQ-affirming spiritual language and symbols on campus, such as in invocations and welcoming remarks at campus events
3. LGBTQ spirituality course offerings
4. New faculty/staff training opportunities on LGBTQ spirituality
5. LGBTQ spirituality student organizations
6. Dedicated, LGBTQ-affirming spaces on campus for spiritual practice
7. LGBTQ spirituality-affirming symbols and language
8. Educational events surrounding intersections of identities for LGBTQ people that includes spirituality
9. LGBTQ-affirming spaces for meditation/prayer
10. LGBTQ-affirming spirituality programming
11. LGBTQ roommate matching that includes spiritual identities
12. Campus police trainings on LGBTQ experiences of religious trauma
13. Professional development training for faculty and staff to recognize and refer students who may need pastoral care and/or spiritual support
14. LGBTQ religious trauma support groups
15. Inclusion of LGBTQ-affirming spiritual resources in student health and wellness services
16. Discussion of LGBTQ-affirming spiritual resources on campus during prospective student tours

The Campus Pride Index is already a leader in identifying colleges and universities that are safe, welcoming, and affirming of LGBTQ students. With the addition of support for spirituality to the list of factors considered in their campus assessments, the Campus Pride

Index will acknowledge and prioritize the importance of spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ students. Naming spirituality as a core identity among LGBTQ students is critical to advance the work of fostering campus environments that not only recognize that LGBTQ and spiritual identities coexist, but to also nurture a culture in which LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff feel safe and confident to be out and visible as their full, authentic selves. As Matty pointed out, “We invite diversity into how we think about everything in higher ed except for religion and spirituality.” Now is the time to begin to change the diversity narrative and embrace spirituality, especially for LGBTQ students.

APPENDIX A: LGBTQ STUDENT SPIRITUALITY SCREENING SURVEY PROTOCOL

Purpose of the survey: The purpose of this survey is to screen for student participants in a research study that explores whether and how a university that is known to support LGBTQ students provides a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ student spirituality. There are 4 criteria for student participation, which align with the questions as indicated:

Criteria	**Survey Question**
Currently enrolled LGBTQ undergraduate student	2, 3
At least 18 years of age	1
Identifies as spiritual	4, 5, 6, 7 (The expansive understanding of spirituality includes religion as well as those of meaning-making and/or an organized faith/belief system. These questions capture the many ways a student may understand spirituality and identify as spiritual.)
Has spent at least one full semester on campus	2

Introductory text: Thank you for taking the time to complete this brief screening survey, which is part of a research study that explores spirituality of LGBTQ students. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. It should take no more than 10 minutes. Your participation is completely voluntary, and all responses are assured confidentiality. Questions or comments may be sent to Tracy Morin, primary researcher, at tracy.morin001@umb.edu.

1. **Are you at least 18 years of age?**
    a. Yes
    b. No

If you answered no, please do not complete the rest of the survey. Thank you for your time.

2. **How many semesters have you been a student at [your university]?**
    a. This is my first semester
    b. 2
    c. 3 – 4
    d. 5 – 6
    e. 7 – 8
    f. More than 8

3. **Which term best describes your sexual orientation?**

a. Gay cis or trans man
b. Gay cis or trans woman
c. Lesbian
d. Bisexual
e. Queer
f. Pansexual
g. Asexual
h. Prefer to self-describe:_____

4. **When you hear/read the word spirituality, what is the first word or phrase that comes to mind?**
   [Open text response.]

5. **When you hear/read the word religion, what is the first word or phrase that comes to mind?**
   [Open text response.]

6. **For the following statements, please identify the extent to which you agree/disagree.**

1 = strongly disagree
2 = somewhat disagree
3 = neither agree nor disagree
4 = somewhat agree
5 = strongly agree

I seek to understand the meaning and purpose of life.	1	2	3	4	5
I search for the sacred in my life. .	1	2	3	4	5
I feel a connection (or seek a connection) with the earth and nature.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel a connection (or seek a connection) with a higher power.	1	2	3	4	5
I draw inspiration from the cycle of seasons and the relationships between humans and all other life on earth.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe in the transformational power of love.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe in [a] divine being(s).	1	3	3	4	5

7. **Which of the following traditions, faiths, and/or belief systems describes how you identify (check all that apply):**

__ Agnostic
__ Atheist
__ Buddhist
__ Christian
__ Earth-centered

__ Hindu
__ Humanist
__ Jewish
__ Muslim
__ Pagan
__ I am not sure.
__ None of these.
__ Something else: _____

8. **Would you be interested in participating in a focus group and/or a one on one interview to discuss how your campus can better support you in finding meaning and purpose, connecting with the sacred (i.e., nature, the divine, God), or exploring spirituality?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Maybe

    If yes or maybe, what is the best way to reach you?
    a. Email:
    b. Text:

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Leadership in Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Consent Form for Fostering LGBTQ Spirituality: A Case Study

Introduction and Contact Information
You are asked to take part in a research study. **Participation is voluntary.** The researcher is Tracy Morin, doctoral candidate in the Leadership in Education Department. The faculty advisor is Dr. Cheryl Ching, also of the Leadership in Education Department. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have questions, Tracy will discuss them with you. Her telephone number is 978-985-6669 and email tracy.morin001@umb.edu.

