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Fictive Kin Relationships and Advising: The Roles of Chosen Family as an Advisory Framework for Higher Education

Zachary Burden
zb918171@wcupa.edu

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Zachary Burden

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The Roles of Chosen Family as an Advisory Framework for Higher Education

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this thesis to my cousin, Colby Sim. Colby was the one who showed me that student affairs was a possibility, showing me that my passions had a direction. She has been, and always will be, a constant inspiration to me. She consistently finds ways to mix social justice and love into her student affairs work, setting a true example for me and all those she meets. She has been a cheerleader, mentor, and guide through this whole process. I can't imagine what my life would be like without her. These two redheads are taking the student affairs world by storm!

As well, this thesis is dedicated to all the queer people who have come before me, who have worked tirelessly to pave the way for people like me.

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"Blood does not [make a] family... Those are relatives. Family are those with whom you share your good, bad, and ugly, and still love one another in the end. Those are the ones you select." - Hector Xtravaganza (Norman, Para. 12, 2019)

Abstract

The structure of a chosen family centers love, commitment, empathy, and accountability into relationships outside of a person's biolegal family. This project asks, if student affairs professionals framed their advising and mentoring work with a platonic and familial sense of love and commitment, would it offer their students a new sense of openness, trust, and community? Using theories of love in education and building a teaching community by bell hooks (2003; 2018), Paulo Freire's (1970) banking model of education, and experiential learning by John Dewey (1997), I examine these chosen family relationships and their application into higher education advising. In this framework, advising is redefined to include peers, mentors, professors, program directors, staff members, administrators, and other campus agents, all acting in an advisory role, to build a chosen family. To address this concern, I propose a peer advising program, QueerPeers. Queer Peers pairs incoming first year and transfer students with fellow LGBTQ students to build a network of queer students on campus, with incorporated casual academic advising. Students involved in the program would either be a big (mentor) or a little (mentee), to build a lineage of queer students at the university.

Keywords: Chosen Family, Fictive Kin, LGBTQ, Advising, Mentorship

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Positionality

Introduction

In this chapter, I share the story of my experiences in education and how it has shaped me as a person. My experiences have continually reminded me of the importance of a close-knit support system, including friends, family, educators, and mentors. In this chapter I also introduce the focus of my thesis, understanding chosen family as a frame for advising in higher education.

Education, Chosen Family, and Me

My Family and I

I come to academia and the field of student affairs as an artist and creative first, but have always held my connections and relationships with others as my highest priority. My background, relationships, and experiences profoundly influence my work in higher education. I was raised from a young age to view those I look at as family to be the most important people in my life. As an only child, my immediate family included my mom, my dad, and I, which resulted in a tight knit home life. I grew up very close in distance to my mom's family which meant getting together on every occasion possible including birthdays, holidays, graduations, theater productions, and the list goes on. I would watch my mom call her parents every day to talk about the dreams they had the night before, what their plans were for the day, and sometimes before my mom could call her sister, my grandma would have beat her to the punch and already told my aunt the news of the day. There has always been a close-knit sense of family around me.

I was raised to look at friends as family too. Many friends of mine and of my family would fill in spaces that my immediate family could not fill. I have members of my family who are not blood related to me, but have been attached as families for generations, and the commitment to one another has lasted. Throughout my life some of my best friends have seemed

more like siblings and have been more committed to helping me through hard times than some of my blood relatives. My parents have kept a similar circle of friends for most of my life as well, so many people in their life have watched me grow and have been there to celebrate and cheer me on for my successes. However, my cheer section was not just limited to family friends and peers. Throughout my youth I had mentors and advisors help guide me and point me right in the direction. I felt that push resonate with me especially when I got to high school.

High School

I was very involved in high school and socialized myself from being a socially awkward and lonely introvert in my childhood, to an outgoing and involved extrovert. After getting tapped in middle school to go to a youth leadership conference by a former guidance counselor, I found myself wanting to direct my passion into community building positions for my school. She had seen how I wanted to be more involved and saw more potential in me than I saw in myself. I had worked my way to be my school's Senior Class President, Editor and Chief of the Yearbook and even would be recognized as my school's first openly gay prom king. However, no matter how close I would get with people around me, or as involved I was, I still always felt somewhat othered and different from many of my peers.

I felt fulfilled by my actions and roles and most of my relationships at the time, but despite being so involved, I was still plagued with microaggressions against me for being gay and more feminine. After years of being called gay as a pejorative, I felt in many ways that I had to overperform, overcompensate, and change myself to give people things to look highly of me and feel comfortable around me. I bounced between friends and groups of people looking for love and support, hoping to find space and company that would allow me to be comfortable as my true self.

I was always the student that went to teachers looking for close mentorship. I knew many of my teachers had my best interests in mind and would almost offer refuge in their classrooms from the struggles of being in high school. Many of my relationships with teachers would be formative for my growth during high school. My teachers would help steer me in the right direction and would emphasize my strengths. This would include my time in clubs, working with my club advisors in things such as student government and yearbook to create programming and things for my peers. I remember my drama club advisor once told me to think of every show as a gift for someone, so you always want to make your performance good. I have held this idea close to me, influencing everything I do. I really wanted to make other people feel included and seen with the things I would do, even when I knew in some ways I wasn't always included.

College

As I transitioned to life after high school, I realized that I had a generalized and glorified expectation of what college would be. I always heard that college was supposed to be this transformative and amazing time. Since I felt that I couldn't flourish and grow anymore in the suburbs or even just being at home, I felt ready for this transition. I had higher expectations of what college was going to be, convinced that my experience was going to be comparable to *Animal House* or other media about college, but going to a small private visual arts school really wasn't going to provide me with that sort of experience. For my undergraduate education, I wanted to be within a community of artists to be able to truly explore who I was on a deeper level, connect with people with similar interests, and build my art practice.

I believe that being surrounded by a community of artists during these especially transformative years led to a lot of personal identity development and growth for me, moving even faster and allowed me to thrive. Separate from being surrounded by people with a shared

passion for art, art school tends to attract many people who are in the LGBTQ community, which was really exciting for me. During my time in college I learned so much more about myself, my passions, and the importance of deep love for platonic relationships in my life. It wasn't until college where I was able to build a community with other Queer people and really learn more about LGBTQ history and culture. Coming from a space where I was usually the token Queer person, I was alone in understanding my identity and grasping how I aligned within this culture.

I had come out as gay during my sophomore year of high school, convinced by my first boyfriend to come out to my parents. I felt as I was coming to terms with and feeling more comfortable with my sexuality, that there was a transition of more that I didn't feel comfortable talking to my immediate family about. What made everything harder was the I didn't know many other Queer people. I could count the other LGBTQ people I knew at that time on one hand. Arriving at college, I felt much more comfortable in myself and was excited to finally be in the company of many other Queer people.

It wasn't until college that I was able to immerse myself in learning more about Queer culture, history, connections, and relationships. As I met more people who were similar to me, I learned more about myself and how to talk about that part of my identity. I grew to form relationships that I now consider to be chosen family, that could understand and talk with me about feelings and struggles. These conversations were ones that I was never able to fully participate in before. The experience felt almost overwhelming at times to be surrounded by people who had similar experiences to mine. The people around me quickly became increasingly Queer or allies, and much more open to talking about issues surrounding social justice.

As my circle began to have conversations about social justice, topics around equity for race, sexuality, gender, and class, became much more casual and common. These topics felt new to me coming from a hometown where those ideas felt ignored or quiet much of the time, even though my high school and district was fairly diverse. These dialogues pushed me to think more critically about the space I was inhabiting and would also make me much more reflective about my own identity. Being at a predominantly White institution in Baltimore, which is a predominantly Black city, felt like the elephant in the room at many points. This would be pervasive into the changing climate of the university and the surrounding area, but also into classroom and casual conversations.

In 2015, at the end of my first year of college, the Baltimore uprising occurred, after the death of Freddie Gray. Around the same time, there was a hate crime on campus in my own residential building. Both events felt like a wakeup call for me, I couldn't really avoid "hard" conversations anymore. I found myself involved in many casual and critical conversations with peers around race and learned more in-depth about the disparities and inequalities both locally and nationally. All of this would spark my interest in social justice but would also bring me closer to many of my peers, mentors, and professors, as we grew and learned how to exist together more thoughtfully.

Much of my development in college, while having a lot of individual work on understanding myself better, progressed and was pushed forward by open and intimate communication with others, and a growing desire to understand identities that were both similar and different from my own. Having people around me to challenge my understanding of identity and my values has been so important. Many have been peers, but also a lot of the people who have helped me the most have been mentors and teachers who have created a nurturing and safe

space for growth. As my life experiences grew, I felt myself with a growing attachment and commitment to the people in my life, to be able to grow together and help one another through hard times.

Chosen Family and Student Affairs

My personal experience in learning more about myself in this manner inspires the work of this thesis. Specifically, I am focused on the roles of the chosen family as an advisory framework for higher education. Fictive kin relationships, or chosen family, are relationships where there is mutual respect and support, in place of the roles that are usually filled by biolegal families. "These networks [provide] similar, if not more, support than what is traditionally expected of related family members" (Duran & Pérez, 2018, p. 69). Chosen family members are more than friendships, but have a mutual respect, provide emotional (and sometimes financial) support, and help serve similar roles of the structured biolegal or nuclear family, although usually not biologically related.

A significant quality of this kind of relationship is that there is a mutual commitment to a long-term relationship of support. Looking at how an advisor can take this kind of relationship and use it as a framework for mutual respect, support, and commitment, can prove to a student that someone is there on campus to help them succeed and flourish during (and after) their time in higher education. When thinking about who falls into an advisory role for a student during their college years, I view the role to not just limited to academic advisors, but extended to peers, mentors, professors, program directors, and administrators as all of these positions can fulfill a role in a student's chosen family while they are at college.

Chosen family is an important framework to consider as I enter the field of student affairs and working in higher education because it influences how I work as a professional. Offering mutual respect for the students I work with and committing to lift a student's goals and best interests are central to the work I want to do. Some of the advisors and mentors that have made the most impact on my life, have shown effort and commitment to my success and continued communication over time. I was raised by a family of educators and artists that have set a standard of emotional commitment, service, and love to those around them and their community. However, I find that too often that student affairs professionals and educators are not aware of how deep their impact can reach for students. Keeping love and commitment as a central value allows for a deeper bond and comfort for students. This kind of relationship is not just limited to my work in the field of student affairs.

Chosen families have also been impactful in my personal life, in relationships that have continued for many years and there are commitments of trust and respect. I consider these individuals to be family, despite not being a part of my biolegal family. The idea of those around me influencing my values and choices I make is something that should reflect the close and trusting nature we should strive for with students. There are limitations for these close and emotionally intimate relationships, in not overstepping boundaries and understanding comfort levels. This sense of relationships should not feel forced but can be facilitated and welcomed. Leading with the intention to commit to the students and work with them to build that form of relationship is important. If this structure of family was more respected and held on a similar level to biolegal family, we would see how support would look different across the board. If student affairs professionals considered this idea in how they commit to their students, and even coworkers, it would offer a new sense of openness, empathy, and trust with each other.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shared my narrative through education and chosen family relations. I also introduced my concern of chosen family structures being used as a framework for advising in higher education. To expand on this, I introduce the frameworks I use to understand my concern and some terms that are relevant to my thesis in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Introduction

From all my experiences in education, and throughout life generally, the role of chosen family has become a major assistance in my own journey. Chosen family relationships and structures outline how I think advising should work in higher education and structures a framework for my own educational philosophies. If this idea of extending familial love was held closer in advising, support for students might look very different. Incorporating a platonic and familial sense of love and commitment would build empathy, trust, and accountability between students, staff, and faculty. If student affairs professionals adopted chosen family values of love, commitment, and service thinking into their work with students, it would change the relationships of working together for knowledge transfer and production.

In this chapter, I will introduce my theoretical framework for views on education and my concern of chosen family structures as an advisory framework. I will also introduce some key terms, to give greater context to my thesis.

