Conflicting Identities: A History of Christian Affiliated Colleges and Universities Changing Views on LGBT Students

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Changing Views on LGBT Students

Introduction

In our culture, often the relationship of Queer students to Christian colleges and universities is often portrayed within our society as one of conflict. If anything, a random survey of LGBTQ students might produce negative results and feedback about these institutions. Flashbacks of the Soulforce Equality Ride might come to mind for many.¹ That was a group that drove around to many Evangelical schools across the country to give voice to Queer students at those institutions. Many times they were banned from the campuses or even arrested for trespassing for just being a voice of support for Queer students. In this paper, we will examine the complex history and relationship of LGBT students with Christian colleges and universities. We will see how various institutions have responded to the organizing of LGBT students and what motivation informed their decisions. Next, there will be an examination of the current landscape of research for Queer students in the student personnel field and how the professionals in the field view religious schools. Finally, we will talk about LGBT Student Identity Development and how we might think of that within a Christian framework for paths forward.

Rising Out of Protest

Stonewall has become the defining moment for the modern Gay Rights Movement and awareness around LGBT concerns in our country. This protest was a revolt against the repressive police polices that Queer persons faced on a daily bases on the streets of New York City at the end of the 1960s. This event has been transformed into a mythical icon for the fight and liberation for Queer communities and issues. Despite the fact that this event has come to define a whole movement, it was but one of many actions during this moment of growing awareness and activity for Queer persons. It is in this era of change that the field of diversity studies in Higher Education began with the formation of student groups, offices, and policy changes around race, gender, and sexuality. Particularly, the development of LGBT support services and programing rose out of this moment of protest. In a study of 30 campus LGBT centers, it was shown that over two-thirds of them were developed in the aftermath of student protest with half of those protest forming after students faced a discriminatory event.² Therefore, the unique aspect of LGBTQ centers is that they have been defined since its beginning as an office that has been focused on advocacy and challenging the institutional norms of both public and private colleges.

One of the conflicts of having an icon like Stonewall in Queer history is the fact that often movements have a history and progression before the event that defines a movement. In the same light, that has happened in the evaluation of Queer history within the academy. There were many student movements and homophile groups that developed during the 60s that began to demand official recognition from their institutions. The difficult part of this history is that no major research or attempt at developing a meta-narrative to these student groups has been written. Instead, we have various LGBT student affairs professionals that have written small sections about this history with conflicting views on where to credit the beginning of the movement toward official recognition of an LGBT group.

One theory is to claim that the first institution to create an office should be the one recognized. This distinction belongs to the University of Michigan, when in 1971, they established the Lesbian-Gay Male Programs Office.³ Another theory is to accept the institution that first dedicated funding or space to LGBT students. In this case, it is the University of Minnesota that first gave space to FREE (“Fighting Repression of Exotic Expressions”) student group that was later renamed the Queer Student Cultural Center in 1969.⁴ In my own research on the area, I believe that we need to develop more information about the formation of homophile student groups across campuses in our country during this decade. We need to understand that LGBT centers did not start with space, funding, or faculty, but started in the pursuit of students for a more just society. One example of this struggle and one that predates the establishment of the centers above happened at Columbia University in April of 1968.⁵ Most know this protest as the most prominent examples of student protest movements changing university policy. Students for a Democratic Society came together to protest the university policy around the Vietnam War but also contained coalitions of other student groups that closed down their campus for ten days. One of the lesser known stories from that movement was the recognition of the demands of the Student Homophile Committee in shutting down the psychology department until they placed in their policy as a department to fight against the DSM classification at the time. They were able to accomplish this in the coalition of change that brought together pacifist, black power, and feminist for changing the landscape of Columbia University. This just exposes how we need to further study our past in this regard as it shed light on how we might need to view our future in bringing together multi-cause diversity initiatives and understanding modern student movements such as Black Lives Black in more complex intersectional terms.