Description of the Project:
The purpose of this research is to explore spirituality of LGBTQ students at this university. Through focus groups and student interviews, the researcher will ask about LGBTQ students' understanding of spirituality and whether and how this university supports an environment that fosters their spirituality. In addition, university administrators and/or faculty will be interviewed to understand their role in fostering LGBTQ spirituality and how they view university support for LGBTQ spirituality.

Student focus groups with be with 2-4 other LGBTQ students and last no more than 90 minutes. One on one interviews with students and administrators/faculty will last no more than 60 minutes.

Audio Recording:
This study involves the audio recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript. Only the researcher team will be able to listen to the recordings.
The recordings will be kept for one week. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.
Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the recording erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to recording or participation in this study.
Risks or Discomforts:
A risk of participation is a loss of confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your information.

You may feel uncomfortable when completing the research materials. You may skip any questions or stop participating at any time.

You may speak with Tracy to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation. If you wish to discuss concerns with other on-campus resources, you are encouraged to do so.

Benefits:
There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Your participation may help us learn more about whether and how this university supports a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ student spirituality.

Confidentiality:
Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be password protected or stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data. You will select a pseudonym for the final report and any future publications, and your name will not be included in any interview notes or data analysis.

If you completed the student screening survey, your name and contact information will be retained only until the conclusion of interviews. Then, all identifiable information will be deleted.

The University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research and other representatives of this organization may inspect and copy your information.

Due to the nature of focus groups, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. To respect the privacy of your fellow participants, do not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

Voluntary Participation:
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to end your participation, you should call or email Tracy at 978-985-6669 or tracy.morin001@umb.edu. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you or affect your relationship with the school, status as employee/student or job/grades.

Consent for Storing and Sharing of Data
This study is collecting data from you. We will not make your data available for other research studies, except those in which the members of the research team are involved, that may be done in the future.

Your name and identifying information will be removed from any data you provide. Researchers cannot easily link your identifying information to the data.

Participating in this study means you agree to share your data for future research conducted by members of the research team. You can change your mind later, but researchers might still use your data. If you do not want your data used for other projects, you should not participate in this study.

Questions:
You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have a research-related problem, you can reach Tracy Morin at tracy.morin001@umb.edu or Dr. Cheryl Ching at Cheryl.ching@umb.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

By verbally agreeing to participate, you will be agreeing to participate in the research. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or if you need to contact me.

APPENDIX C: LGBTQ STUDENT SPIRITUALITY

FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Purpose: The purpose of this 60 – 90 minute focus group is to understand the spirituality of LGBTQ students and whether and how their campus fosters their spirituality. Using a semi-structured approach, questions will ask about intersections in sexual and spiritual identities, where and how LGBTQ students practice spirituality, and whether their campus is a place where they feel affirmed in both their sexual and spiritual identities. These topics are important for the focus of my case study research on whether and how a campus supports a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Recruitment message: Thank you for participating in this focus group, which is part of a research study that explores spirituality of LGBTQ students at this university. We will spend 60 – 90 minutes together. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are assured confidentiality.

1. Tell me about the factors you considered in your decision to attend [this university].
    a. Possible follow up: Was support for spirituality a consideration in your decision? Tell me more.

2. What does it mean to you to be ranked a Best of the Best institution by the Campus Pride Index?

3. What does spirituality mean to you?
    a. Possible follow up: Can you give an example of how you practice spirituality?

4. When do you feel like you rely on your spirituality the most?
    a. Possible follow up: Can you give me an example of a time when you called on your spirituality to help you through a difficult time?

5. Walk me through a day in your life here on campus, including any of your daily spiritual practices.

6. Where on campus do you feel like you can be your most authentic self (not hiding or shielding any parts of your identity), including as a spiritual person?
    a. Possible follow ups: Can you give me an example of what it's like to be in that space? Tell me how it feels to be in that space.

7. Who on campus do you feel like you can talk to about spirituality?
    a. Possible follow up: Can you give me an example of a conversation you may have with this person?

8. In your opinion, what does a university do to show they care about your spirituality?

9. How does this university compare to [that description]?
    a. Possible follow up: Is there a personal experience you can share?

10. Campus climate includes the attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices that signal the degree of commitment to access and inclusion of all individuals. Generally, in higher education, campus climate is categorized using descriptors like positive and negative; but, since spirituality is such a complex concept, using words like productive and nonproductive may better describe campus spiritual climate for LGBTQ students. Productive experiences may not always be described as positive, but they lead to student growth and learning. Nonproductive experiences may include conflict and divisiveness between individuals with differing spiritual or religious views, resulting in LGBTQ students taking a more guarded, cautious approach to their spirituality. How, if at all, do you think this campus promotes a productive campus climate for fostering your spirituality?
    a. What about the climate is nonproductive for fostering your spirituality?

11. In addition to words like productive and nonproductive, a third word is sometimes used to describe LGBTQ spiritual experiences; that word is provocative. Provocative encounters can be productive and they can be nonproductive. For example, you may have a conversation with another student whose faith does not affirm your sexuality, or you may go to the interfaith center to learn more about different faith traditions. Can you think of an example of a provocative experience you've had on this campus? Tell me about it.

