



Queerating (Creating) Harmony: Intentional and Inclusive Queer Campus Spaces

Dr. Dwight C. Watson

Professor of Education

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Email: watsond@uww.edu

Dr. Kenney E. Yarbrough

Vice President of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Lawrence University

Dr. Logan Edwards

Associate Teaching Professor of Kinesiology

Emory University

USA

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ABSTRACT

The creation of affirming spaces is imperative because queer students must find affinity to unpack and deconstruct the various intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and other intersectional identities that are a part of their transformational lives. This article discusses the use of the word *queerating*, which is an action that focuses on agency (self-identity), advocacy (self-empowerment), action (self-engagement), and actualization (self-efficacy). As ethno-autobiographers, the authors share their administrative and teaching journeys through personal vignettes, research on the history of queer spaces, and the psycho-social development of queer college students. The articles also discuss the practices, procedures, protocols, and policies necessary to *queerate* college spaces.

Keywords: campus climate, the cycle of socialization, open and affirming policies and practices, queer identity development, queer history, racial identity politics, sexual-identity politics, social-emotional skills

RUNNING HEAD: Queerating (Creating) Spaces

"I want to be cohesive."

-Beast of the Southern Wild

Introduction

In the movie *Beast of the Southern Wild* (Zeitlin et al., 2012), the young character, Hushpuppy, is on a muddled journey of reality and mysticism. This journey is disjointed and cacophonous, and often the character needs help deciphering what is real and what is dreamlike. As she meanders, she solemnly states, "I want to be cohesive." She longs for a place and space where she can safely settle her fractured, displaced person. She seeks cohesion, harmony, and safety. Hushpuppy's adventure is very familiar to queer folk who enter college on a journey of realness and the unknown; they also seek a refuge place to become their cohesive selves.

Edythe Eyde, the writer of the first gay and lesbian magazine, *Vice Versa*, stated in 1947, "I venture to predict that there will be a time when gay folk will be accepted as part of regular society" (Waller, 2019). As Black, biracial, queer, cisgender, straight faculty members and an administrator in predominately White institutions (PWI), we want that predicted acceptance to be now because we know how it feels to be displaced as we teach and lead through a lens of humility, humanity, and empathy.

Sadie Lee (2006) coined QUILTBAG+ as an inclusive self-designation for minority sexual and gender identities, which represents queer, undecided/unsure, intersex, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, asexual/ally, gay/genderqueer, plus others

who find affinity in this group. Lee used this term because it paid homage to the AIDS quilt and captured the woven connectedness of the identities and personalities stitched together for solidarity and strength. QUILTBAG+ best represents our campus as we coin the phrase *queerating*, which means intentionally creating open, affirming, and accepting spaces for all queer students. Within this quilted community, people can represent their unique patterns as they strengthen the fabric (Jefferies, 2023).

Noted in the QUILTBAG+ acronym is the letter A, which also refers to *ally*. The high school Queers and Peers group ensured that Ally was an active verb. This queer activism resulted in the creation of t-shirts that stated, Ally is a verb, and the actions are to 1) Ask about and respect pronouns, 2) Be accepting of others, 3) Talk less, listen more, 4) Be inclusive, and 5) Help others feel comfortable with who they are. Another Queers and Peers activism slogan that was embraced was "Same struggle, different difference." This slogan encompassed other marginalized groups recognizing their differences, but embracing the common struggles for dignity and respect in supporting QUILTBAG+ Rights, Civil Rights, Black Lives Matter, Women's Rights, and Disability Rights through awareness, agency, advocacy, and action.

Bringing a sense of cohesion amongst the intersectionality of QUILTBAG college students is an intentional charge as we eliminate barriers and build bridges that assist our

queer students on their meandering journey as they acknowledge and incorporate queerness into their lives. Whether queer students flaunt their faggotry or furiously dream of being free; whether they stand before the world ready to fight for queer liberation; or whether they stand before a mirror fighting to recognize their queer beauty and worth; we as institutional leaders must *queerate* visible affirming spaces and bridges to assist them along the way (Pohlen, 2016; Riemer & Brown, 2019). Soto (2018) stated that bridges are:

Thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span threshold spaces between worlds. Transformation occurs in these in-between spaces, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Living in this liminal zone means constant displacement an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in this space so often that it has become a home (Soto, 2018).

Attending college is a liminal space; proper guidance and support are necessary for this space to feel like home, a place of safety and settlement. As college leaders, we want our queers and peers to see college as a space where they can find intersectionality around their identity development, including their affectional orientation, gender roles, gender expressions, socialization, race, and religion. "We do not choose to be queer, but we do choose to be visible in whatever way possible" (Riemer & Brown, 2019, p. 11). We tell our QUILTBAG+ students that we want them to be visible, not liminal, but legendary as they become their authentic selves.