In the Christian Context

For our own understanding, it might be helpful to look at some examples from Christian colleges and universities. We can begin to understand the status of where Christian higher educational institutions are in regard to the advancement and support of Queer students. We will take note of four schools in this section that will show a balance of views. Two of these institutions have taken the stance of supporting LGBT organizations and the two others have maintained a position of faith against such developments. By exploring this, we will be able to see how each of these schools has viewed diversity and faith with their actions toward LGBT students. I will be using typology descriptions of Christian colleges and universities that were produced by Robert Benne in his book, Quality with Soul, as a means of comparison between these institutions. This helps give us a framework as each of these schools come from a different Christian denomination which has a different ethos around their formation of students.

Our first two institutions will show examples of “critical-mass” institutions.⁶ These schools view their Christian tradition as the primary or privileged perspective when looking at education and student formation. They tend to be composed of communities where a majority of the students are from the

school’s confessional background but allow for students of other perspectives to attend. Baylor University, a Baptist institution in Waco, Texas, is an example of this model on the conservative side. This means that they are an institution that is affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas (allied with the Southern Baptist Convention), the majority of faculty, students, and trustees are all members of the denomination and must abide by a statement of faith that defines student life. Baptist have an interesting context when it comes to their history of administration of colleges. Despite their strong support of congregational freedom, Baptist have traditionally had strong control over their institutions with state conventions being authoritative bodies in the support of schools. Therefore, the social culture of the Baptist tradition within an area had large influence on the piety of the schools they founded. Therefore, Baylor University is very influenced by the social conservative nature of the Southern Baptist Convention and the greater Texas region. For many years, Queer students have organized outside the official recognition of the university for mutual support. As stated about critical-mass schools, most of the students and faculty are of the confessional tradition of the sponsoring denomination. Therefore, supporting LGBT students would be against their statements of faith and their stance against pre-marital sex. Recently, there has been a break between students and faculty. The students have tried to maintain their strong ties to these social policies, even with the Student Senate voting against passing a resolution that would have removed “homosexuality” from the discipline code. Therefore, the student body has preserved the social contract of the community whereas the faculty have moved toward another view on the matter. The faculty on the other hand have been trying to appeal to a large audience in the bid to becoming the top national Christian school. Therefore, they have removed this clear statement against it in favor of one that would allow for more diversity of students to be able to live within the ethos of the school. In the pursuit of becoming a national research university, they are in the process of shedding their religious social standards such as not allowing dancing or alcohol, whose policy has changed also in recent years. This shows how the pressures of the national attention at Baylor has produced two movements with students wanting to preserve their cultural milieu and faculty seeking to provide a more challenging environments when it comes to diversity.

Another institution that falls into the critical-mass category is that of Wheaton College, an Evangelical liberal arts college outside of Chicago, Illinois. Evangelical colleges such as Wheaton have their own unique call when it comes to how formation should be viewed. Instead of being unified around one confession or denominational tradition, evangelical institutions have often found themselves defined with high regards to Biblical studies, conservative ethics, and cautious of popular culture. They have a high regard for believing collegiate formation depends on the strong Christian character of the institution for them to be sent out into the world solid in their faith. Due to the lack of denominational ties, alumni have come to form an important base of administration for these colleges.

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Wheaton, just like Baylor, has a student organization that has not been recognized by the college. Yet, in 2015, the administration decided to hire a chaplain and organizer for LGBT students on campus as a way to think about how these students can be brought into the religious ethos of the school. The administrators faced a conflict in this decision. As stated before, the support structure for this type of university depends on alumni that supports and expects the college to create a Christian environment for the formation of students to spread the Gospel. Therefore, for many of these supporters, the thought of providing LGBT students with support staff members was undermining the whole goal of the educational experience. Wheaton can never claim independence from its public persona because they depend on it for alumni funding and students that are drawn to that ethos. So even in moments when they are trying to expand the circle, they too like Baylor, find themselves in troubled water with their base of support. As we have seen with these two examples, institutional change is difficult for various reasons at critical-mass schools. There are expectations from alumni, denominations, students, and trustees for the status quo. We have also seen how diversity is commodified by both of these institutions as Baylor wants it for national reputation and Wheaton wants it for greater clarity of bringing LGBT students into their form of faith (evangelizing). Neither of these views fully accept nor support current LGBTQ students that are members of their communities or the value they bring to the learning process. For this reason, promoting diversity can be a difficult task for those in the minority will always be a secondary concern or will not have the support of the institution for the special needs of their communities.