12. The Campus Pride Index considers eight different factors in their evaluation of how LGBTQ-friendly a university is. I would like to review those eight factors with you and ask you to share whether and how you think they have a role in fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus:
    a. Policy inclusion
        i. Example: Policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of LGBTQ identity and spiritual/religious beliefs, and enforcement of those policies
    b. Student Support and Institutional Commitment
        i. Example: Inclusion of ecumenical, interfaith, and LGBTQ-affirming spiritual language and symbols on campus, such as in invocations and welcoming remarks at campus events
    c. Academic Life
        i. Example: Honoring spiritual and religious practices that may impact class attendance
    d. Student Life

        i. Example: LGBTQ spirituality student organizations; spiritual spaces on campus; LGBTQ spirituality-affirming symbols and language
    e. Housing
        i. Example: Spaces for meditation/prayer; spirituality programming
    f. Campus Safety
        i. Example: Removal of religious/spiritual symbols or language on campus that discriminate against or condemn LGBTQ identities
    g. Counseling and Health
        i. Example: Inclusion of spiritual resources in student health and wellness services
    h. Recruitment and Retention
        i. Example: Discussion of spiritual resources on campus during prospective student tours

13. What could [this university] improve to foster your spirituality?
    a. Follow up: People? Places? Programs? Services? Policies?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your spirituality or your experiences with spirituality on campus?

APPENDIX D: DIRECTOR OF INTERFAITH EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to understand the administrator's experiences with fostering LGBTQ spirituality with students on this campus. Using a semi-structured approach, questions will ask about the role of university chaplain in fostering LGBTQ spirituality, the ways the university chaplain believes LGBTQ students develop and make meaning of spirituality, and ways the university can improve campus climate to better foster LGBTQ spirituality. These topics are important for the focus of my case study research on whether and how a campus supports a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Recruitment message: Thank you for participating in this interview, which is part of a research study that explores spirituality of LGBTQ students at this university. We will spend no more than 60 minutes together. Your participation is completely voluntary, and while your name will not be used in my final case study report, your job title and a brief explanation of your role will be included. As such, people who are aware of my research at this university may connect you to the study; however, the university name and all participants will be held in confidence and you will be able to choose a pseudonym for the final report and any future publications.

1. Tell me a bit about your role here and how long you've been part of this university.

2. What does it mean to you to be ranked a Best of the Best institution by the Campus Pride Index?

3. How would you describe *a day in the life* for an LGBTQ student at this university? (Supportive? Safe? Unwelcoming? Affirming?)

4. What are some of the programs and services offered to students to support their spiritual growth and development?
    a. Are any of these programs designed specifically for LGBTQ students?
    b. If yes, please tell me about them. If no, why do you think that is?

5. The Campus Pride Index considers eight different factors in their evaluation of how LGBTQ-friendly a university is. I would like to review those eight factors with you and ask you to share whether and how you think they have a role in fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus:
    a. Policy inclusion
        i. Example: Policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of LGBTQ identity and spiritual/religious beliefs, and enforcement of those policies

b. Student Support and Institutional Commitment
    i. Example: Inclusion of ecumenical, interfaith, and LGBTQ-affirming spiritual language and symbols on campus, such as in invocations and welcoming remarks at campus events
c. Academic Life
    i. Example: Honoring spiritual and religious practices that may impact class attendance
d. Student Life
    i. Example: LGBTQ spirituality student organizations; spiritual spaces on campus; LGBTQ spirituality-affirming symbols and language
e. Housing
    i. Example: Spaces for meditation/prayer; spirituality programming
f. Campus Safety
    i. Example: Removal of religious/spiritual symbols or language on campus that discriminate against or condemn LGBTQ identities
g. Counseling and Health
    i. Example: Inclusion of spiritual resources in student health and wellness services
h. Recruitment and Retention
    i. Example: Discussion of spiritual resources on campus during prospective student tours

6. Do LGBTQ students come to see you with questions about faith and spirituality?
    a. What kind of questions do they ask?
    b. How do you respond?

7. What words or phrases do you think LGBTQ use to ascribe meaning to the word spirituality?
    a. What about the word religion?

8. In what ways do you think spirituality relates to sexual identity development for students?

9. What is your role is in fostering the spirituality of LGBTQ students?

10. Campus climate includes the attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices that signal the degree of commitment to access and inclusion of all individuals. Generally, in higher education, campus climate is categorized using descriptors like positive and negative; but, since spirituality is such a complex concept, using words like productive and nonproductive may better describe campus spiritual climate for LGBTQ students. Productive experiences may not always be described as positive, but they lead to student growth and learning. Nonproductive experiences may include

conflict and divisiveness between individuals with differing spiritual or religious views, resulting in LGBTQ students taking a more guarded, cautious approach to their spirituality. How, if at all, do you think this campus promotes a productive campus climate for fostering LGBTQ spirituality?

   a. What about the climate is nonproductive for fostering LGBTQ spirituality?

11. In addition to words like productive and nonproductive, a third word is sometimes used to describe LGBTQ spiritual experiences; that word is provocative. Provocative encounters can be productive and they can be nonproductive. For example, an LGBTQ student may have a conversation with another student whose faith does not affirm their sexuality, or they may come to the interfaith center to learn more about different faith traditions. Can you think of an example of a provocative experience a student may have on this campus? Tell me about it.

12. Beyond the interfaith center, where else on campus do you think students can go to explore their spirituality? Tell me about those places.

13. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus?

14. Is there anyone else on campus you think I should interview to learn more about how [this University] fosters LGBTQ spirituality?