Theoretical Framework

To build my own philosophy on education and what education should do, I have been inspired by both authors and theorists. One of the main influences on the inclusion of love into education is bell hooks (2003; 2018) who writes on love and building a learning community. She shines a light on the importance of a love ethic in building a learning community in education that can thrive. hooks (2018) notes that community building can start in relationships outside of our biolegal family, by writing:

Many of us learn as children that friendship should never be seen as just as

important as family ties. However, friendship is the place in which a great

majority of us have our first glimpse of redemptive love and caring community.

Learning to love in friendships empowers us in ways that enable us to bring this

love to other interactions. (p. 134)

By recognizing that the relationships outside of a person's biolegal family can be formative and

help develop an image of community, the structure of a chosen family becomes crucial and

necessary.

As well, hooks (2018) expands this importance of a chosen family and extended family,

by describing it as a form of resistance against pressures of capitalism and patriarchal image.

Given the importance of hooks' argument, I quote her at length:

The talk about "family values" in our society, highlights the nuclear family, one

that is made up of mother, father, and preferably only one or two children. In the

United States this unit is presented as the primary and preferable organization for

the parenting of children, one that will ensure everyone's optimal well-being. Of

course, this is a fantasy image of family. Hardly anyone in our society lives in an

environment like this. Even individuals who are raised in nuclear families usually

experience it as merely a small unit within a larger unit of extended kin.

Capitalism and patriarchy together, as structures of domination, have worked

overtime to undermine and destroy that's a larger unit of extended kin. Replacing

the family community with a more privatized small autocratic unit helped

increase alienation and made abuses of power more possible. It gave absolute rule

to the father, and secondary rule over children to the mother. By encouraging the

segregation of nuclear families from the extended family, women were forced to

become more dependent on an individual man, and children more dependent on

an individual woman. It is this dependency that became, and is, the breeding

ground for abuses of power. (2018, p. 130)

By creating the image of this small, closed off family, it takes away the reach of outside views

and other forms of support. The chosen family structure allows for a person to look to their

community and have an extended, shared presence in their life. In education, this permits

advisors, mentors, teachers, and peers, to build a support system around the family. Not that

"abuses of power" cannot happen within an extended or chosen family, but there is more of an

active choice in who is participating, as well as, giving and receiving support. The chosen family

structure is rooted in commitment, empathy, and love.

In building my view of education, John Dewey (1997) and Paulo Freire (1970) have also

been necessary voices of a new image of education. Freire identified the banking model of

education that actively negates a form of community knowledge production and transfer. Freire

(1970) describes the banking model to be when "education… becomes an act of depositing, in

which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of

communicating… [the teacher] makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize,

and repeat" (p. 72). In this case, the teacher is not communicating with the students, but is more

communicating *at* the students. Education becomes reproduction, instead of looking to find new

ways to create and spread thought.

As well, John Dewey's (1997) theory of experiential learning elevates the importance of community and collaborative knowledge production. Dewey writes that society is dependent on collaborative transmission of knowledge based on experiences, to keep a continuity of life going (Dewey, 1997, p. 2). This process of knowledge production is not limited to a classroom, but "the very process of living together educates" (Dewey, 1997, p. 5). In relation to having a chosen family structure, it pushes for commitment to community and learning from each other's experiences. I will expand on these theoretical lenses in both Chapters 3 and 4 in relation to education, chosen family, and my programmatic intervention surround the intersection of hooks, Freire, and Dewey.

Historical Influences

The idea of chosen family and university members assuming familial roles is not new to the university system. Chosen family structures help enforce cultural values of respect, provide important messages of aspiration and achievement, offer emotional support, and build ideas of self-efficacy (Duran & Pérez, 2018). Having peers, staff, and faculty to help students navigate higher education can be a form of support (and survival) a student might not be able to get from their biolegal family.

Historically, non-traditional forms of family have appeared both in the university and in society. Within the university, the *in loco parentis* doctrine (Latin for "in place of the parent"), placed university administrators as parental figures for punishment and sanctions. This doctrine was especially active before World War II and lasted into the Civil Rights Era. *In loco parentis* shaped how the university handled students and framed what support would look like over the decades. However, *in loco parentis* is not an example of what I am describing here as chosen family, because there is no choice provided for who is in students' "family". This example falls

into a form of fictive kin in a way, since it places people who are not a part of a biolegal family into a familial role without a more active commitment of support.

My conceptualization of chosen family has also been influenced by Queer ballroom culture, specifically from Black and Brown Queer people. Within events called balls, chosen family structures are named "houses." Balls are "lengthy late-night [events] where contestants parade in a series of categories," (Flannery, 1997, p. 172). The categories build a form resistance to society but create a world where queer Black and Brown people can escape the societal constraints placed on them, emulating and parodying straight White people and the lives they live.

Balls began in the early 1900s, but it wasn't until the 1960s that balls and drag pageants started to resemble the more modern design of today (Brown & Riemer, 2019). The houses (chosen families) built a support system for many members of the ball scene who were abandoned by their biolegal families and looked down upon by society (Flannery, 1997). Ball culture would set an example for bonds of mutual support, or as chosen families, specifically for people at intersections of multiple marginalized identities. I will explore this historical context and the impacts of both ball culture and *in loco parentis* in Chapter 3 to frame my perspective on education and familial roles.

Definition of Terms

To give greater context to my thesis, several commonly used terms must be defined. These definitions will give a base understanding but will be expanded on throughout my thesis.

Chosen Family and Fictive Kin

Chosen family is a form of fictive kinship, where a relationship is recognized to fulfill responsibilities or roles that are usually filled by biolegal families. Within a chosen family, there is a sense of active commitment and love, in comparison to the general fictive kin that is fulfilling the responsibilities. "These networks [provide] similar, if not more, support than what is traditionally expected of related family members" (Duran & Pérez, 2018, p. 69). Chosen family members are more than friendships, but set a standard of mutual respect, emotional (and sometimes financial) support, and mentorship. Main values of a chosen family relationship are long-term commitments, love, empathy, open communication, and accountability. These "kinship networks are… [not] singular in number, meaning individuals often have multiple kinship networks through which they move and obtain support" (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 168)

Biolegal Family

Biolegal families are an inclusive term for both biological and legal adoptive family relations. Often referenced as a nuclear family or Fordist family, with the image of a "mother, father, and preferably only one or two children" (hooks, 2018, p. 130). This structure of family does not include extended family members or multi-generational relationships.

LGBTQ and Queer

LGBTQ is an acronym used for the community of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people, and queer people. This acronym includes Q for queer people, as an umbrella term for other sexual and gender identities that align with this community. I use these terms interchangeably throughout the thesis, but queer is recognized to be more of inclusive of the expansive number of identities within this community. Although "the use of umbrella terms

[such as] queer… can diminish the visibility of unique subcommunities" (Brown & Riemer, 2019, p. 21), queer is used in this thesis to speak of the community at large.

Balls, Pageants, and Ball Culture

Balls are "lengthy late-night [events] where contestants parade in a series of categories" (Flannery, 1997, p. 172). The first versions of balls and pageants began in the early 1900s, but a more modern version began in the 1960s. Most of the participants of balls are queer Black or Latinx people. Participants compete in balls for trophies and recognition among the community, by competing in events around modeling, lip-syncing, and dancing.

Drag pageants are a form of pageantry, usually with a similar format to Miss America, but instead of participants being specifically cisgender women, these pageants are focused on transgender women and drag queens. More recent versions are more inclusive of drag kings and transgender men. Some examples would be Miss Gay America, Miss Continental, and National Entertainer of the Year.

Ball culture is the encompassing culture of those involved, their lives, and the events they would put on. Ball culture was brought to the mainstream by Madonna's song Vogue, (named after one of the categories of a ball), the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*, and more recently the TV show *Pose*.

In Loco Parentis

In loco parentis (Latin for "in place of the parent") "[placed] the educational institution in the parents' shoes… [permitting] the institution to exert almost [unrestricted] authority over students' lives" (Kaplin & Lee, 2014, p. 17).

ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies

To incorporate the chosen family structure into advising, I propose a peer mentorship program called QueerPeers. QueerPeers is a peer mentorship and advising program that connects incoming first year and transfer students with fellow LGBTQ students. QueerPeers would build a network of queer students on campus with incorporated casual academic advising. Students involved in the program would either be a "big" (mentor) or "little" (mentee), to build a lineage of queer students at the university.

This programmatic intervention intersects with the College Student Educators International (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) professional competencies. These competencies help guide student affairs professionals and other college level educators in the work they do with students. My program touches mainly upon the competency areas of: (a) personal and ethical foundations, (b) values, philosophy, and history, (c) social justice and inclusion, and (d) advising and support.

Each competency area lists learning outcomes to help strengthen the student affairs professional's work. Under personal and ethical foundations, the outcomes most related to my programmatic intervention are to "serve as a model and mentor for others in their search for excellence, taking measures to encourage and inspire exceptional work in self and others," and "analyze personal experiences for potential deeper learning and growth, [engaging]... others in reflective discussions" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 17). For values, philosophy, and history, the outcomes that I would set would be to "articulate the history of the inclusion and exclusion of people with a variety of identities in higher education," and to "model, encourage, and promote

community by reinforcing the long-standing values of [student affairs]" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p.18-19). With social justice and inclusion, the outcome I would like to see is to be able to "effectively facilitate dialogue about issues of social justice, inclusion, power, privilege, and oppression in one's practice" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 31).

Finally, under advising and support the outcomes most relevant would be to "establish rapport with students, groups, colleagues, and others that acknowledges differences in lived experiences," and to "assess the developmental needs of students and organizational needs of student groups" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 36-37). These outcomes set standards for me and supervisors of the QueerPeers program, of what should be expected to come from the program. I discuss my programmatic intervention more at length in Chapter 4, as well as assessment of the program in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shared an introduction to my theoretical framework, including bell hooks' (2003; 2018) writing on love and building a learning community as well as John Dewey's (1997) theory of experiential learning and Paulo Freire's (1970) writing on the banking model of education. I also discussed some of the historical context of my concern and introduced some key terms to help guide through my concern. In the following chapter I expand on the historical, philosophical, and personal aspects of my thesis.

Chapter 3: Historical, Philosophical, and Current Contexts

Introduction

In this chapter, I present my personal philosophy and understanding of education. I will also address the relevance of chosen family/fictive kin in higher education, and how the key concept of love can be used to strengthen an educator's work with students. In relation to this sense of community, I will be giving context to community and chosen family within a discussion of student identity development.

Philosophy of Education

The Purpose of Education

As I think about my own personal philosophy of education, considering what education is and what I think education should aim to do for students is important. I define education as a process of learning how to live by experience, and then using those experiences to better one's own life, community, and society. I don't believe education to be limited to a school or university setting. Educational experiences can come from multiple facets of an individual's life. Education can look different for people, as there is such variety in ways of learning, such as visual learning, field work, learning within a classroom, reading, oral histories, and more.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines education as "the action or process of educating or of being educated" (Education, n.d.). From this definition, education is a collaborative process, involving multiple parties. I believe that education is a collaborative process and this understanding informs my thoughts on what education should do. The aims of education should be to learn from one another, to better ourselves and our society based on shared and personal experiences and studies. Part of this experience should be being able to attempt to pass on our passions and stories, to those who have similar love for said ideas, practices, and topics.

To expand on this definition of education, I draw on the metaphor of a farmer. While farming might not be a skill learned specifically in a classroom, a farmer might pass on their passion, tricks of the trade, and stories through their life's work to future farmers. This way, the future farmer may learn to successfully grow crops, expand on the original farmer's tricks of the trade, and grow as a farmer themselves. However, there might be some individuals that are interested in the work of farming and the stories and passion they are able to learn from the farmer. By learning more about the original farmer's passions and work, an individual will be able to apply some of those skills and lessons to their own work. Then, there are those who use the crops that the farmer grew but might not explicitly know the stories behind that crop or the farmer but by using the crops they are indirectly connecting themselves to the farmer. Even with a person who might not use or know anything at all about the crops or the work of the farmer, by being a part of the society that the farmer exists in, they will be indirectly influenced by the farming and the passions of that original farmer and their farmer disciples.