The next institution we will cover is the University of Notre Dame, a Roman Catholic research university in South Bend, Indiana. This institution would be called “Intentional Pluralist.” This means that it normally has a higher percentage of students not from its faith tradition and there is a greater focus on a classical liberal education. This often means that the ethos of the tradition takes place as a dominate voice but allows for the sharing of space with others. For Norte Dame and many other Catholics institutions, the assumption would be for a hierarchy of power from Rome to the colleges. In fact, the in American experience, it has been quite the opposite. Only sixteen out of over a hundred institutions that are Catholic affiliated have trustees from Rome or local diocese. Instead, the religious orders have been the primary actors in the field of Catholic Higher Education and the ethos they create gives most of the character to their institutions. In the example of Notre Dame, the Congregation of the Holy Cross has always had a deep culture and respect for the diversity of knowledge that could be brought together within a Catholic framework. Therefore, diversity for their model can only mean the advancement of the world and the church when given a Catholic character. This is demonstrated in their Mission Statement, "As a Catholic university one of its distinctive goals is to provide a forum where through free inquiry and open discussion can various lines of Catholic thought interest with all forms of knowledge found in the arts, sciences, professions, and every other area of human scholarship and

creativity.” LGBT student affairs at Notre Dame are housed in the Gender Relations Center founded in 2004. What separates Notre Dame from some of our previous examples is that the initiative to support LGBT students came from the university administration. Noting the increasing number of Queer students using the service of the GRC, there was the decision to hire a full time staff member to work as an LGBT advisor and form programing for them. This process also produced a pastoral plan from the Congregation about the matter. In not hiding from their support of the Catholic tradition of chastity, at the same time, they acknowledge that the main goals of their university are the production of the religious virtues of charity and justice. For them, they know that the formation of an LGBT student group might upset some parts of their church or alumni, but they have the ability to resist push back for the sake of their values. Therefore, in the model of the intentional pluralist, there is always room for conversations between the dominant voice of the institution with those that seem to be contrary. Particularly, in this case, Notre Dame saw that they needed to help give resources and a voice to a community that they thought would benefit their discussions in promoting charity and justice in our world about gender related issues encountered on campus.

Our final case study will be that of Oberlin College, a liberal arts college in Oberlin, Ohio. This college was founded under the support of Congregationalists with assistance of a Presbyterian minister. This dual ministry of the Congregationalist and the Presbyterians founded many colleges and universities before the Civil War in the Midwest and Rocky Mountain regions. During this time period, there was strong relationship between both denominations and their schools, but that would shift in the breakdown of their joint ministries. In many ways, the Congregationalists once forced to manage their own schools looked much like how we previously saw with Baptist conferences taking over the supporting roles. The unique thing that happened in the Congregational schools was the fact that instead of being influenced by alumni or state conventions, it was the faculty in many of these institutions that took over the daily operations and appointed their own trustees. This would diffuse the affiliation with the church overtime. This is what we would call the development of “accidental pluralism.” These are schools that are loosely or no longer affiliated with their religious tradition and they often have religious life staff that continue a supporting role but often promote a secular atmosphere across campus. This leads into our example of how Oberlin College developed their LGBT programs which is one of the earliest examples of LGBTQ programing. It was in the mid-60s when the campus was facing increasing “interference” of the county police in the affairs of the college. Several students and faculty members had been arrested for socializing together in town and in Cleveland. The President and Dean of Students saw this as interference of the local police into the authority of the