APPENDIX E: DIRECTOR OF LGBTQ RESOURCE CENTER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to understand the experiences of the Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center with fostering LGBTQ spirituality with students on this campus. Using a semi-structured approach, questions will ask about the role of the Director and the LGBTQ Resource Center in fostering LGBTQ spirituality, the ways the Director believes LGBTQ students develop and make meaning of spirituality, and ways the university can improve campus climate to better foster LGBTQ spirituality. These topics are important for the focus of my case study research on whether and how a campus supports a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Recruitment message: Thank you for participating in this interview, which is part of a research study that explores spirituality of LGBTQ students at this university. We will spend no more than 60 minutes together. Your participation is completely voluntary, and while your name will not be used in my final case study report, your job title and a brief explanation of your role will be included. As such, people who are aware of my research at this university may connect you to the study; however, the university name and all participants will be held in confidence and you will be able to choose a pseudonym for the final report and any future publications.

1. Tell me a bit about your role here and how long you've been part of this university.

2. What does it mean to you to be ranked a Best of the Best institution by the Campus Pride Index?

3. How would you describe *a day in the life* for an LGBTQ student at this university? (Supportive? Safe? Unwelcoming? Affirming?)

4. Do LGBTQ students come to see you or other staff in the LGBTQ Resource Center with questions about faith and spirituality?
    a. What kind of questions do they ask?
    b. How do you respond?

5. What religious or spiritual resources does the LGBTQ Resource Center have for LGBTQ students?
    a. How frequently do LGBTQ students access these resources?

6. The Campus Pride Index considers eight different factors in their evaluation of how LGBTQ-friendly a university is. I would like to review those eight factors with you and ask you to share whether and how you think they have a role in fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus:
    a. Policy inclusion

        i. Example: Policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of LGBTQ identity and spiritual/religious beliefs, and enforcement of those policies
    b. Student Support and Institutional Commitment
        i. Example: Inclusion of ecumenical, interfaith, and LGBTQ-affirming spiritual language and symbols on campus, such as in invocations and welcoming remarks at campus events
    c. Academic Life
        i. Example: Honoring spiritual and religious practices that may impact class attendance
    d. Student Life
        i. Example: LGBTQ spirituality student organizations; spiritual spaces on campus; LGBTQ spirituality-affirming symbols and language
    e. Housing
        i. Example: Spaces for meditation/prayer; spirituality programming
    f. Campus Safety
        i. Example: Removal of religious/spiritual symbols or language on campus that discriminate against or condemn LGBTQ identities
    g. Counseling and Health
        i. Example: Inclusion of spiritual resources in student health and wellness services
    h. Recruitment and Retention
        i. Example: Discussion of spiritual resources on campus during prospective student tours

7. In what ways, if any, do you think spirituality is a source of strength for LGBTQ students to persist at this university?

8. What do you believe your role is in fostering the spirituality of LGBTQ students?
    a. In what ways do you (or could you) collaborate with the interfaith chaplain to foster the spirituality of LGBTQ students?

9. Campus climate includes the attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices that signal the degree of commitment to access and inclusion of all individuals. Generally, in higher education, campus climate is categorized using descriptors like positive and negative; but, since spirituality is such a complex concept, using words like productive and nonproductive may better describe campus spiritual climate for LGBTQ students. Productive experiences may not always be described as positive, but they lead to student growth and learning. Nonproductive experiences may include conflict and divisiveness between individuals with differing spiritual or religious views, resulting in LGBTQ students taking a more guarded, cautious approach to

their spirituality. How, if at all, do you think this campus promotes a productive campus climate for fostering LGBTQ spirituality?

   a. What about the climate is nonproductive for fostering LGBTQ spirituality?

10. In addition to words like productive and nonproductive, a third word is sometimes used to describe LGBTQ spiritual experiences; that word is provocative. Provocative encounters can be productive and they can be nonproductive. For example, an LGBTQ student may have a conversation with another student whose faith does not affirm their sexuality, or they may come to the interfaith center to learn more about different faith traditions. Can you think of an example of a provocative experience a student may have on this campus? Tell me about it.

11. Beyond the LGBTQ Resource Center, where else on campus do you think students can go to explore their spirituality? Tell me about those places.

12. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus?

13. Is there anyone else on campus you think I should interview to learn more about how [this University] fosters LGBTQ spirituality?

APPENDIX F: ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to understand the experiences of [position title] with fostering LGBTQ spirituality with students on this campus. Using a semi-structured approach, questions will ask about the role of [position title] in fostering LGBTQ spirituality, the ways the incumbent believes LGBTQ students develop and make meaning of spirituality, and ways the university can improve campus climate to better foster LGBTQ spirituality. These topics are important for the focus of my case study research on whether and how a campus supports a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Recruitment message: Thank you for participating in this interview, which is part of a research study that explores spirituality of LGBTQ students at this university. We will spend no more than 60 minutes together. Your participation is completely voluntary, and while your name will not be used in my final case study report, your job title and a brief explanation of your role will be included. As such, people who are aware of my research at this university may connect you to the study; however, the university name and all participants will be confidential and you will be able to choose a pseudonym for the final report and any future publications.

1. Tell me a bit about your role here and how long you've been part of this university.

2. What does it mean to you to be ranked a Best of the Best institution by the Campus Pride Index?

3. How would you describe *a day in the life* for an LGBTQ student at this university? (Supportive? Safe? Unwelcoming? Affirming?)