Legendary children

In *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1990), Dorian Corey, a pioneering drag performer, spoke about the legendary children. She was the mother of her house and created spaces for her children to find a sense of family and be safe. We, too, felt that our job was to provide spaces for copious legendary children. They came to school with their vernacular, their cadence, and ways of being. They used the language of expression, survival, protection, and affirmation (Wilson, 2011; Davis, 2021). They asked for practical solutions such as tampon disposal receptacles in the stalls of male restrooms for transitioning female to male students. They were aware, ready, engaging, and legendary. Our roles as leaders were to eliminate barriers so these queer, legendary children would have the functional, navigational skills to access power (Delpit, 1995).

In securing safe spaces and providing navigational skills, we had to understand that QUILTBAG+ students are sexualized, and that sexualization is often weaponized and causes trauma as these students are viewed as sexual bodies and not people. We used the term affectional orientation instead of sexual orientation to offset this dissonance (Watson, 2010). This sexualized trauma appears in an array of adaptive but dysfunctional behaviors, including hypervigilance, heightened anxiety and suspicion, disordered thinking, difficulty concentrating, panic attacks, learned helplessness, self-hatred, and depression (Menakem, 2017).

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Rechy (1977) captured this displacement that we wanted to offset. Today's legendary children should not have to deal with the same struggles of living as sexual outlaws in which all of their most intimate acts could land them in prison or even killed in some places and spaces. Back then, being queer was dangerous and shameful as men relied on the privacy of public spaces, namely, city parks, restrooms, and bathhouses. Our students needed to be out, proud, and legendary; therefore, we anticipated and acted to create open, affirming, and welcoming spaces so that QUILTBAG+ students' social and emotional learning was embraced and actualized.

We want our students to tell us what they need, but we should not make them the culprits of oppression; they must speak their truths for us to listen (Evans, 2000). To empower students, we are intentional about social and emotional learning, which is developing self and social awareness. Through these techniques, this is how our students learn to make responsible decisions, manage relationships, and understand their own emotions (Kalvaitis & Whitson, 2021). Social and emotional learning must be taught intentionally through collaborative activities that build social awareness and relationship skills. These skills include: 1) Self-Management: Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals, 2) Self-Awareness: Accepting one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and challenges, 3) Responsible Decision-Making: Making ethical constructive choices about personal and social behavior, 4) Relationship Skills: Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict, and 5) Social Awareness: Showing understanding and empathy for others. For QUILTBAG+ students to can these skills, they will need inclusive queer spaces (D'Augeli, 1994; Denworth, 2020; East, 2020; Bures, 2021). These skills are taught as we *queerate* our campus spaces so students can engage in affirming interactive dialogue.

Queerating Spaces: Creating Inclusive Spaces

We view *queerating* as an active state of agency and advocacy in which college campuses are intentional about the practices, procedures, protocols, and policies of QUILTBAG+ students. As we share some of the *queerating* that took place on our campus, we also want to showcase the history of queer space emancipation and how these initial spaces and places were foundational to the current affirmation of queer college students. In discussing the history of queer spaces and the currency of queer college spaces, the *queerating* of social-emotional learning skills, cycles of socialization, psycho-social development, gender expressions, and sexual identities of queer students, freedom of expression emerges. (Sadowski, 2012; Stead, 2017; Serano, 2022).

This intent to build safe spaces is often threatened by religious evangelism, conservative posturing, and legislative actions. In statehouses around the country, legislators are trying to make gay folk invisible. Bills claiming to combat critical race theory and "divisive concepts" in education are being signed into law. Though many states' bills initially focused on public schools, more have aimed at colleges. These concepts are typically race, social justice, and diversity-related, including sex education, LGBTQ+ discussions, and critical race theory (Elliot, 2021; Harari, 2023).



Recent legislation such as the *Parental Rights in Education: "Can't Say Gay Bill"* Florida Republican House Bill 1557 prohibits classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grade levels. In this environment of identity politics and divisive concepts weaponizing, establishing place, space, and grace has become a queer quest for access, affinity, and affirmation.

A similar attack on queer folk rights occurred at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, a private Christian university. This university considered strictly limiting the free speech rights of its students when it comes to sexuality and gender, from how they behave to what they wear and what they can say on campus or even online, according to published reports. The proposed policy would not allow students to identify as anything other than their biological sex. The draft policy declares that biological sex is binary and humans do not have the ability, or observed right, to choose a gender. No member of the Lee University community may publicly identify or behave as a gender that does not correspond to his or her biological sex. Although federal law bars discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity for education programs receiving federal funds, religious schools are exempt if those protections interfere with the organization's religious tenets, according to the U.S. Department of Education (Bellamy-Walker, 2022).

The legislative and institutional decisions are troubling but situating the need for university administrators to eliminate barriers to access so that queer students are given the same rights and privileges as all other students. These rights include residential halls that are safe and affirming, unisex bathroom spaces, pronoun policies, and staff that are designated to support, guide, and advise queer students (Erdmann, 2020). These actions should not be considered supplemental but an integral, transparent part of the university's ethos and operations (Tavarez, 2022; Thomas, 2022).