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campus to enforce law and the formation that the college should be providing these students discipline. This is the watermark of the independence in which Congregational colleges took in the administration of their institutions; that they were even immune to standards of conduct of the surrounding community. The administration wanted to keep the students and faculty on campus and under their power, so this started the process of forming concepts of how to proceed. The President required that these LGBTQ students and faculty quit attending local bars and be secluded to their own room on campus for socializing. This was the offer of physical space to a minority group of students, yet it was still formed in the pretense that homosexual persons had psychological issues. In a twist of irony, the students and faculty never got on board with this concept and formed their own advocacy group called the Oberlin Gay Liberation in 1971. In the time span of three years, they would transform into one of the first LGBT centers at a Christian college. Therefore, as we see in this example, there was not a conflict with faith that has been encountered as in the other institutions we have profiled. The separation of church authority from the institution and deference to administration in managing the college environment at Oberlin gave the President the authority to provide a space for LGBT students without having to address faith at all. One of the positive benefits of accidental pluralism is that they are able to take on change and diversity easily without having challenges from outside authority either in the forms of alumni or church authorities. This can be a benefit I do acknowledge to allowing multiple voices but the problem with these models is that they often do not give a means for integration of these students into the faith traditions that maintain these colleges.

Reflections on Christian Institutions from LGBT Professional Student Resources

In our previous section, we examined how Christian colleges and universities have responded differently to the call for diversity particularly with LGBT students. We saw how the ethos and religious tradition of an institution had varying effects on the responses and actions of administrators, alumni, denominations, faculty, students and trustees. In my presentation of these effects, I gave two examples of negative developments in relationship to Queer students and two examples of positive progression for Queer students. The landscape of responses from Christian colleges are complex and need more study to fully understand how those institutions have responded to the needs of Queer students on their campuses. Despite this lack of information on the matter, when looking at the literature of LGBT Student Affairs, we find a black and white picture on the matter for the most part. The picture that has been cast in the field has been that religious institutions have primarily been sites of oppression for Queer students and to avoid the dialogs on religion.

The American College Personnel Association in 2000 published a collection of articles on the state of LGBT centers and student personnel called Toward Acceptance. There are two article within this body that are of keen interest to our study. On is an article from Valsin DuMontier on methods of dealing with religion and particularly how to address issues of reading the Bible in light of homosexuality. This article is rather basic on helping students navigate Biblical interpretation around

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the “clobber passages” and provides some helpful tips on ways to have discussions with church resources mentioned in the final section. The irony of this piece is that it is the most quoted when referencing Queer students and religion. This has also been the only article in my research that despite acknowledging negative history towards LGBT students from Bible study, that understanding and engaging your faith in new ways is something that should be encouraged on our campuses particularly for Queer students. On the flip side, the other article around religious institutions in this book listed in the “Institutional Issues” section. Heidi Levine and Patrick Love write a chapter that is dedicated to warning future administers and LGBT student personnel of the overall negative atmosphere at religiously affiliated institutions. There are several factors of this section that I find need to be exposed in order to understand the negative views of these scholars toward Christian colleges and institutions. In the first place, there needs to be noted that neither of these writers worked in a religious institution nor have they since this publication worked within such an institution. When examining both their examples and sources for information, we find that they have a really limited scope. They only looked at sources from Roman Catholic viewpoints, which we have acknowledged previously how the local character of the religious order can change dynamics greatly. Therefore, one can assume that not only did they compare all religious institutions as the same from the look at one faith tradition, but they also only looked at a rather conservative section of that population. Their final warning to those entering into religious colleges is to “Be Realistic.” In this, they speak of being satisfied with small steps of progression for the assumption is that Christian colleges and universities are such a negative environments for Queer students that one should not expect much from them.

After this publication, there was a concerted effort to bring together LGBT student personnel for the formation of their own professional association that has started forming in 1997. This publication was the first major effort of the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Campus Resources (now named Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals). It is often referenced as the guidebook to any LGBT student personnel and is still promoted by the organization as the standard barrier. Once again, there are conflicts in the narratives that are told about Christian colleges and universities. In the section on case studies of eight institutions that are positive examples in the field, not one of those are religiously affiliated institutions. Then later in that same section, they are giving demographics of the field and state that it is “not surprising that few religiously affiliated institutions have established such centers/offices, only Emory University and DePauw University, both associated with the Methodist Church, have done so.” We have seen in our own example of Oberlin, who at the time not only was Congregational but had a seminary, was one of the

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29 Ibid. 26-27.
first in 1973. Also, Duke University founded their LGBT Center in 1994.\textsuperscript{30} We just find the lack of care in sourcing examples of LGBT student movements in Christian colleges and universities. Finally, in the last section of the book, there is an appendix for resources in various areas of books, movies, programs for LGBT student personnel.\textsuperscript{31} It is interesting to note that the only mentions of religious groups falls in the “Anti-LGBT Websites” which it list the likes of American Family Association, Death Penalty for Homosexuals in the Bible, and Westboro Baptist Church.