4. Do LGBTQ students come to see you or other staff in the [center/department name] with questions about faith and spirituality?
    a. What kind of questions do they ask?
    b. How do you respond?

5. What religious or spiritual resources does [center/department name] have for LGBTQ students?
    a. How frequently do LGBTQ students access these resources?

6. The Campus Pride Index considers eight different factors in their evaluation of how LGBTQ-friendly a university is. I would like to review those eight factors with you and ask you to share whether and how you think they have a role in fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus:
    a. Policy inclusion
        i. Example: Policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of LGBTQ identity and spiritual/religious beliefs, and enforcement of those policies

b. Student Support and Institutional Commitment
    i. Example: Inclusion of ecumenical, interfaith, and LGBTQ-affirming spiritual language and symbols on campus, such as in invocations and welcoming remarks at campus events
c. Academic Life
    i. Example: Honoring spiritual and religious practices that may impact class attendance
d. Student Life
    i. Example: LGBTQ spirituality student organizations; spiritual spaces on campus; LGBTQ spirituality-affirming symbols and language
e. Housing
    i. Example: Spaces for meditation/prayer; spirituality programming
f. Campus Safety
    i. Example: Removal of religious/spiritual symbols or language on campus that discriminate against or condemn LGBTQ identities
g. Counseling and Health
    i. Example: Inclusion of spiritual resources in student health and wellness services
h. Recruitment and Retention
    i. Example: Discussion of spiritual resources on campus during prospective student tours

7. For Student Life Director Only: What religious or spiritual student groups or clubs are open and affirming to LGBTQ students? Tell me about them.

8. What do you believe your role is in fostering the spirituality of LGBTQ students?
    a. In what ways do you (or could you) collaborate with the interfaith chaplain to foster the spirituality of LGBTQ students?

9. Campus climate includes the attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices that signal the degree of commitment to access and inclusion of all individuals. Generally, in higher education, campus climate is categorized using descriptors like positive and negative; but, since spirituality is such a complex concept, using words like productive and nonproductive may better describe campus spiritual climate for LGBTQ students. Productive experiences may not always be described as positive, but they lead to student growth and learning. Nonproductive experiences may include conflict and divisiveness between individuals with differing spiritual or religious views, resulting in LGBTQ students taking a more guarded, cautious approach to their spirituality. How, if at all, do you think this campus promotes a productive campus climate for fostering LGBTQ spirituality?
    a. What about the climate is nonproductive for fostering LGBTQ spirituality?

10. In addition to words like productive and nonproductive, a third word is sometimes used to describe LGBTQ spiritual experiences; that word is provocative. Provocative encounters can be productive and they can be nonproductive. For example, an LGBTQ student may have a conversation with another student whose faith does not affirm their sexuality, or they may come to the interfaith center to learn more about different faith traditions. Can you think of an example of a provocative experience a student may have on this campus? Tell me about it.

11. Beyond your center/department, where else on campus do you think students can go to explore their spirituality? Tell me about those places.

12. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus?

13. Only for First Round Interviews: Is there anyone else on campus you think I should interview to learn more about how [this University] fosters LGBTQ spirituality?

APPENDIX G: SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to understand the experiences of [position title] with fostering LGBTQ spirituality with students on this campus. Using a semi-structured approach, questions will ask about the role of [position title] in fostering LGBTQ spirituality, the ways the incumbent believes LGBTQ students develop and make meaning of spirituality, and ways the university can improve campus climate to better foster LGBTQ spirituality. These topics are important for the focus of my case study research on whether and how a campus supports a campus climate that fosters LGBTQ spirituality.

Recruitment message: Thank you for participating in this interview, which is part of a research study that explores spirituality of LGBTQ students at this university. We will spend no more than 60 minutes together. Your participation is completely voluntary, and while your name will not be used in my final case study report, your job title and a brief explanation of your role will be included. As such, people who are aware of my research at this university may connect you to the study; however, the university name and all participants will be confidential and you will be able to choose a pseudonym for the final report and any future publications.

I would like to record our conversation, which I will only keep to transcribe it. Then, I will delete it. Is it okay with you for me to record?

1. What role, if any, do you think spirituality has in the lives of students at [University]? LGBTQ students?

2. [University] is a Best of the Best institution in the Campus Pride Index national rankings. When you think about the ways [University] fosters a supportive campus climate for LGBTQ students, what are you most proud of?

3. The Campus Pride Index does not consider support for spirituality in their rankings, but spirituality can be an important source of strength and hope for LGBTQ students. What resources or services are there at [University] that have the potential to foster LGBTQ spirituality?

4. In my interviews with students, I heard that [University], and more broadly [state], has a highly secular culture that shies away from conversations about spirituality. Is this your experience as well, and if so, what is your role in creating space for these conversations?

5. Do you think [University] demonstrates an institutional commitment to fostering LGBTQ spirituality? Why or why not?

6. In my time on campus and in my interviews with students and staff, support for LGBTQ spirituality seems to exist in pockets that are not necessarily easy to find. Is this your perception too, and how can [University] make this support more accessible and visible?

7. What do you think [University] can do better to support a campus environment that fosters LGBTQ spirituality?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about fostering LGBTQ spirituality on this campus?