This metaphor can be applied to a variety of outlets and fields. With mathematics, people dedicate their lives to learning all the skills, topics/foci, and history of math. While some may have a distaste for math, they are still influenced by the place that math has in our society and world. While one might argue that visual arts are irrelevant and unnecessary, the work of artists have influenced the design of essentially all common items that one might use daily. The artist will most likely have introspection within their practice, and that introspection will then influence a future artist and their thought process. An individual might be inspired by the artist's passion for their work, their practice, or their style within their work, and can apply these learnings contextually towards themselves. For some, going to an art museum or gallery to see work can bring them joy. This experience might be able to get them through their day or week,

their job, or just be a time to relax, while simultaneously giving them a memory and experience to reflect on. All these examples display ways that everyone in a society has something that they output and will have a far outreach, even if it ends up being indirect. This outreach is a way of spreading and producing knowledge, even if we aren't actively thinking of it as knowledge production.

The spread of knowledge does not need to be limited to a job or career, although those experiences do influence a person's thoughts and opinions. So much of this knowledge transfer is due to the interactions we have with others around us. Being raised by a family member is a form of education. Raising a child is about passing down morals and lessons, a parent has been taught or learned from experiences. The child might strictly follow what they are taught by those raising them, but inherently will have their own experiences and spin on the lessons and passions that were passed down. The child might also disagree with what they were taught, and will juxtapose their own opinions, views, and passions in relation to who they were raised by, which is impossible to be completely disconnected from. A child will be informed also by their teachers, caretakers, friends, media, and more, which will amplify the information and influence all that they intake.

Education, though it might sometimes feel constricting and limiting, should be about passing these experiences and passions onto others. These experiences directly influence not only the people interacting with the lesson but will add into the lessons and learnings of society at large. Addressing this view on education as a collaborative community-based effort, emphasizes that when we all learn, we all gain in the end. While one person's influence might be more direct and stronger on some, like the older farmer teaching a new farmer, it does not mean that their ideas or work are less influential to those that are not as directly tied to them. For

example, a person who doesn't buy the farmer's crops, but lives in a country where the economy is influenced by the price of crops.

In the context of a school or university, my philosophy of education does not change. Society should expect that a teacher is passionate about what they are teaching, and although the student might not be passionate about the same topic, being in the classroom with that teacher and other students will be a facilitated learning experience that the student will be able to take from. The aim of education within the university should work to facilitate a collaborative diffusion of passion, knowledge, lessons, tricks of the trade, and stories, that will influence growing thought and future experiences for all parties involved. The university should also teach the skills of reflecting on an individual's experiences and learning from them. Many college students, upon coming home from school and returning to their communities, will be able to look at wherever they call home in a different light, because they have now been exposed to new ways of thinking, people, and environments. All this collective growth will not only benefit the individual, but the people they directly interact with, the community they live in, and society at large. To create this collective growth, there needs to be a spirit of love and service to the community.

Love in Education

One of the core values of education should be love. My view on this is heavily influenced by bell hooks' (2003) writing on love and community in education, but also has been relevant to me through my own experiences in formal education systems. Education, both formal and informal, affects the individual, communities, and society. Seen through this lens, we can view educators as serving their communities. In hooks' words, "Commitment to teaching well is a commitment to service. Teachers who do the best work are always willing to serve the needs of

their students" (2003, p. 83). Viewing educators as people who work to serve their students to the best of their ability, places care, commitment, and love for the students at the center of the educators work.

These values of care, commitment, and love for the work we do as educators, match very closely to ideals of chosen family, including having a commitment of support and respect, but also to pass on lessons, stories, and knowledge. Especially as undergraduate students can build long term relationships with faculty and staff members over their time in college, there is room to build a mutual commitment to each other. This happens through growing deep conversations and displays of care that show the relationship can be more than just within the realm of the classroom. However, even within the classroom alone, a teacher's care for students can change the student's perceptions of the world. hooks (2003) describes how educators can have a deeper impact on students:

> The teacher who can ask of students, "What do you need in order to learn?" or "how can I serve?" brings to the work of educating a spirit of service that honors the students' will to learn. Committed acts of caring let all students know that the purpose of education is not to dominate, or prepare them to be dominators, but rather to create the conditions for freedom. Caring educators open the mind, allowing students to embrace a world of knowing that is always subject to change and challenge. (p. 92)

This spirit of service is not just limited to the classroom and academic affairs in the university but can be carried over into student affairs and other administrative aspects of higher education.

Considering the student is the core of our work and the direct audience that we are serving,

encourages us to think about how important programming is and how it is received by students.

Similar to the farmer analogy, the work that student affairs professionals do does not just

shape those students, but sets a standard for care, commitment, and knowledge transfer that can

be used outside of the university setting. Holding this relationship with love, care, support, and

commitment as main values, allows for the classroom to become a true learning community.

hooks (2003) expands: "... these basic principles of love form the basis of teacher-pupil

interaction [through] mutual pursuit of knowledge creates the conditions for optimal learning.

Teachers, then, are learning while teaching, and students are learning and sharing knowledge" (p.

131). Recognizing education to once again be a collaborative process, centers the mutual

commitment to each other that is found in chosen families.

Comparing a learning community to a chosen family structure in this context is

important. One of the primary comparisons is that there is less choice in building this specific

relationship and community. Although students might be able to choose a class specifically due

to a professor or go to an office on their own will, this may have more of a sense of obligation or

push, than in a friendship.

Radical Candor in a Learning Community

Building a learning community with the values of chosen family should inspire thinking

about the ways that they overlap with the ideas of support and open communication, but also

healthy criticism and accountability. The accountability within the relationship should be more

than just setting expectations for each other but holding check-in's and updates for continual

support. Good communication is an important aspect of staying accountable, keeping a healthy

relationship and helps in giving and receiving criticism. This kind of communication is not

meant to shut down one person's choices or processes but allows for feedback to grow together and is an expected element of communication.

In thinking about good communication to keep these relationships tight knit, one way is working to create radical candor. Radical candor is a form of good communication where someone is honest, open, and forward, as well as open to giving and receiving criticism. Kim Scott talks about as radical candor as:

> Radical candor happens when you… say what you really think and to allow yourself to challenge others, but also to be challenged in return. When you can do both of those things at the same time, when you can challenge people at the same time that you care personally… about them. (HubSpot, 2017)

Radical candor does not take a long-term relationship to accomplish, but is an acceptance of criticism, knowing it will be from a place of respect and care. Criticism can sometimes be given in the form of advice, to take your own experiences and perceptions and place them into conversation with the other person's experiences.

Finding that middle ground of radical candor matches up with Nevitt Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support. Sanford's theory of challenge and support is broken into three pieces of readiness, challenge, and support. Having a relationship of maturity and respect as the base, and then balancing challenge, to push to build skills, and support to help a student fulfill those skills (Sanford, 1966, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 36). The amount needed for both challenge and support will depend on the student one is working with, which relates to chosen family relations as those who will work with you to find that balance of challenge and support, and keeping one accountable, to reach personal and communal goals.

Using chosen family as inspiration for educational experiences, can help to build healthy learning communities and pushes for love to be a central value for teaching. As well, transferring these into student affairs, allows programming to really be influenced directly by what students want and need, and be in conversation for the services that they will be using and attending. As well, these points of including love into education, can be related to working with coworkers, supervisors, or those you supervise, in keeping open communication, care, and mutual goals.

History of Chosen Family

The structure of the chosen family is not a new one, with a variety of touch stones through history that have shown familial roles with those who are not in a person's biolegal family. As I focus on chosen family structures as an advisory and community building framework for higher education, it is important to see where the place of fictive kin, family structures, and familial responsibility, have existed historically for both higher education and American society at large.

Chosen Family in LGBTQ Life

A key example of chosen family occurs within queer ballroom culture, specifically centered around Black and Brown LGBTQ people. Balls would take place in dance halls and clubs, where people would gather for nightlife. Balls are "lengthy late-night [events] where contestants parade in a series of categories," (Flannery, 1997, p. 172). Many contestants were Black and Brown queer people, including many transgender participants. These categories would include things like femme realness, high fashion evening wear, performance categories, and some categories that cross the boundaries of race and sexuality. This space creates a world where queer Black and Brown people can esc ape the societal constraints placed on them, parodying, and trying to emulate straight White people, and the lives they live. At the balls, there would be

"houses" which are essentially chosen families. These houses compete at the balls together, but also support each other in life. Often members of ball culture have been abandoned by their biolegal families, filling the void of support with those in their house. Members of houses would have a house mother and father and would consider each other to be siblings (Flannery, 1997).

Balls started in the early 1900s during the years of prohibition in the 1920s as speakeasies required that people socialize in underground nightlife. This would include the Hamilton Lodge Ball in Harlem, New York, with events such as the "parade of the fairies" which was focused on gender inversion, with queer culture at the center. A ball would include a mix of straight and LGBTQ people, as well as socializing between races (Brown & Riemer, 2019, pp. 54-58). After prohibition and the stock market crash of 1929, there began a change in morals for Americans, creating more binaries and separation between straight and LGBTQ people. Spaces that focused on queer visibility shut down, pushing the central space for queer people to gay bars. However, these spaces were still hostile to queer people of color, so Black queer people would begin to meet more at house parties (Brown & Riemer, 2019, pp. 58-60).

Drag pageants began again in private spaces, they would often be run by White gay men who would exclude Black members of the community (Cunningham, 1995, para. 44). It wasn't until the 1960s that drag balls returned as a central part of urban queer life, thanks to people such as Flawless Sabrina, on the east coast, and Empress José I, on the west coast (Brown & Riemer, 2019, p. 100). The ball houses, as they exist now, were kickstarted by Crystal LaBeija, the founding mother of the House of LaBeija, in 1972 in Harlem. LaBeija was one of the few Black drag queens to be awarded highest titles at a White-organized ball. Responding to the exclusion and discrimination of Black people at the balls and pageants, Crystal would create what is considered to be the first house, the House of LaBeija, with Lottie LaBeija, and began to put on

balls that would center Black queens and generally Black queer people (Lawrence, 2013, para. 8). Houses and ball culture would be made available to the mainstream with the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*.

In much the same way as exemplified in the Houses of ball culture, the structure of a chosen family shows up in the university as well. Peers, staff, and faculty help students navigate their time in higher education, giving support during their time in undergrad and building emotional bonds that can last a lifetime. This occurs in formats such as peer mentors, advisors, fraternity and sorority life, close knit clubs and organizations. As a personal example from my own experience in undergrad, my acapella group became more of a family structure, where we would call some of the members mom or dad, would have family dinners, and build deep emotional and trusting connections with each other.

In some forms this can happen naturally for students, and for some this structure needs greater intentionality in their undergraduate years. This need for bonds of mutual support can be amplified for people with marginalized identities, such as persons of color or members of the LGBTQ community, and especially for people with intersections of these identities (Duran & Pérez, 2018). Although not specifically at a university, those who were members of the aforementioned ball culture were prime examples of this. In this way, spaces were created where members could find community and feel safe, while also going against expectations that were made to restrict queer people at the time and tell how one should be conducting one's self. People in these houses support each other through life, some having specific standards, such as the House of Pendavis which requires its children to get a college degree (BUILD Series, 2019).

The University in Place of The Parent

Familial roles made its way onto the college campus in the area of conduct and discipline with the *in loco parentis* doctrine (Latin for "in place of the parent"). *In loco parentis* "[placed] the educational institution in the parents' shoes… [permitting] the institution to exert almost [unrestricted] authority over students' lives," (Kaplin & Lee, 2014, p. 17). *In loco parentis* became active during the era of legal insularity in higher education just before World War II. The era of legal insularity was "an era of protecting the power and prerogative of institutions of higher education," (Lake, 2011, p. 48). *In Loco Parentis* preceded greater law involvement in the system of higher education and protections of students on campus. Essentially, higher education was looked at as a privilege not a right (which can still be argued today) giving free reign and leaving more rights in the arms of the university, instead of the students. Administrators of universities would not provide due process to students before giving sanctions like expulsion or suspension, almost treating expulsion or suspension like a parent grounding their child, because a student disobeyed their rules.