Kerry Poynter, former LGBT Center Director for Duke University, comes to reply to these developing trends that he notices in the field.\textsuperscript{32} He begins with a description of gay culture at the time looking at Ellen Degeneres, Will and Grace, and Queer as Folk. In all of these cultural media connections with the Queer community, they only show one kind of community. They only reflect a community that is white and not religious. He proceeds to give examples of how this dichotomy has harmed his students that he worked with at Duke. African American students felt they could only be loyal to being Black or Gay; a seminarian felt like Christianity didn’t accept him nor did the gay community for being religious. In this, Poynter opens us up to intersections of identity that I believe will be important for how we think about understanding Queer students in Christian colleges and universities. In conclusion, within the field of LGBT student personnel, we need to support a community of scholars that are dedicated to opening up dialog with religious institutions without dismissing their contribution to the formation of Queer students.

\section*{Understanding Formation}

One of the major areas that needs Christian scholars is in developing literature for LGBT Student Identity Development. Student Development Theory has been one of the cornerstones of administrators and program directors in student affairs in higher educational institutions. These are systematic philosophical underpinnings of how to think about student formation and what programs would be a benefit to their development. In many regards, these systems often have a degree of universality around how humans function and also tend to limit themselves to certain periods of life. Just like the advent of changing cultural standards around homosexuality in the 1970s, the same is true for this field as we see scholars begin to propose systems of development geared toward LGBT students.

One of the first theorists to propose a formation model for LGBT students is Australian psychologist Vivienne Cass. In 1978, she took part in a study detailing the life journey of 178 Queer persons with a majority of them being gay men.\textsuperscript{33} She lays out six stages in the progression of understanding one’s identity for a Queer person. The first stage is confusion, which is like a moment of epiphany that there is something different about yourself from others. Comparison is the second stage when the person chooses a life between being straight or gay. Tolerance is the next stage where


someone starts to experiment with life within the Queer community but is not dedicated to the identity. If the person affirms their experience in the Queer community, they might progress to Acceptance where the person is open about their life to all persons in their life. This might be called the “coming out” moment. Pride results from positive experiences with the added personal connection to fighting for one’s identity in society. The final stage is Synthesis where the person is content with all aspects of their life and sexuality. For scholars that follow in Cass’s footsteps, they often use the term of life stages and progressive steps in their formation. In giving credit for being the first in the field, we can see various conflicts in our modern day. One of the major conflicts is that it reduces everyone to the same pattern of development and only allows for forward movement. It does not account for the complexity of how persons might move in and out of various stages of these developments. Are we ever fully formed as persons as this progression tends to insinuate? Another area that it does not take into account the intersection of identities that are at play in a person’s life. If there is anything we have gained knowledge about is that not all Queer persons affirm the same experience. From this, Cass’s model also assumes societies that press negative impressions on the person and as we move forward, we might see that this model will no longer be valid as children are raised in accepting cultures. Finally, unless one reaches the final stage in their life, it proposes that a person will never be content with their sexuality or who they are as a person. Therefore, this early model was a great start to thinking about LGBT student development but may not speak fully to our modern context.