9. What name would you like to use for your pseudonym?

APPENDIX H: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Name of Activity: **Date/Time:**

Length of Observation:	
Chronological Descriptive Notes	***Reflective Notes*** *(remember all senses)*
Additional Descriptive Notes	***Reflective Notes*** *(remember all senses)*

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT CODING

Primary Descriptive Codes	Secondary Descriptive Codes	Final Emergent Thematic Codes	Example Quotes for Thematic Codes
Recruitment and Retention Policy Inclusion Student Support & Institutional Commitment Academic Life Student Life Campus Safety Counseling & Health Spiritual Life	Non-productive Provocative Productive	Pockets of support: Places and People	"No matter what you believe, or what your spiritual ethos, the goal of the Interfaith Center is to just encourage dialogue and create space for people to feel like they can embody and explore whatever spirituality they have, and feel safe in the company of others." (Wren)
		Closeted spirituality	"I feel like my faith, my spiritual identity, is very hard. And I'll find myself in spaces, in the way that politics are going, it's becoming this like, not taboo to be Christian because I don't wanna sound like a Republican, but like, there's this tension that I know exists in my faith and with my identities. And so a lot of times, I'll be in spaces where people are like, 'Oh, you practice this, that and the third – that's stupid'. Or like, 'You do this? Like, that's bad or that practice is demons'.... And it's like, oh, okay, so there's not really a lot of spaces here that I'm like oh yay, I feel so celebrated." (Matty)
		Blind spots	"When I think of all the issues of diversity that we've tried to talk about in 20 years, there's others that I think we haven't done great on - socio economic, class, but every once in a while we've touched upon it. We talk about race all the time, as bad as we are at it…we talk about it all the time. Sexuality stuff, we certainly have talked about, but it's almost like maybe we are good enough at it. I mean, we've always got blind spots. But religion and spirituality? Almost never." (Jude)

REFERENCES

Adeyemo, D. & Adeleye, A. (2008). Emotional intelligence, religiosity and self-efficacy as predictors of psychological well-being among secondary school adolescents in Ogboso, Nigeria. *Europe's Journal of Psychology,* 4(1). https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v4i1.423.

Assemblies of God. (2014). Homosexuality, marriage, and sexual identity. https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Homosexuality-Marriage-and-Sexual-Identity

Bacon, J. (2021, March 15). Vatican, Pope Francis say Catholic church can't bless same-sex marriages because God 'can't bless sin'. *USA Today.* Retrieved from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/03/15/vatican-says-catholic-church-cant-bless-same-sex-unions/4698628001/.

Bilodeau, B. A., & Renn, K.A. (2005). Analysis of LGBT identity development model and implications for practice. *New Directions for Student Services, 111*, 25-39. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.171.

Birch, Z. G. (2011). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual spirituality: An intersectional identity study. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Indiana State University.

Boone, R. (2022, June 13). Right-wing extremists amp up anti-LGBTQ rhetoric online. *AP News.* Retrieved May 20, 2023 from https://apnews.com/article/politics-religion-arrests-riots-race-and-ethnicity-c65c1090ed923687716114be371e9fdb

Bozard, R. L., Jr., & Sanders, C. J. (2011). Helping Christian lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients recover religion as a source of strength: developing a model for assessment and integration of religious identity in counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 5,* 47–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2011.554791.

Brady, A. (2019, July 10). *Religion vs. spirituality: What is the difference?* The Chopra Center. Retrieved from https://chopra.com/articles/religion-vs-spirituality-what-is-the-difference.

Brennan-Ing, M., Seidel, L., Larson, B., & Karpiak, S. E. (2013). "I'm created in God's image, and God don't create junk": Religious participation and support among older LGBT adults. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging, 25*(2), 70-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/15528030.2013.746629.

Campus Pride Best of the Best. (n.d.). https://www.campuspride.org/campus-pride-announces-the-2022-best-of-the-best-colleges-universities-for-lgbtq-students/.

Campus Pride Index. (n.d.). Frequently Asked Questions. https://www.campusprideindex.org/faqs/index.

Cass, V.C. (1984). Homosexuality identity formation: Testing a theoretical model. *Journal of Sex Research, 20,* 143. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498409551214.

Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *American Behavioral Scientist, 25*, 469. https://doi.org/10.1177/000276482025004009.

Conron, K. J., Goldberg, S. K., & O'Neill, K. (2020). Religiosity among LGBT adults in the US. The Williams Institute.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist policies. *University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989, 1,* 139-167.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, & D. Birman (Eds.), *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (pp. 312-333). https://doi.org/10.1037/h0080345.

Dunn, M., Glassmann, D., Garrett, J. M., Badaszewski, P., Jones, G., Pierre, D., Fresk, K., Young, D., & Correll-Hughes, L. (2015). Faith and sexual orientation identity development in gay college men. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 52*(4), 374-386. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2015.1050033.

Eliason, M. J. (2009). An integral approach to sexual identity: Beyond religion and science. *Journal of Integral Theory & Practice, 4*(2)*,* 67-87.

Engberg. (2007). Educating the workforce for the 21st century: A cross-disciplinary analysis of the impact of the undergraduate experience on students' development of a pluralistic orientation. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(3), 283–317. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-006-9027-2.

Gandy, M. E., Natale, A. P., & Levy, D. L. "We shared a heartbeat": Protective functions of faith communities in the lives of LGBTQ+ people. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice, 8*(2), 98-111. https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000225.