During the mid to late 1960s, universities struggled with a rise in student radicalism and activism. This then initiated a lot of tension between the administration and the students of the university. The era of legal insularity in higher education would be followed by many changes during the Civil Rights Era in the 1960s. *In loco parentis* would continue into the 1960s, but would be chipped away as students gained greater protections and rights.

In California, Clark Kerr, president of the University of California system at the time, endorsed the "1960 *Master Plan for Higher Education in California*, which preserved the [University of California] institutions as the state's preeminent public research universities and affirmed the principle of free college access for residents of the state, who were to be charged

only minimal administrative fees,." (Cooper, 2019, p. 227). This plan aligned with the beginning

of the free speech movement on University of California (UC) Berkeley's campus, while

simultaneously seeing an increase in enrollment at the university (Cooper, 2019, p. 228). With

increased enrollment, there was a rise in critiques of anti-communism, race relations, and

American imperialism on college campuses (Cooper, 2019, p. 229). These new foci for student

protest would find their basis against *in loco parentis* rules as they would allow the university to

restrict what could be said on college campuses.

As Melinda Cooper (2019) describes:

> The idea that college administrators were somehow endowed with the custodial
>
> powers of parents, and therefore authorized to act *in loco parentis*, was a very old
>
> one on American campuses, but it had been reinvigorated in the early twentieth
>
> century when a court ruling gave colleges wide powers to expel students without
>
> due process. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, *in loco parentis* rules
>
> transplanted the intimate normativity of the Fordist family into a wider
>
> institutional context, radiating its disciplines well beyond the confines of the
>
> family home into the liminal social space of the college campus, where students
>
> were considered neither complete adults nor children. *In loco parentis* allowed
>
> administrators and dorm officials to restrict the political activities of students, to
>
> regulate behavior, dress, and alcohol consumption, and to police sexuality.
>
> Controlled heteronormativity was the rule here. (p. 230)

Although this idea of "parental" discipline would not be directly considered as chosen family,

since there is not an obvious case for a mutual sense of support, it does reflect someone else, in

this case the university administrator, acting as a parental figure and the one who disciplines the child, the student. However, university administrators were there to enact how students should conduct themselves, and to teach subordination under the university administration and the government at large. This would seem familiar for many Black students, who would "see *in loco parentis* as a form of institutionalized infantilism, a way of imposing norms of respectability and [submission]," (Cooper, 2019, p. 231) especially when trying to protest for civil rights and against racial discrimination on college campuses. However, as students would protest *in loco parentis* ruling, they would learn to critique the ways that it subjected them to racial, sexual, and gender normativity, and understand how it built and strengthened a hierarchy of power within the university they were attending (Cooper, 2019, p. 231).

In loco parentis would start to see a decline after the ruling of *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961). Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education presented a case that had "Several black students at Alabama State College… expelled during a period of intense civil rights [protest] in Montgomery, Alabama," (Kaplin & Lee, 2014, p. 589). Students were expelled without being given due process which set a precedent requiring public institutions to give due process to their students and measuring the procedures for expulsion and other sanctions. (Private institutions follow a similar structure, but more so reflects contract law.) After this case, students were "recognized under the federal Constitution as 'persons' with their own enforceable constitutional rights. They are recognized as adults, with the rights and responsibilities of adults, under many state laws," (Kaplin & Lee, 2014, p. 343). Although there would now be legal standards for due process and procedures for working with students, the authoritative parental role would not disappear from the university and legislation around the university system.

Long before Ronald Reagan was President of the United States, he served as Governor of California from 1967 to 1975. While he was campaigning, he "organized his entire campaign rhetoric in opposition to [Lyndon B.] Johnson's Great Society programs, which were at that very moment being rolled out across the country," (Cooper, 2019, p. 233). The Great Society programs would work to end American poverty and racial inequality. This would include legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965. Reagan would go against this with his idea of the "creative society," pushing for more privatization and less government involvement, compared to Johnson's introductions which involved building more public programming. Instead of working with student activist movements and protesters, "Reagan's campaign… filtered campus unrest through the lens of a family drama, with Reagan himself cast in the redemptive role of the stern father," (Cooper, 2019, p. 234). He was against free college and social welfare, describing what legislators and administrators were doing through the lens of parental indulgence, as if the administrator is giving so much to the student, as if free tuition was on par with an overload of candy given to a child. As Governor, he would be very involved with the California university system, erasing Clark Kerr's ideals for higher education, and pushing the ideals of responsibility for tuition costs onto families instead of the government.

As evidenced, the ways that *in loco parentis* occurs in the university has changed. "*In loco parentis*, it seems, now speaks the language of personal injury rather than institutional paternalism and disciplinary norms," (Cooper, 2019, p. 254). The university must now care for the students, with families as "private investors in the future capital of their children, and colleges as… a trustee relationship to this investment — liable for damages if their charges were in any way harmed," (Cooper, 2019, p. 254). The university must now work with growing

concepts of "[building] safe spaces, [fighting] microaggressions, and trigger warnings," (Cooper, 2019, p. 255). The workers of the university, such as the staff, faculty, and higher administration, are once again taking care of the student, but now in the protection of capital gain.

The ideas of chosen family and *in loco parentis* reflect each other, because they both place a role of familial responsibility on someone who most likely is not a member of the student's biolegal family. However, where chosen family members are exactly that, chosen, with a mutual commitment and respect, there is less of a sense of mutual commitment for *in loco parentis* and more of a sense of obligation. Students look for this structure of chosen family during their time in college for support, whether from peers or staff and faculty.

Familial Roles in Context of Student Affairs

The frame of chosen family and familial roles in student affairs has changed but has been consistent in building and shaping spaces for students to feel comfortable and supported during their time at the university. A focus for current literature are these relationships, but specifically focused for queer students of color. In Duran and Pérez's (2018) study on queer Latino men at predominantly white institutions they describe how these students build a chosen family structure during their time on campus, and the students find is more success (p. 79). They found that these chosen family structures help in enforcing cultural values of respect, placing important messages of aspiration and achievement, providing emotional support, and building ideas of self-efficacy (Duran & Pérez, 2018, p. 69).

It is common for students to begin to call student affairs staff and administrators "mom," or other familial roles (Duran & Pérez, 2018, p. 79). This expresses a sense of closeness and commitment, when students begin to not only build this family structure but reference it.

Students look to find staff and faculty members to be mentors, especially those who can

recognize and relate to specific pieces of their identity. A queer student would feel more

comfortable seeking advice from a queer staff or faculty member. A Black student would feel

more comfortable seeking advice and mentorship from a Black staff or faculty member. This is

because that person they are seeking refuge and mentorship with would be able to connect with

them on a deeper level, giving the student a sense of recognition for something that otherwise

might be ignored by other administrators or faculty. Having a mentor to fulfill a chosen family

role on campus can help with development, as well as offering a feeling of sanctuary and support

on campus.

Community and Student Development

In analyzing the relationship of chosen family as a framework for advising in higher

education, the developmental aspects should also be considered. bell hooks' (2003) writing on

community, family, and love deeply informs my views on the development of these tight knit

relationships and communities. hooks writes:

> If we do not experience love in our extended families of origin (which is the first
>
> site for community offered for us), the other place where children in particular
>
> had the opportunity to build community and know love is in friendship. Since we
>
> choose our friends, many of us, from childhood on into our adulthood, have
>
> looked to friends for the care, respect, knowledge, and all-around nurturance of
>
> our growth that we did not find in the family. (hooks, 2003, p. 133)

Learning more about one's self and developing personal identity outside of our biolegal family,

but more with friends, community members, and those we consider to be chosen family, is

relevant in theories of student development. In this subsection I present theory BALH and BALH as example of this connection.

Context for Community in Student Development

To give context for the importance of community in student development, Urie Brofenbrenner's model for developmental ecology offers a holistic understanding (Patton, et al., 2016, p. 41). Within his theory, Brofenbrenner lays out four components of this person-environment theory for development, including process, person, context, and time. With student development in relation to chosen families, the context resonates closely. Brofenbrenner subdivides context into a nested series of the student in the center, surrounded, (in order) by microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Patton, et al., 2016, p. 42). These spaces lay out where student development can occur and prompt reactions, and each has social forces and relations to those around them. One of the closest relations is the microsystem, and is suggested to include friends, family, and staff/faculty relationships (Renn & Arnold, 2003, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 44). These relationships help to give context for a student's development.

Theories around community gain greater relevance when thinking about identity development. One well-rounded idea of community aligned with this exists in Sharon Daloz Parks' (2000) theory of faith development. Parks writes about how community and dependency on others can help with personal development, specifically around faith, but this can be applied in a larger context to understanding personal relations with others. Parks explains "that individuals need familiar and dependable networks of people, places, and communities to explore themselves and their values," (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 205). This

theory suggests that people experience a need to find balance between personal identity and relations with others. This balance is found in 5 different ways:

- **conventional community:** This sense of community is found when an individual is dependent on others to define themselves. An individual at this point would be following values and cultural norms of the significant people in their lives. This tends to happen when an individual would be an adolescent or younger (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 205).

- **diffuse community:** This sense of community is found when an individual starts to explore new ways of being, with some of their familiar social groups becoming uncomfortable for them. During this time, the individual will start to search for new relationships that match their new views. This commonly happens in adolescents (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 206).

- **mentoring community:** Mentoring communities happen as individuals separate themselves from their beliefs from their past. These match up with a community that sees potential in the individual. Usually, this sense of community is found for young adults (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 206).

- **self-selected group:** When an individual has more of a solid sense of beliefs and values, they tend to seek out communities that share those ideas. This tends to happen more with adults (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 206).

- **open to the other:** When an individual becomes more aware of "otherness" or lives different from their own, they can further develop as a full human. This is said to be found with people past midlife (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 206).

Parks herself describes that this is not a linear model, but remains interwoven (Parks, 1986, as cited in, Patton, et al. 2016, p. 206). That the theory is nonlinear is important because these senses of community can happen at different stages in life.

When you separate faith from Parks' model and focus specifically on the community aspect, *mentoring communities*, *self-selected groups*, and *open to the other* are the three stages that provide the most insight into the structure of the chosen family. Chosen family relationships include these, but are usually prompted in a diffuse community view, looking to build a new network that can support an individual as they develop and learn more about themselves. Afterwards, an individual would find a self-selected group that shares beliefs with them, supports them, and helps them make meaning of their life. *Mentoring community* aligns at the same time, as a chosen family might include an individual looking to someone to help guide them and help figure out their own personal direction in life. A *mentoring community* can offer a parallel within higher education for an advisor-student relationship. The student will go to the mentor for help in guiding their experience in college. Once again, this would not be limited to a staff member with "advisor" in their position title but can be someone who in general will be helping to mentor and guide the student.

For chosen family structures, it is important to mix *open to the other* groups with *mentoring* and *self-selected communities*. A chosen family thrives when there are those who hold differences of opinion and identity, to be able to value different perspectives and avoid an echo chamber of thought. Placing these forms of community into the college setting makes sense as it is common for students to have their college experience as the first time they reach a diffuse community from their biolegal family and home life. Parks' (2000) forms of community reach into and help give context to other pieces of identity development.

Community in Theories of Identity Development

Community importance in identity development is not just in relation to faith, but also to other components of a person's identity. Community and social identity appears in Dillon, Worthington, and Moradi's (2011) unifying model of sexual identity development. This model includes "two parallel, reciprocal developmental determinants: (a) an individual sexual identity development process and (b) a social identity process," (Dillon, et al., 2011, as cited in, Patton, et al. 2016, p. 160). Examining this process reveals that the determinants of the individual and social identity are influenced by each other and work together to develop a person's sexual identity. A person's social identity will include elements of a group membership identity and attitudes towards sexual identity (Dillon, et al., 2011, as cited in, Patton, et al. 2016, p. 161). These aspects focus on how one will fit into the group, but also their own perceptions of this identity group.