The other major scholar in this dialog is Anthony D’Augelli, a professor of Clinical Psychology at Pennsylvania State. He is the proponent of the “life span” model. For D’Augelli, the development of identity is always in context to the person’s life and the influences around them. Therefore, the situations of one’s life will always change with the movement of context and conditions that one finds themselves in. So instead of stages, D’Augelli focuses on the concept of six dynamics that are constantly in fluid movement during life. The first is affirmation of identity when one feels same-sex attraction with action and affirmation. Next, the idea of making contentions with aspect of the Queer community from society or history were one has a personal identity within their sexuality. The third dynamic is formation of a social identity, which are the relationships that are maintained between allies and other Queer persons. Out of these relationship, the next development should be the creation of alternative family. As a result of this, one might have the opportunity for greater personal intimacy with a person and exploration of their sexuality. Investing in personal risk is the last dynamic where after having all these dynamics, a person is willing not only willing to listen but also to be formed by the community that is invested in them. In D’Augelli study, it is noted that he allowed for the development of persons to define their own dynamics of growth. From this, his work has become popular in the advent of intersectionality and future scholars using this model have been able to adapt to their specific communities of focus.

A Christian Context for LGBT Student Identity Development

Stanley Hauerwas in The State of the University gives us his final glimpse into what the purpose of higher education could be. He gives examples of how the Church Fathers used their office as a

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means to elevate poverty. In the act of education, Hauerwas ask if the purpose cannot be that the university is not only a place where we learn of charity for the poor but it could also become a site where students are taught by the poor. This is a total reversal of what one might think when we place Hauerwas within the ivy walls of Duke University. In this hope for the university, I share many common concerns for the goals of our pursuit of knowledge in the university. I would expand the breadth from Hauerwas’s concern of poverty and state that the Christian university should be a place where all forms of injustice can be discussed and action taken towards reconciliation. The university should be able to be the testing field for how to effect change in our world and further the Great Commandment to “Love God and Neighbors.” In order to carry out this vision, there has to be some fundamental changes to how we practice education. We will have to turn away from the idea that the university is just pursuit of knowledge for itself. For the Christian context, knowledge must always be oriented toward love and reconciliation. Therefore, knowledge can never just be about the collection of facts but must include the virtues of how that knowledge is used for the good of humankind. The university will have to be made into a community of praxis. We will have to think of the university as an extension of the church, where an incarnational view of ecclesiology argues that Christ’s mission for liberation of the oppressed is carried out here and now by communities of faith.

In turning our institution into Christian communities of praxis, I believe we can turn to two scholars to give us insight into what this looks like. Paulo Freire, the father of Critical Pedagogy, developed the idea that educational communities must be communities that are not dedicated to a storehouse of knowledge, in the banking system, but must be dedicated to forming communities of praxis were the oppressed may find their voice, propose solutions, and enact those changes for the good of society. For Paulo, “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” In this, Paulo has us understand that the educational model must be one where reflection and action go hand in hand for the transformation of society. He also states that in the right educational environment that we partake as co-creators to reimagine and recreate just societies were all persons can flourish together in love and care for one another. Therefore, educational communities must be places where relationships can be formed and nurtured. “Authentic education is not carried on by “A for B” or by “A about B” but rather has to be “A with B.” One scholar of Christian education that I believe can help us on this path is that of Thomas Groome. Groome is the founder of a model of Christian education called “Shared Christian Praxis” that shares many characteristics with Paulo beliefs about education. Grooms states that Christian praxis is “a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their sociocultural reality, have access together to the Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith towards God's reign for all creation.” For Groome, the three main points of a community of praxis are active (all persons participating), reflective (all voices being heard and discussed), and creative (new ways of living formed). Groom is specific that in our formation, we have to use the stories of our current context and place them along with Biblical or Christian tradition as stories that are in conversation with each other.

37 Ibid. 93.
Therefore, I believe that the place for Christian scholars in LGBT Student Development is for us to engage in forming communities of praxis where those that are oppressed in our society may find their voice, raise awareness and critical reflection of their status, and work toward actions that will not only change the university or the church, but change the world. Therefore, the principle I hold for the formation of students are that we have communities of praxis that participate in dialogical construction and movements toward change. In this, the result should produce communities where relationships are formed for the reconciliation of the world. I believe for communities of oppression in Christian colleges, we have to be supportive of forming communities where students are able to learn about their particular contextual identity, compare and analyze their identity as a community with the Christian tradition or story, realize the paths forward where both speak to one another, and create communities of action around those sites of understanding. I believe that this practice could be taken on by all students and faculty to reform our institutions.