Garvey, J. C., Rankin, S., Beemyn, G., & Windmeyer, S. (2017). Improving the campus climate for LGBTQ students using the Campus Pride Index. *New Directions for Student Services, 159,* 61-70. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20227.

Gold, S. P., & Stewart, D. L. (2011). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students coming out at the intersection of spirituality and sexual identity. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 5,* 237-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2011.633052.

Goodrich, K. M., Buser, J. K., Luke, M., & Buser, T. J. (2016). Spiritual and sexual identity: Exploring lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients' perspectives of counseling. *Journal of Homosexuality, 63*(6), 783-807. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1112192.

Halkitis, P. N., Mattis, J. S., Sahadath, J. K., Massie, D., Ladyzhenskaya, L., Pitrelli, K., Bonacci, M., Cowie, S. E. (2009). The meanings and manifestations of religion and spirituality among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults. *Journal of Adult Development, 16*, 250-262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-009-9071-1.

Hill, D. L., Nguyen, D. J., Kilgo, C. A., Lange, A. C., Shea, H. D., Renn, K. A., & Woodford, M. R. (2021). How LGBTQ+ students thrive in college. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 58*(3), 267-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2020.1738241.

Hindman, D. (2002). From splintered lives to whole persons: facilitating spiritual development in college students. *Religious Education, 97*(2), 165-182. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080290060923.

Holdcroft, B. B. (2006). What is Religiosity. *Catholic Education*, *10*(1), 89. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1001082013.

Horn, S. S., Kosciw, J. G., & Russell, S. T. (2009). Special issue introduction: New research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: Studying lives in context. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38,* 863-866. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-009-9420-1.

Hurtado, S., Griffin, K. A., Arellano, L., & Cuellar, M. (2008). Assessing the value of climate assessments: Progress and future directions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 1*(4), 204–221. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014009.

Jastrzębski, A. K. (2022). The challenging task of defining spirituality. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health,* 24(2), 113-131. https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2020.1858734.

Johnson, D. M. (2013). *The relationship between spirituality and sexual identity among lesbian and gay undergraduate students: A qualitative analysis.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. State University of New York at Buffalo.

King, K. P., & Biro, S. C. (2006). A transformative learning perspective of continuing sexual identity development in the workplace. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education, 112*, 17-27. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.233.

Lange, A. C., Duran, A., & Jackson, R. (2019). The state of LGBT and Queer research in higher education revisited: Current academic houses and future possibilities. *Journal of College Student Development, 60*(5), 511-526. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0047.

LePeau, L. (2007). Queer(y)ing religion and spirituality: Reflections from difficult dialogues exploring religion, spirituality, and homosexuality. *College Student Affairs Journal, 26*, 186-192.

Lease, S. H., Horne, S. G., & Noffsinger-Frazier, N. (2005). Affirming faith experiences and psychological health for Caucasian lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* 52(3), 378-388. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.3.378.

Lincoln & Guba, 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Love, P., Bock, M., Jannarone, A., & Richardson, P. (2005). Identity interaction: Exploring the spiritual experiences of lesbian and gay college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(2), 193-209. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0019.

Lytle, M. C., Blosnich, J. R., De Luca, S. M., & Brownson, C. (2018). Association of religiosity with sexual minority suicide ideation and attempt. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 54(5), 644–651. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.01.019.

Mancini, O. (2019). Attrition risk and resilience among sexual minority college students. *Columbia Social Work Review, 9*(1), 8-22. https://doi.org/10.7916/cswr.v9i1.1961.

McCann, E., Donohue, G., & Timmins, F. (2020). An exploration of the relationship between spirituality, religion, and mental health among youth who identify as LGBT+: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Religion and Health, 2020*(59), 828-844. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-00989-7.

McCarn, S. R., & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: a new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. The Counseling Psychologist, 3, 508. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000096243011.

McGrady, M. L. (2011). *Understanding the dimensions of spirituality in Caucasian lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/436.

McGuire K. M., Cisneros, J. & McGuire, T. D. (2017). Intersections at a (heteronormative) crossroad: Gender and sexuality among Black students' spiritual-and-religious narratives. *Journal of College Student Development, 58*(2), 175-197. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0014.

Means, D. R. (2014). *Demonized no more: The spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at predominantly white institutions.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. North Carolina State University.

Means, D. R. (2017). "Quaring" spirituality: The spiritual counterstories and spaces of Black gay and bisexual male college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 58*(2), 229-246. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0017.

Means, D. R., & Jaeger, A. J. (2016). Keep pressing on: Spiritual epistemology and its role in the collegiate lives of Black gay and bisexual men. *Journal of College and Character, 17*(1), 23-39. https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2015.1125368.

Means, D. R., Collier, J., Bazemore-James, C., Williams, B., Coleman, R., & Anderson Wadley, B. (2018). "Keep your spirit aligned": A case study on Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students defining and practicing spirituality. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*(5), 648-623. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0057.

Mertens, D. M. (2020). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (5th Ed.). Sage Publications.

Newcomb, M. E., Birkett, M., Corliss, H. L., & Mustanski, B. (2014). Sexual orientation, gender, and racial differences in illicit drug use in a sample of U.S. high school students. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(2), 304–310. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301702.