Dillon et al.'s model (2011) can connect to the *diffuse* and *self-selected group* spaces from Parks' (2000) theory. As a student looks to be around those that share this piece of their identity with them and find community in those with shared values and pieces of culture, they will begin to grow with them and learn more about themselves. As with any part of identity development, a person will also be influenced by the intersections of other parts of their identity, such as gender, race, and religion. (Patton, et al., 2016, p. 162)

Community and familial forces are theorized in racial identity development models, as well. One example can be found in Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) model of Black identity development. Cross (1991) writes about Black identity development with three central concepts: personal identity, reference group orientation, and race salience (Cross, 1991, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 96). Like the unifying model for sexual identity development (Dillon, et al.,

2011), personal identity and world/group view influence each other and work together to form a person's racial identity. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) developed an approach to understanding Black identity development by examining a person's life span. This life span model has six sectors that match to different points in a Black person's life and development, but the first two sectors are particularly relevant due to the influence of family and community. These sectors (1) infancy and childhood, and (2) preadolescence, both have to do with factors of the family and immediate community, including inheriting traditions, values, and practices (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, pp. 96-97). These teachings are set from parental figures and are also reinforced outside of the home.

These sectors match Parks' (2000) a *conventional community* and as a person grows and feels greater external and societal influences, their identity might strengthen, or perception might change. The external or societal influence shows up in sector five of Cross and Fhagen-Smith's model, adult nigrescence. In this sector, a person has experiences that affect their understanding of their racial identity and makes them reexamine their own perspectives of their racial identity, who they surround themselves with, and solidify their personal values (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 99). Sector five, adult nigrescence, could resemble the *diffuse, mentoring, and self-selected groups*, as a person wants to find a space that matches with their views of the world more.

A person's identity development flourishes when they find the group they feel they matter in and where they can exist as their truest self. For an undergraduate student coming into the university for the first time, it is important to find both mentors and peers that can help them find themselves, understand their community more, and gain new perspectives on the world. The need for community is enhanced by Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) theory on mattering and

marginality. Marginality, in this sense, means a worry that a student matters to anyone, and mattering means a belief that "whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else," (Schlossberg, 1989, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 36). As a student affairs professional, but for educators in general, it is important to make students feel like they matter, both personally and through programming, as it will only make their experience in higher education better and more effective.

Schlossberg (1989) divides mattering into four aspects:

- **attention:** The feeling that an individual is being noticed (1989, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 37)

- **importance:** The belief that the individual is cared about (1989, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 37)

- **dependence:** The feeling of being needed (1989, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 37)

- **appreciation:** The feeling that others appreciate an individual's efforts (1989, as cited in, Patton, et al., 2016, p. 37)

These aspects are enhanced by facilitating programs, creating safe and open spaces for students, and committing to connect with students on a deeper level. As student affairs professionals, we can make the space for students to find peers that can also give them this sense of mattering and community.

Field Experience

During my studies in my graduate program of higher education policy and student affairs, I did two internships, one in the university's undergraduate admissions office and one in the

graduate school. This university is a medium-sized, public state university. I also worked as a research assistant for a program aimed at supporting first generation students at the university, as well as, research for a workshop series focused on education and the global south. All these experiences helped form my philosophy and theory for how education should look and run. My internships also informed my own practice within student affairs, of working with targeted audiences, building support for students, and working with university policy, and incorporating social justice.

Graduate School

Working in the university's graduate school set a standard of love in the office and passion for working with students. Within the office, there was always a sense of humor, community, and appreciation among the staff. The staff was a small number, which made every person's work more noticeable and made the community of the office more in tune with one another. This allowed for more open and honest office meetings, but also more opportunity to celebrate successes. Most of the work I did was in addressing departmental policy and analyzing data about graduate students; this work allowed for the office to find the best practices for supporting graduate students. As I was a graduate student myself, I was also able to give a more personal perspective.

In the graduate school, we had a specific targeted audience for our advising and programming, the students had different needs in comparison to undergraduate students. Graduate students entering a program have been through college already, been working in their field for years, or were doing their program online to balance a busy schedule. Due to this, programming had to be consolidated into specific times and incorporate virtual resources to accommodate students who couldn't be in person. Compared to the work around undergraduate

students, the graduate school was more focused on support than classic event programming. Although these choices might seem to go against the idea of community building, it takes into consideration what the population we are serving needs, and how to best support them.

Undergraduate Admissions

My experience in the undergraduate admissions office was different from graduate school, as I was working mainly with students who were entering college for the first time and their families. Most of my work was educating the students and their families on what their experience would be like attending this university. As well, I would be working with the undergraduate student ambassadors to help make sure their experience working in the office went smoothly and was positive. While I was not their direct supervisor, I was able to act as a mentor and advocate to the ambassadors, and a bridge between them and the professional staff members. I was an undergraduate admissions ambassador, myself, so I tried to mix what I remembered needing in that time with finding out directly from them how to best serve them.

Undergraduate admissions had a much larger staff and had much more independent work. I struggled with this but pushed for more open communication with my own supervisors. It was during my time working in the admissions office that I was able to find ways to work with multiple mentors to receive different kinds of support. Working with incoming prospective students allowed me to find ways to best comfort students in a time in their lives of transformation. As well, working with prospective students taught me skills of more personalized communication to work with students on a case by case basis.

Research Positions

My research positions during graduate school allowed for me to investigate best practices for working with an underserved population at the university, as well as being able to build a deeper understanding of putting theory to practice. As a research assistant for a program for first generation students, I was able to find best practices in ways to support an at-risk population of students. Then, being able to watch as the service to support these students were rolled out, I could see as my work and discussions had influence.

As a research assistant for a workshop series around critical theory and education, I was able to help bring the main workshop to fruition. The series brought together both theorists and practitioners from across North and South America, whose work is in education and pedagogy. This was a great example of people coming together to discuss a topic they are all passionate about, spread new ways of thinking, and work together to find how to take theories and put them into practice within the educational system and other public spaces. All that attended wanted to find ways to work against neoliberal systems, to support students (and people in general) in a community and social justice focused education.

Conclusion

From my work experiences, I have been able to watch as theory and research is put into practice within student affairs and higher education, at large. There have been clear signs of where community and service to students has been a core value, matching with my own philosophy and values for education. It is clear from a developmental and historical perspective that there is an intrinsic value of familial roles and community in education. Because of this, community and relationship building in education must be facilitated with love, care, and a spirit of service.

In the next chapter, I present a programmatic intervention, QueerPeers, that takes the theories described into consideration, and works to bring those theories to practice. By building a tight knit, committed, community on campus for an at-risk population, familial roles are given space within an advising and mentorship context.

Chapter 4 - Theory to Practice, Program Design

Introduction

In this chapter I propose a program, QueerPeers, that will be able to take my philosophy of education and chosen family structures actively into the university. QueerPeers will relate to my focus on chosen family roles acting to frame advising within higher education. Chosen family relationships exist with mutual respect, support, accountability, and commitment, fulfilled by those outside of a person's biolegal family (Duran & Pérez, 2018, p. 69). In this program a queer student will be able to build these relationships and find commitment to other queer students.

QueerPeers

To incorporate a chosen family relationship into advising, I am proposing a peer mentorship program, QueerPeers. QueerPeers is an advising program that connects incoming first year and transfer students with other LGBTQ students. QueerPeers would build a network of queer students on campus, while simultaneously offering a way of connecting these students to advising on campus. Students involved in the program would either be a "big" or "little," similar to fraternity and sorority life, to build a lineage of queer students at the university. QueerPeers connects to the structure of the chosen family, because students would be actively choosing to be a part of a lineage and form committed relationships with one another. This program would also recognize that advising is not just limited to staff member advisors and mentors but can emphasize peer to peer advising.

QueerPeers is focused specifically on queer students, since they are an at-risk population at many universities. According to the Campus Pride Index State of Higher Education (2010):

> [Queer] students [are] more likely to... seriously [consider] leaving their
>
> institution. The likelihood of leaving for all students, regardless of sexual identity,
>
> decrease[s] with each year of study, but the differences between [queer] and
>
> heterosexual students widen[s], with [queer] students considering leaving more
>
> often... (Rankin et al., p. 15).

Having these peer-to-peer connections beginning in the student's first year and reassuring them that they have a support system on campus could raise retention for the undergraduate queer population on university campuses.

Critical Action Research and QueerPeers

In building QueerPeers as an intervention, I was inspired by the core values of critical action research (CAR) within higher education. CAR provides a collective process of knowledge production that also works to be critical of oppressive systems. By combining critical theory and action research, CAR "[generates] knowledge that is both valid and vital to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and for the larger-scale democratic social change" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p.11). I believe that the use of critical action research in higher education is vital to a comprehensive, democratic, and community focused education.

CAR is important because it works directly with the population that this research/thesis addresses and lets the students involved have control over the directions it goes in. Within my intervention, students are discussing issues of social change, power, and identity, both in group settings and one-on-one conversations. By giving the control over topic choice at the family dinners (see Appendix A) to the mentors, the mentors can shape the discussion of the night. As the mentors choose topics, with goals in place for discussion, it follows the form of facilitated knowledge production. As well, students will have the action of building a family tree in the

LGBTQ center, to see the network of queer people that have come before them and are there to support them.

An interesting aspect of CAR is that it has a tenant of shared commitment within research and implementation, which feels familiar to my thesis topic of chosen family. As I have mentioned, mutual commitment, accountability, and collaboration are core values of a chosen family. In this way, not one person has more "power" than another, but each person brings different strengths and support to the collaboration. All the different members of this program, QueerPeers, bring a different strength and role with them. The supervisor sets standards and outlines with the mentors, as the mentors do with their mentees. The design of the roles and the program are intended to be iterative, as the mentee's views on the programming will change how the supervisor works with the mentees, and so forth. This design also sets a standard of accountability, in knowing that how we serve the incoming mentors or "littles" has direct influence on how the program is run.

Theoretical Frameworks

Along with CAR, my program of QueerPeers is also heavily influenced by my educational philosophy. The aim of education within the university should be to facilitate a collaborative diffusion of passion, knowledge, and lessons, that will influence growing thought. As well, the university should teach to reflect experiences and how to build the reflective process into educational processes. My intervention centers this philosophy, as it builds a community of discussion, storytelling, reflection, and knowledge production. For the program to exist, there needs to be a sense of passion and care from the participants involved. Students need to have space for discussion and new perspectives, but also a community of like-minded people.

My intervention also relates to my views on knowledge diffusion, as the thought and passion that is conducted in the program will only influence the students involved to discuss what they have spoken about and learned at QueerPeers events with other members of the students own chosen families, communities, and homes. Building collaboration and love into QueerPeers, is not only relevant, but necessary. The program will not work if the supervisor alone is building how the program should run. It will only be strengthened as new perspectives are offered to shape how it will run as a program.

QueerPeers is also related to my relation of chosen family and student development. Using the context of Parks' (2000) theory of faith development, specifically the forms of community, I can match where students might be in their understanding of community. QueerPeers is centered around the forms of a *mentoring community, self-selected group, and open to the other,* (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton et al., 2016, p. 206). Students opt in and can then find mentors and those with new perspectives on shared lived experiences. As students build these communities of new thought and perspective, "they are able to further develop as a full human," (Parks, 2000, as cited in, Patton et al., 2016, p. 206).

QueerPeers build a form of chosen family, because students actively choose to participate and can build these deeper relationships and commitments to each other. This commitment happens both on the personal level, in one-on-one interactions with the "big" and "little," and on a group level at family dinners and other programming. The intentional relationship-building done in the program reflects a very direct line from Dillon, Worthington, and Moradi's (2011) unifying model of sexual identity development. QueerPeers is focused on LGBTQ people and needs to take into consideration the determinants of both individual and group membership identity, of a student's sexual identity. Individual and social sexual identity are influenced by

each other, which can be emphasized in a setting such as this (Dillon et al., 2011, as cited in, Patton et al. 2016, p. 160).

While building this chosen family community, there are also new forms of education that will be happening outside of the classroom setting. Placing experience and collaborative service as a form of knowledge production relates to John Dewey and Paulo Freire's theories of education. John Dewey (1997) writes about how education is based on the idea that society is dependent and exists due to the transmission of knowledge, as well, that experience builds what we call life. Dewey writes, "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life," (Dewey 1997, p. 2). He expresses that *life* is a "range of experiences" including "customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations and occupations," (Dewey, 1997, p. 2). In that thought, all pieces of our lives come together to build a form of education.

Even closer to QueerPeers, Dewey (1997) writes directly about collaborative knowledge production by saying, "Not only does social life demand teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates" (p. 5). This idea of existing together as education builds the need for collaboration. Building a chosen family structure, inherently will build a form of education and knowledge transfer. Especially as students work closely together and build traditions and gatherings, the community thrives on facilitated informal education.

Paulo Freire's opposition to a banking model of education is relevant to the organization of QueerPeers. Freire (1970) describes the banking model to be when "education… becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating… [the teacher] makes deposits which the students patiently receive,

memorize, and repeat," (p. 72). His idea has a teacher as the knowledgeable, placing thought into the students with no sense of collaboration or cyclical transfer. QueerPeers, brings a sense of education where there is collaborative transfer of communication and knowledge; education is not depository within QueerPeers, but is collaborative. The "big" will learn from their "little", just as much as the "little" will learn from the "big", reflecting Freire's (1970) image of service to one another through conversation and discussion:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is… taught in dialogue with the student, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 80).

As students adopt ways of thinking, they will be able to respond to the past related to their queer identity, but also help create the future and ways of resisting against oppressive systems.

Current Best Practices

To help build my program proposal, it has been helpful to look at some best practices from the field of higher education and student affairs. There are universities that have similar programs to my proposal, such as the Queer Peers programs at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), Dickinson College, and University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (UW Oshkosh). The Student Academic Mentor program at Berklee College of Music, also helped to give a structure to the lineage model for advisors for my program.

At Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) they have multiple programs made to accommodate queer students on campus, including their own program called Queer Peers. Penn State is a large public, land-grant, research university in University Park, PA. Their Queer Peers

program is aimed at sharing resources for queer students, implementing programming throughout the year, and building a queer community on the Penn State campus, (Pennsylvania State University, n.d.- a, para. 3). This program hosts three major events, with various smaller events throughout the year. The major events they host include: (1) "New in Town," a gathering hosted to welcome new students to campus and learn about their Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, (2) "New & Q," a gathering mid-fall semester to make care packages students on campus, and (3) "New Year, New Queer," at the beginning of the spring semester, to reconnect queer students after the winter break (Pennsylvania State University, n.d.-a).

Penn State also offers a mentorship program that matches queer graduate students with queer undergraduate students, for one on one meetings (Pennsylvania State University, n.d.-b). As well, Penn State hosts discussion groups focused on specific communities. These groups would include: "Aces (asexual and aromantic), Beyond the Binary (gender identity), BiLions (bisexual, pansexual, fluid), Color Me Queer ([queer] students of color), and WLW (women loving women)," (Pennsylvania State University, n.d. c). The discussion groups would offer space to have more focused conversations on specific pieces of queer identity and be able to share perspectives and experiences for those living in that identity. These programs can offer both personal one on one peer support and facilitated group programming for queer students on campus.

Dickinson College hosts a program also called Queer Peers, which is a close resemblance to the program I would like to build. Dickinson College is a small private, liberal arts college, in Carlisle, PA. Dickinson's Queer Peers program is a peer advising program, pairing mentor and mentee on similar interests and identities. (Dickinson College, 2013, para. 1-2) The participants

in this program will also have social events to attend, to build a community among those involved. Students interested apply themselves to be involved in this program.

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (UW Oshkosh) have their own Queer Peer program, as well. UW Oshkosh is a medium sized, public, state university, in Oshkosh, WI. The program hosts undergraduate students, both on and off campus, as well as incoming first year students. (University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, n.d.- a) Mentors in the program are trained by the university counseling center, and work with the university's LGBTQ Resource Center (University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, n.d.-a). Their website for the Queer Peer program hosts an "Ask a Queer Peer" option, that allows for anonymous online questions, that go directly to mentors in the program (University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, n.d.-a). As well, they have a frequently asked questions section, for quick information on resources for queer students both on and off campus. Separately, they also offer an LGBTQA+ Alumni Mentorship program, connecting current students with alumni of UC Oshkosh, for a different form of mentorship (University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, n.d.- b). Their web page for the program is detailed and offers many resources, even for students not involved in the program.

The Student Academic Mentor (SAM) program at Berklee College of Music, helped give a structure to the lineage model of advisors for my program. Berklee College of Music is a small private music college, in Boston, MA. (Booker & Chartelain, 2020) "SAMs are student staff members of the Office of Academic Advising [at Berklee]," (Berklee College of Music, n.d., para. 8) These students are supervised by an academic advisor in the Office of Academic Advising, and each are assigned to two first-year seminar classes (Booker & Chartelain, 2020). The SAMs have one on ones with their supervisor, to give feedback and stay accountable, while also meeting with mentees three to four times a semester. The SAMs send out a weekly

newsletter to their mentees and facilitate some out of class activities, such as visits to museums and places that relate to their mentee's studies (Booker & Chartelain, 2020). The SAM program builds a lineage, with the supervising advisor at the top, the mentors branching out from there, and then connecting to multiple first year seminar classes below them.

These best practices are relevant to me, because they help to frame and shape my program, knowing how others have done similar. The programs at Penn State, Dickinson College, and UW Oshkosh, offer a variety of mentoring and advising models for queer students in higher education. As well, they put on creative programming that still has education and community as central values to their goal. This also shows various institutional types (private, public, rural, urban, etc.) that can shape their mentoring program to fit the university. The Berklee College of Music mentor program is relevant, because it helps to build a line up for supervision for both the mentor role and mentee role. It also shapes both direct and indirect contact for mentors with mentees in their role.

Goals and Objectives of QueerPeers

When building this programmatic intervention, QueerPeers, I have set goals and objectives for the program. Goals, to set a vision for where I would like to see the program go; with objectives to plan how to make that vision possible. These goals and objectives are shared below.

Program Goals

The QueerPeers program aims to:

- build a network of committed relationships for students on campus;
- offer students different ways of coping with and navigating higher education as a queer student;

- improve retention rates for queer undergraduate students;

- increase student understanding of intersecting identities of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, with LGBTQ identities.

Program Objectives

The QueerPeers Program will:

- create a space for students to connect with other queer students on campus;

- connect students to resources, both on and off campus, for LGBTQ people;

- train "bigs" on how to be supporting and effective leaders;

- host family dinners to bring together all QueerPeers participants;

- have students participate in critical and reflective discussions around their own queer identity;

- pair incoming queer first year and transfer students with current undergraduate students.

By setting these goals and objectives, I am able to make QueerPeers come to life. It also creates solidified intentions for the program and clears up what I will need to assess within the program See Chapter five for more discussion on assessment). As I plan the blueprint for major events for the intervention, the training and family dinners, it is important to keep my vision at the core and align with the values for creating the program.

Learning Outcomes

The experience of QueerPeers is educational at its core, centering academic advising with community building. The learning outcomes for the QueerPeers program, include:

a. Students involved in the QueerPeers program as a mentee will be able to identify at least one support person on campus.

b. Students involved in the QueerPeers program as a mentor will be able to discuss navigating higher education as a Queer student.

c. Students involved in the QueerPeers program will be able to articulate a basic history of LGBTQ people, including a variety of intersecting identities.

d. Students involved in the QueerPeers program will learn reflection skills to better be able to address their needs as an LGBTQ student in higher education.

e. Students involved in the QueerPeers program will be able to identify systems that have influenced pieces of their personal identity, and how their lived experiences have impacted their perspectives.

By addressing these learning outcomes, there are objectives to make sure students build these committed relationships. In these mentor-mentee relationships, students will be able to reflect and learn about themselves, their community, and resources that are available for them, both on- and off-campus Similar to familial relationships, I expect there to be a difference of perspectives among the group, which will be fruitful at the family dinners where discussion is at the core. QueerPeers will help in making sure LGBTQ students involved in the program have a support system, to help them guide both the social and academic aspects of higher education.

Program Proposal

For my programmatic intervention, QueerPeers, I am proposing a pilot program for the first year, to lay a groundwork and begin the lineage of the chosen family tree. This pilot would include one advisor, four "bigs" with each having one or two "littles". If there are four "bigs" and eight "littles", there are already 12 people to begin a lineage; this will also account for any future drop offs of members from consistent membership of the program. The program will consist of one fall training retreat and three family dinners as the major events.

For the QueerPeers program, incoming queer first- year and transfer undergraduate students would be matched with current undergraduate students. The mentors (who will be called "bigs") will be supervised by a staff member in the university LGBTQ Center. There will be a training retreat for the "bigs" in the program at the beginning of the fall semester (See Appendix C), as well as three family dinners throughout the year. These family dinners will take place once in the fall semester and twice in the spring semester.

As students go through their time in the program, they would take on their own "littles", creating a lineage of QueerPeers (see Figure 1 below). Within the LGBTQ Center on campus, there would be a family tree mural created, so students could see how the network of queer students continues to grow. Doing outreach to these populations would also keep some alumni connected to the program, as they would still be attached to the lineage, they are in.

Figure 1

Lineage Structure for QueerPeers Program
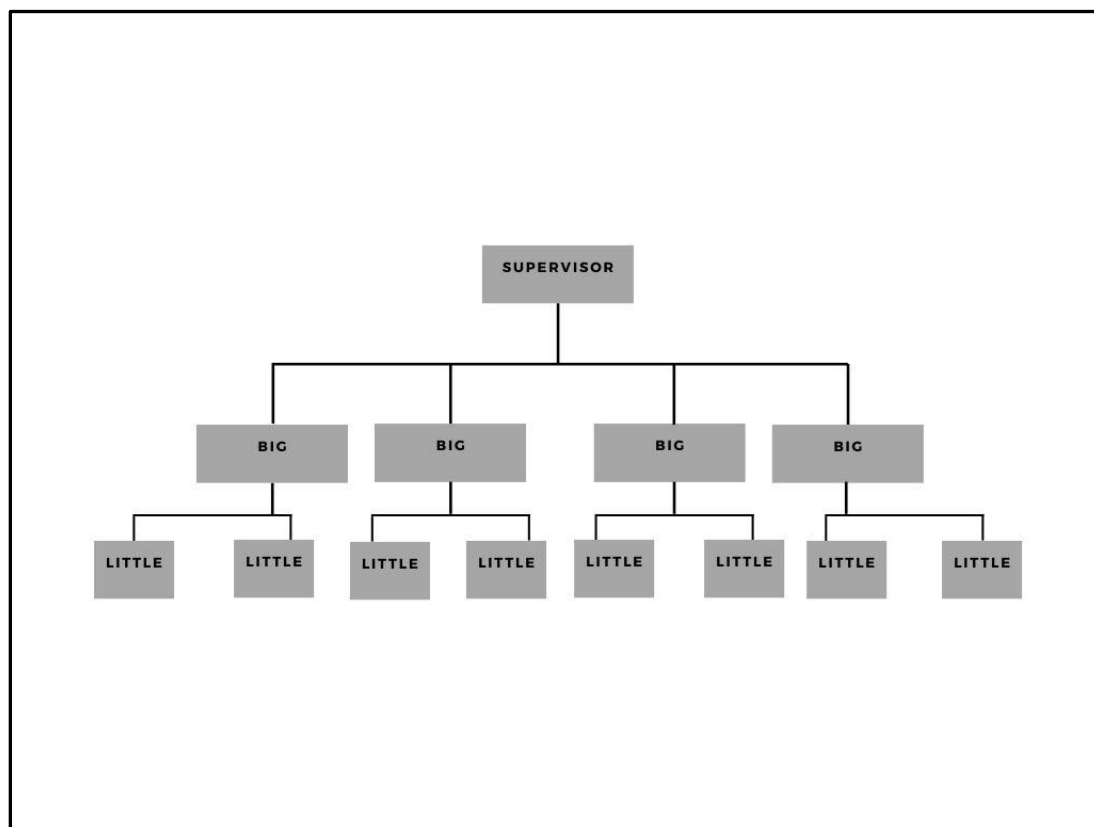
Within QueerPeers, there are four major events--one training in the fall for the "bigs" and three family dinners that will be planned by the "bigs." These events allow for the goals of the program to come to life, with a training to make the "bigs" prepared to act as mentors to their "littles" and the dinners to bring all participants together, as a chosen family.