Peele, C. (2023, May 2). Weekly roundup of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation advancing in states across the country. *Human Rights Campagin Press Releases.* Retrieved May 20, 2023 from https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/weekly-roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country-3.

PFLAG. (n.d.) LGBTQ+ Glossary. https://pflag.org/glossary/.

Pitcher, E. N., Camacho, T. P., Renn, K. A., & Woodford, M. R. (2016). Affirming policies, programs, and supportive services: Using an organizational perspective to understand LGBTQ+ college student success. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 11*(2), 117-132. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000048.

Pryor, J. T., Garvey, J. C., & Johnson, S. (2017). Pride and progress? 30 years of ACPA and NASPA LGBTQ presentations. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 52*(2), 123-136. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1206020.

Rankin, S., & Reason, R. (2008). Transformational tapestry model: A comprehensive approach to transforming campus climate. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 1*(4), 262. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014018.

Rankin, S., Blumenfeld, W., Weber, G., & Frazer, S. (2010). *2010 state of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender people*. Campus Pride.

Rankin, S., Garvey, J., & Duran, A. (2019). A retrospective of LGBT issues on US college campuses: 1990-2020. *International Sociology, 34*(4), 435-454. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580919851429

Rapley, T. & Rees, G. (2018). Collecting documents as data. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 378-391). Sage Publications.

Renn, K. A. (2010). LGBT and queer research in higher education: The state and status of the field. *Educational Researcher, 39*(2), 132-141. https://doi.org./10.3102/0013189X10362579.

Rhoads, R. A. (1997b). A subcultural study of gay and bisexual college males: Resisting developmental inclinations. *Journal of Higher Education, 68*, 460-482. https://doi.org./10.1080/00221546.1997.11778993.

Rockenbach, A. N., & Crandall, R. E. (2016). Faith and LGBTQ inclusion: Navigating the complexities of the campus spiritual climate in Christian Higher Education. *Christian Higher Education, 15*(1-2), 62-71. https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2015.1106355.

Rockenbach, A. N., Riggers-Piehl, T. A., Garvey, J. C., Lo, M. A. & Mayhew, M. J., (2016). The influence of campus climate and interfaith engagement on self-authored worldview commitment and pluralism orientation across sexual and gender identities. *Research in Higher Education, 15*, 497-517. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11162-015-9395-6.

Rockenbach, A. N., Lo, M. A., & Mayhew, M. J. (2017). How LGBT college students perceive and engage in the campus religious and spiritual climate. *Journal of Homosexuality, 64*(4), 488-508. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1191239.

Rockenbach, A., & Mayhew, M. J. (2013). How the collegiate religious and spiritual climate shapes students' ecumenical orientation. *Research in Higher Education, 54*(4), 461–479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-013-9282-y.

Rosenkrantz, D. E., Rostosky, S. S., Riggle, E. D., & Cook, J. R. (2016). The positive aspects of intersecting religious/spiritual and LGBTQ identities. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice, 3*(2), 127-138. https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000095.

Russo, C. J. (2022, December 2). Religious freedom and LGBTQ rights are clashing in schools and on campuses – and courts are deciding. *The Conversation*. Retrieved May 20, 2023 from https://theconversation.com/religious-freedom-and-lgbtq-rights-are-clashing-in-schools-and-on-campuses-and-courts-are-deciding-191540.

Sanchez, O. (2022, December 9). Many LGBTQ+ college students feel the weight of a national pile-up of negativity. *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved May 20, 2023 from https://hechingerreport.org/many-lgbtq-college-students-feel-the-weight-of-a-national-pile-up-of-negativity/.

Sanderson, A. (2013, November 11). Gay or God? Cal Poly sparks queer-faith dialogue. *UWIRE Text,* p. 1. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/apps/doc/A348820200/ITOF?u=mlin_b_umass&sid=ITOF&xid=e4703b19.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (1998). The disclosure to families of same-sex attraction by lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 8*, 49-68. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327795jra0801_3.

Sedikides, C. (2010). Why does religiosity persist? *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14*(1), 3-6. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309352323.

Snow, K. C. (2015). *A mixed methods study of the intersection of sexual orientation and spiritual development in the college experience.* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Old Dominion University.

Stake, R. (2006). *Multiple Case Study Analysis*. The Guilford Press.

Stratton, S. P., Dean, J. B., Yarhouse, M. A., Lastoria, M. D. (2013). Sexual minorities in faith-based higher education: A national survey of attitudes, milestone, identity, and religiosity. *Journal of Psychology & Theology, 41*(1), 3-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/009164711304100101.

Tan, P. P. (2005). The importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals. *Journal of Homosexuality, 49*(2). 135-144. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v49n02_08.

The Trevor Project. (2022). *2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.* https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(2), 409-427.

Winkler, C. E., Mayhew, M. J., & Rockenbach, A. N. (2021). Beyond the binary: Sophisticating diversity climate considerations and assessments. *Research in Higher Education, 62*, 556-568. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-020-09607-7.

Wood, A. W. & Conley, A. H. (2013). Loss of religious or spiritual identities among the LGBT population. *Counseling and Values, 59*, 95-111. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2014.00044.x.

Yarhouse, M. A., Stratton, S. P., Dean, J. B., & Brooke, H. L. (2009). Listening to sexual minorities on Christian college campuses. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 37(2)*, 96-113.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.