The fall training would be to train the Queer Peers "bigs" on how to be supportive and effective leaders, as well as gaining some basic counseling and advising skills. This would be to prepare them for working with the incoming students, their "littles", to be able to support them as best as they can and plan the programming throughout the year. QueerPeers would connect with

offices and departments on and off campus, surrounding resources for queer students, and queer people in general.

Each family dinner will have a different focus for conversation, planned by the "bigs" in the program, but with topics such as: queer visibility, chosen family, being queer in higher education, or pairing conversations with a movie (See Appendix E). These family dinners would act as a gathering for "bigs" and "littles" to connect with other participants in the program and build a network and community of queer students on campus. Having all the participants gather with a central focus on the food, allows members to add sentimental ties to the community gathering. Like many family gatherings for events such as holidays, food tends to be at the core of the event, with discussion and tradition built around. Having these family dinner gatherings, also allows for an experiential learning experience, outside of the classic classroom setting.

Funding and Costs

I plan to obtain funding for the program through the university LGBTQ office, but also alumni asks. Hoping for alumni to want to see this recorded lineage begin, specifically for LGBTQ alumni and outspoken allies, can have a direct relation to the supporting the LGBTQ community on campus. Pointing an ask towards out LGBTQ alumni and allies, sets a standard for those involved to then assist with funding, as well, when they graduate.

"Bigs" will get a stipend of $600 dollars per semester, to total $1200 dollars for the whole year (See Appendix D). This position will require them to have one to two office hours per week, to help in planning events, check ins, and writing bi-weekly newsletters to their "littles". If a "big" is in the federal work study program they would be able to use this position but might end up having to do more hours working with the LGBTQ center in addition. The advisor/program coordinator will be a part of the LGBTQ office, and most of their involvement

in the program is to make sure things are running smoothly, hold accountability with the "bigs", and check off on any decisions that are made. As a program sponsored by the LGBTQ center, the supervisors involvement would fall into the job description and responsibilities for one of the staff members of the LGBTQ center. The training retreat will have a catered lunch and dinner, either by a university endorsed caterer or outside entity; the family dinners will be a potluck style mix of home cooked food by members of QueerPeers and catered food.

Marketing, Recruitment, and Participation

Marketing and recruitment for the program will be a collaboration between the LGBTQ center, the office of diversity and inclusion, and academic advising. There will be posters hung for marketing, and staff members should advise students who they believe would benefit from the program to join. As the program is self-nominating, no student can be forced into the program, so reference to the application will be important. Students interested then can apply through the LGBTQ center for the position (See Appendices A & B). The staff members that do reference, should only reference if they have an open understanding that the student is queer, so there is an avoidance of indirectly outing a student or implying sexuality that might not be queer.

Some challenges that this program might face is if there are too many "littles", the "bigs" might get overwhelmed with mentorship work, in which case more recruitment for "bigs" will be necessary. As well, in creating a mural students' names will be shown, although in the LGBTQ center, which might be more open than a student wants for their disclosure of their sexual identity. In that case, students can opt to just write initials, so they still feel tied to the lineage without outing themselves. For family dinners, some universities have limits of home cooked or

baked food, which would make the need for more catered food. In this case, there would just need to be more overwatch of the food choices made with catering.

I see the future of QueerPeers to continue growing and building a lineage that can trail for many years. Hopefully in the future, as more are involved, there can be a faculty and staff mentorship component, where faculty and staff members act as group mentors. I would also hope to see as there are more members, for more specific pairings of "bigs" and "littles", dependent on other pieces of the students identity and needs. I will address more of the limitations and the future of the program, in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

By building this programmatic intervention I can begin work on a facilitated network of queer students on campus. By offering students a new way of building support, they will be able to address their struggles and triumphs in navigating higher education as a queer student. I believe that having this program, it will begin to improve institutional retention rates among queer undergraduate students. QueerPeers is a true expression of theory to practice, as there is a sense of community building, love, experiential learning, and service that is found in the theoretical frameworks I have used.

The next chapter will focus on how leadership plays a role with the chosen family and in my program of QueerPeers. I will also discuss ways to evaluate and assess this program to ensure future goals for the program are possible.

Chapter 5: **Leadership & Evaluation**

Introduction

In this chapter, I will be focusing on the role of leadership within student affairs, my programmatic intervention, and how it relates to the structure of the chosen family. As well, I will discuss ways I will be evaluating and assessing my program, QueerPeers, to ensure future goals for the program can be made a reality. I will also address some of my limitations and topics I am unable to address fully in this initial version of the program.

Leadership in Higher Education

In thinking about the role of leadership in higher education, it is important to think about some important characteristics and theories. Two in particular would be Robert K. Greenleaf's (1991) theory of servant leadership and Bruce J. Avolio & William L. Gardner's (2005) theory of authentic leadership. Both bring a spirit of empathy, service, and awareness to the work of professionals.

Greenleaf's (1991) theory of servant leadership is relevant to both my own philosophy of education and my views on the role of the student affairs professional. Servant leadership focuses on a leader who is serving those in their community or organization. Leading with a spirit of service to others and keeping an approach to work that puts those served and community first. Greenleaf (1991) writes:

> The servant-leader is servant first… it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve — after leadership is established. The leader-

first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings

and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature (p.6).

Greenleaf (1991) emphasizes this approach by saying the servant-leader asks: "How can I use

myself to serve best?" (p. 10). Servant leaders have characteristics and attributes of strong

listening skills, empathy, healing, the ability to build a sense of community, and commitment to

the growth of people.

The theory of the servant-leader reflects the idea of love in education. Specifically, of bell

hooks' (2003) focus on the educator: "The teacher who can ask of students, 'What do you need

in order to learn?' or 'how can I serve?' brings to the work of educating a spirit of service that

honors the students' will to learn," (p. 92). Being a servant-leader, or in this case a servant-

educator, places the student at the center of student affairs professional's work. By bringing a

spirit of service, the educator incorporates love and care to their work with the student.

In relation to the chosen family relationship in education, servant leadership pushes for a

commitment to others. By doing so, the educator hopes to model a sense of care for those they

work with and for. This model should lead to a mutual commitment between all parties involved.

Being able to respect and care for another person, leading with their expressed interests and

needs in mind can help to create a better environment for success and growth.

Another theory that relates to this work is Bruce J. Avolio and William L. Gardner's

(2005) Authentic Leadership theory. Authentic leadership follows the idea of leading as

authentically as possible. Being aware of the context one is leading in and setting an example for

authenticity in their community or organization is important. The authentic leader has a clear

idea of their own morals and values and leads with them. Reflections on their own personal

experiences and views influence their leadership, and they are value driven instead of working specific to a position. Avolio and Gardner (2005) write:

> Authentic leadership can make a fundamental difference in organizations by helping people find meaning and connection at work through greater self-awareness; by restoring and building optimism, confidence and hope; by promoting transparent relationships and decision making that builds trust and commitment among followers; and by fostering inclusive structures and positive ethical climates. (pp. 331-332)

By bringing authentic leadership into education, the educator has an awareness of those they work with and the environments they work in and try to lead as truthfully, and value focused as possible.

In advising, this style of leadership allows for a deeper reach to the student, by showing reflection and self-awareness, as well as empathy. For me, as a queer person, I find this to be very important. Being authentic and loudly open about my queer identity, to be a possible role model or mentor for younger queer people is a core value of mine. This model can also help to bring forward conversations with my community on how being queer has affected my life and work.

Leadership in QueerPeers

In my programmatic intervention, QueerPeers, queer students become peer mentors and advisors for incoming queer first year and transfer students. To bring this relationship to life, there needs to be a sense of strong leadership and care. One model that can be used to bring these leaders to light is Susan Komives, Nance Lucas, and Lance McMahon's relational leadership

model (2011). Relational leadership is about finding your own strengths, as well as supporting and uplifting other's strengths within an organization.

The Relational Leadership model is built on being purposeful, inclusive, empowering, and process oriented. It focuses on understanding one's own values and leadership skills and using also learning other's values to get everyone involved to lead better (Komives, et al., 2011, pp. 44-45). Within the Relational Leadership model, the leader lifts people's strengths and puts focus on them for the betterment of the organization or team. This leadership styles can be inclusive, because it finds a way for everyone to contribute to a shared goal and purpose of an organization.

When using relational leadership in QueerPeers, there is a need to find a student's strengths for advising and mentoring. The supervisor of the program must work with the "bigs" to make sure their strengths are shown in programming and in the way they will mentor their "littles." The "bigs," when working with a "little", need to find the best ways to support and serve their "little. This can be brought out by self-awareness and empathy for the students that they work with.

Assessment and Evaluation

Following the theories of leadership and service to the target population, the assessment of my programmatic intervention, QueerPeers, matches the values of relational leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership. Assessment and evaluation will help to make sure that QueerPeers can be a lasting program and continues to serve incoming new queer students at the university. To make certain of sustainability, I am proposing a one-on-one interview with incoming participants at the beginning of the program and a focus group at the end of the year.

As well, I plan to send out surveys to get feedback on family dinners, since that is the main programming of QueerPeers.

An entrance one-on-one interview allows for the supervisor to collect information on what will most be needed both for the "bigs" and "littles" (See Appendix F). Doing this type of assessment also sets a line of qualitative data that can be used to build the questions for the end of year focus group. By collecting this information, there are ways to continue to shape the program around the participant's needs. Data collected from both the entrance and exit discussions can be measured by similar responses and tracking both high and low perceptions of the program, success, and views of community.

At the end of the academic year I plan to do a focus group style end assessment. (See Appendix G) Leading focus groups will be a way to emphasize the communal voice and accept changes for the following year. The focus groups will be separated into the "bigs" and littles" for more specific conversations. This way, for the "bigs," we can continue to shape what mentorship and programming roles will look like. With the "littles," more of the discussion will be on satisfaction and growth. Questions for the "littles" will have some resemblance to their entrance questions, with more about understanding of chosen family and perceptions of the family dinners. By having these focus groups, it allows for the participants of the program to be in conversation with each other and have more control over how the program will grow year to year.

After attendance at a family dinner, students will receive a survey in their email to measure satisfaction and understanding of topics. (See Appendix H) The survey would be qualitative questions, both satisfaction scales and quick short answer questions. Doing surveys would be a quick way to get back data. A post-event survey will help in guiding within the year,

for each family dinner; data from the surveys can also be collected for year span growth. Separate from findings on satisfaction and perception, attendance can be collected over the first years, after the first pilot year, to measure growth for participants and programming. At the core of QueerPeers, is the value of community and a spirit of service and care; by evaluating this information, the program can continue to support the at-risk population of incoming queer students.

Limitations and Looking Ahead

Limitations

For this pilot program of QueerPeers, there are some limitations and challenges that need to be addressed. As a program focused on peer mentoring and advising, some "littles" might disclose issues that are beyond the scope of advising from the "big," in which case they will reference the student to the program director. The program director can direct the "little" to academic advising or to the counseling center, depending on the issue. This is to make sure that the student is not overstepping any boundaries and should not be taking the full place of a trained professional. The supervisor acts as the "grandparent" of the family (QueerPeers) so there should be candor between all the students and the supervisor, preventing escalating any issues more than needed. "Bigs" will be trained in leadership and with some counseling skills from the counseling center, but are not trained therapists and should be able to recognize signs of emergency or need for collaboration.

Another limitation might be considering the arena of virtual spaces and kinship. While we think about building community, it is relevant to consider other forms of community building, such as virtual kinship networks. "Although [a majority of] the development of kinship networks [occurs] in physical spaces… [many students recognize] the importance of virtual

spaces in cultivating and maintaining community" (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 128). The internet can be a resource to stay in contact with those around you, but also find a safe haven of like-minded people that might not be easily accessible, is important for "developing a sense of community and connection with other [queer] people," (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 128).

Through websites, chat rooms, video games, social media, and more, queer people (especially young queer people) can see positive examples of queer lives. This virtual space can be a contrast to some of the sensationalized or negative versions of queer lives shown in media throughout history. On the importance of this network, in comparison to the university, Z Nicolazzo writes:

> Although not every [LGBTQ] student may benefit or desire to connect with virtual communities, the use of virtual spaces is important for developing and maintaining kinship networks that reflect [a] myriad of ways of practicing gender [and sexuality] that certain campus contexts might not be able to support or maintain. (2017, p. 130)

Student affairs professionals and other college educators need to reconceptualize the span of the college experience for queer students. The reach of the college campus becomes relevant, as QueerPeers strives to build a close-knit community; if there is no consideration for the reach of community, there may be missed opportunities.

Looking Ahead

As QueerPeers grows, the way it runs will have to adapt and stay connected to the population. As there are more students involved, it will be easier to have more specific pairings based on interests and identity. By considering intersections of marginalized sexual identities

with other marginalized identities, such as gender, race, religion, and ability, students might be able to find deeper relationships and more of a mentor of a similar experience.

I would also be interested in finding ways as the program builds, to have more staff and faculty involvement as mentors. Separate from the supervisor for the program, staff and faculty members can add an extra element of mentorship and offer another perspective to look to. In a separate form, this could also inspire a mentorship program for new queer staff and faculty, as they will need a different community of support.

I also believe that as the number of participants grows, it might be important to build a programming board of "bigs" that will oversee putting on the family dinners and other events, to prevent too large of a group in charge of producing each event. After multiple iterations of the program, there will be a growing number of "bigs", that might be more than the number of "littles" available. In this case, continuation of pairings past the first year, between "bigs" and "littles" will have to be considered.

QueerPeers would also benefit with some extension that goes online. As discussed before, virtual kinship networks are common among queer people, which would insinuate that there should be some element online in the future. The online element should be more continuous and in-depth than the newsletters that "bigs" will already be making. Extending to online could make the program accessible for students who are commuters or take classes online. Also, an online element could help introduce some students to the program, who might not be comfortably out in their queer identity yet. Making an extension online, would also help in an emergency, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In a scenario where the university must switch

entirely online the program planners are forced to consider alternatives to in-person gatherings and mentorship.

Conclusion

During the time of working on this thesis project, the world began to deal with the Covid-19 Pandemic. The experience of going into isolation and quarantine during this process has made so many of the values of chosen family even more important. I personally, was isolated by myself, and would have had a much harder time transitioning into this period of turmoil and confusion, had it not been for the closest people in my life adjusting communication. Video chatting became more common, with new ways of feeling close and intimate with loved ones changing. Conversations on essential workers and positions became frequent, which will present discussion on what makes a position or person essential, during and after the crisis. Universities switched to online platforms, presenting a sense of accessibility that could have been commonplace beforehand. Switching online also took away a lot of the traditions, experiences, and closeness that is felt during a student's time in college. Personally, I found the community of my graduate program to become more supportive with each other, and my own chosen family found new ways to stay in touch, support one another, and share loving moments.

Building this program of QueerPeers and addressing how chosen family structures can be used as an advising framework is close to my heart. I believe that, even though I had attended a progressive and inclusive-feeling university for my undergraduate experience, I would have benefited greatly from a program like QueerPeers. Having a mentor, especially a peer, who can guide you through the experience of college is not only helpful but can feel necessary. However, I am lucky that I had and currently have a chosen family to support, love, and challenge me as I

go through transformative times of my life. Advisors, mentors, teachers, friends have been able

to get me through some of my hardest times and celebrate the best of times.

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Appendix A

QueerPeers "Big" Position Description

QueerPeers is an advising/mentorship program to connect incoming LGBTQ first year

and transfer students, with current LGBTQ students at the university. Through QueerPeers, a

support network of LGBTQ students on campus will grow. Students that are "bigs" will be

assigned one or two "littles" that they will act as a mentor to. Family dinners will happen three

times a year that the "bigs" will organize.

Bigs are assigned one or two "littles" (incoming first year and transfer students) that they

will serve as a mentor for. They will work to support these students during their first year,

through one on one meetings, newsletters, and at family dinners. "Bigs" will be helpful guides

for their littles, providing access to resources and support, and acting as a role model.

Job Responsibilities

1. This position is a one-year commitment (After your "littles" first year, you will
   need to reapply for a new little, but we want you to continue your mentorship with
   your little, although no structure for continuation)

2. Act as a mentor and advisor to Little

3. Plan Family Dinners and minor events throughout year

4. Biweekly Newsletters to littles

5. 1-2 Office Hours a week

Qualifications

1. Be a rising sophomore, junior, senior

2. Be in good academic and conduct standing

3. Demonstrate good communication and interpersonal skills\

4. Passionate interest in LGBTQ culture, history, and activism

<u>Benefits</u>

Bigs in the QueerPeers program will:

- Receive $600 stipend per semester

- Build committed relationships to incoming first year and transfer students

- Develop leadership and advising skills

<u>Specific Responsibilities of Big QueerPeer Position:</u>

<u>Training:</u>

- Participation in fall training

<u>Mentorship:</u>

- 1-2 office hours a week in LGBTQ Center

- Meet with QueerPeers Little at least 3 times a semester for one on one

- Work with other QueerPeers Bigs to write newsletter every two weeks to Littles including scheduled events, information about LGBTQ resources, and university

- Serve as positive social and academic role model

- Work independently and in a team with other QueerPeers Bigs

<u>Programming</u>

- Coordinate Family Dinner gatherings with other QueerPeers Bigs

  - Organize Menu for food (catering and homemade)

  - Plan discussion topics for Family Dinners

- Meet with QueerPeers Bigs to plan smaller QueerPeers events/gatherings (movie nights, speakers/panels

Appendix B

Application for QueerPeers "Big" Role

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Email: _____

University ID Number: _____

Year/Class: _____

Major: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

Racial/Ethnic Background: _____

Languages: _____

Religious/Spiritual Ideology (if any): _____

(Information above is to help in pairing students with their QueerPeers Littles)

Why do you want to participate as a Big in the QueerPeers program?

_____

_____

Do you have any involvement with the LGBTQ community, outside of QueerPeers, at _____
University? Outside of the University?

_____

_____

**Thank you for applying to be a Big in the QueerPeers program! Please submit this
application to the LGBTQ center. We will get back to you soon with information on
participating in the program.**

Appendix C

QueerPeers "Big" Training Day Schedule

August 23, 2020
10:30AM - 4:00PM

10:30AM - Arrive
10:45AM - Welcome and Introduction
- Welcome from LGBTQ Center Staff and QueerPeers Supervisor
- Introduction of QueerPeers Bigs (Name, Pronouns, Year, Fun Fact)
11:00AM - Icebreaker: "10 Common Things"
- Group must find 10 common things that they all share amongst themselves
- Group must avoid obvious things such as "we all attend this university" or "we all wear shoes"
- Give group 10-15 minutes to come up with answers, and then share their findings
11:20AM - Overview of QueerPeers Program
- Go over job description
- Events throughout year
- Why did you choose to be a QueerPeer? (Short Response - Ask Students)
11:40AM - Mentoring Introduction
- What is mentoring? (Ask students)
- Share personal stories of mentors (Good Qualities? - Write Down)
- Build group definition of a good mentor
12:25PM - LUNCH
1:00PM - Advising Information
- Presentation from Academic Advising
1:30PM - Counseling Information
- Presentation from Counseling Center
2:00PM - 15-minute break
2:15PM - Family Dinner Planning
- Why do we do Family Dinners?
- Brainstorm discussion topics for Family Dinners
3:00PM - Goal Setting
- Developing a step by step plan
- Realistic and personal
- Celebrate achievements
3:45PM - Questions / Review
4:00PM - EARLY DINNER
5:00PM - Closer / Thank You

Appendix D

Budget for QueerPeers Pilot Program

Expense		Description	Unit Cost	Units	Total Cost
Personnel					
	Bigs (Mentors) - Stipend	Stipend for Bigs in QueerPeers program	1200 (600/Semester)	4	4,800
Meals					
	Training Lunch	Wawa Catering - Hoagie Box	60	1	60
	Training Dinner	Qdoba - Hot Bar	214	1	214
	Family Dinner 1	New Street Catering- Basic Italian Buffet	17	15	255
	Family Dinner 2	Soda (All Food Homemade)	3	3	9
	Family Dinner 3	New Street Catering - Antipasto Platter	68	1	68
Marketing					
	8 X 11 Posters	Posters to advertise program at beginning of fall semester	0.10	50	5
	Emails	Sent out after initial advertising	0		0
Other					
	Decorations for Dinners	Party City/Dollar Store - Table Cloths, Centerpieces, etc.	30	1	30
				Total:	**5,441**

Appendix E

QueerPeers Family Dinner Discussion Questions

(These questions are meant to give a guide, but follow flow of conversation)

Topic: Queer Visibility in TV & Movies

1. What are your favorite movies?

2. In your favorite movie, are there LGBTQ characters or LGBTQ themes?

3. What are some of your favorite movies with LGBTQ themes?

4. Do any of your favorite LGBTQ television shows or movies have a character of a marginalized identity (Gender, Race, Class, Religion) as one of the lead roles?

5. Who was an important LGBTQ character for you to see in the media?

6. What was the first time you felt like you "saw yourself" in a character in a TV show or movie?

7. What was a TV show or movie that inspired you when you were younger?

8. What are some stereotypes/clichés you have seen for queer people in TV/movies?

9. What is a storyline you would like to see in TV or movies, that you have not seen (or have not seen enough of)?

10. Why do you think it is relevant to have media with queer stories at the forefront?

Appendix F

Pre-Involvement Assessment Questions

- Why do you want to participate in the QueerPeers program?

- What do you consider to be success? (In education)

- Who have been past supporters of educational achievement?

- Do you have any current advisors or mentors at the university?

- Do you have any expectations from family about importance of success in college?

- Experience of community and chosen family with other queer people?

    1. Do you have any involvement with the LGBTQ community outside of QueerPeers at school?

    2. Do you have any involvement with the LGBTQ community outside of the university?

- Are you interested in LGBTQ Activism?

- Who have been pivotal LGBTQ people in your life?

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

<u>Bigs</u>

- Which Family Dinner was your favorite?

- How would you change programming for QueerPeers?

- Do you feel like you helped your Little towards academic success?

- What was the best experience of mentoring your Little this year?

- Do you feel like you are getting mentored by your own big? How has that lineage helped you?

- What are ways we can grow the mentorship program, for Bigs?

- What were pieces of the Big Training that you found helpful?

- What were parts of the Big Training that you found unnecessary?

<u>Littles</u>

- Have you felt like you had support towards academic success from QueerPeers?

- Did you have good experiences with you Bigs? Any specific moments?

- What was your favorite Family Dinner?

- How have your perceptions of family and community changed, since joining QueerPeers?

- What were the best parts of your experience in QueerPeers this year?

- What were parts of your experience this year in QueerPeers that you would change?

- How can we grow the mentorship program from Bigs, for future Littles?

Appendix H

Post-Event Survey

Thank you for attending a QueerPeers Family Dinner!

To help us plan future Family Dinners we need some feedback!

(For multiple choice, circle response, 5 being highly agree and 1 being highly disagree)

How was the food at the Family Dinner?

1   2   3   4   5

Were you able to contribute to the discussion topic?

1   2   3   4   5

Did you enjoy the discussion topic?

1   2   3   4   5

Did you feel a sense of community at the Family Dinner?

1   2   3   4   5

Are there any suggestions for future meals at the Family Dinner?

Any suggestions for future discussion topics for a Family Dinner?