Queer History of Social Spaces: A Focus on Agency and Self-Identity

A way to solidify the ethos and operations is to investigate spaces as counter spaces, the role of space, and the rights to space in higher education for QUILTBAG+ students. The creation of social spaces aids in the development of agency and self-identity. These spaces are not static, and they do not occur within a vacuum but are instead a result of interactions and fluidity. Many suggest that the dynamism of space, the of claiming space, and the taking up space as counterspaces occurs physically, through expression, and with kinship networks (Jha, 2016; Flint et al., 2019; Pham, 2020; Jackson, 2021; Love, 2021; Naugle, 2021). Expression is how one sees oneself and how one claims oneself. History indicates that bold pioneers such as Virginia Woodhull expressed the need for counterspaces so they could be their authentic selves.

Virginia Woodhull was the first woman to run for President of the United States in 1871. She was selected by the Equal Rights Party which supported Free Love, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, and universal suffrage. She had Frederick Douglas as her Vice President

"Yes, I am a Free Lover. I have the inalienable, constitutional, and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can; to change that love every day if I please, and with the right to neither you nor any law you can frame have any right to interfere. And I have the further right to demand a free and unrestricted exercise of that right, and you must not only accord it but as a community, to see that I am protected in it" (Bronski & Chevat, 2019, p.72).

Several resources about queer history (Stevenson, 2016) noted that gathering spaces for gay and lesbian folks started as house parties and club spaces before they became full-fledged societies and organizations. These gathering spaces were places of solidarity around social and political action and spaces for social and relational connections. "Much of queer history was made in homes with curtains drawn and in bars with no windows, on dimly lit streets, with furtive glances, and through coded letters" (Riemer & Brown, 2019, p. 85).

Some of the earliest safe spaces were the Mattachine Society for Men and the Daughters of Bilitis for women. These spaces took place during post-World War II in the midst of what was called the *Lavender Scare* period. During the *Lavender Scare*, congressional investigations exposed the employment of homosexuals in the 1950s. The notion was that the federal government employed "moral misfits" to head a range of social programs. *The Lavender Scare* also allowed police harassment and extortion to increase and Mayor Daley in Chicago gave the police extensive freedom to raid bars, entrap men cruising in public parks and restrooms, and demand payoffs from bar owners. The Chicago newspapers published the bar raids and mass arrests, sometimes printing the names of individuals who were arrested (D'Emilio, 2021). Due to these atrocities of human rights and denials of dignity, the idea of the Gay Liberation Front was formed as a political group that would fight for the social and political freedom of gays and lesbians (Bronski & Chevat, 2019, p. XIV).

Besides the political and social societies, the bar scene was a historical refuge for gay and lesbian people although the possibilities of being arrested were imminent. Some spaces specialized in specific body types so that body positivity could be showcased without stigma. Bear spaces serve as communal spaces for bigger men. Bear spaces allow large-bodied men to feel more comfortable than mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces. The research found that those who went to bear spaces were less self-conscious about being overweight. In the bear spaces, bigger men reported feeling desirable not experiencing rejection solely because of their weight, as they do in some other queer spaces and their everyday lives (Cooper, 2022).

To many young queer people, bars were magical places where you could finally be yourself, openly desire and be desired, and do what you want without guilt or shame. In the early 70s, just a few years after the Stonewall uprising, cops were no longer busting lesbian bars, and you would no longer be put in jail for wearing male attire, but the atmosphere for lesbians outside of the bars was still oppressive. "To be identified as a lesbian could mean losing your job, your reputation, your family, and your future. The bars may have been a bigger closet, but they filled a



crucial role. As long as everyone was sworn to secrecy, everyone was safe" (Schlesinger & Rose, 2022, p. 17). "Much of queer history was made in homes with curtains drawn and in bars with no windows, on dimly lit streets, with furtive glances, and through coded letters" (Riemer & Brown, 2019, p. 85). Throughout queer history, there has been a search for private spaces gay and lesbian women could feel safe, but some groups wanted more. Lesbian women wanted spaces that were LGBTQ+-friendly and open to the public. Early on some of these spaces were cooperatives or organizations owned, controlled, and run by members to meet the economic, cultural, and social needs of lesbians who were sometimes left out of the feminist movements (Kalvaitis & Whitson, 2021).

Specific spaces supported individuals who considered themselves gender non-conforming and were expressive beyond the gender binary were definitely needed and not necessarily social spaces, but utility spaces such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and medical facilities. Vaid-Menon (2020) stated that as gender non-binary folk face heightened prejudice and harassment on the ground, more policies and public statements deriding them continue to be made. This disconnect is not a coincidence; it is a calculation. "This is how it has always worked: The best way to eliminate a group is to demonize them, such that their disappearance is seen as an act of justice, not discrimination" (p. 6). This demonization is currently evident in recent laws passed to outlaw gender-neutral bathrooms in Iowa, Florida, Texas, Idaho, and other states headed by Republican governors (Vellner, 2022).

Psycho-social Need for Queer Spaces: A Focus on Advocacy and Self-Empowerment

The psycho-social need for queer spaces arises from the need to form connections with individuals who share similar experiences and identities. Queer spaces play a crucial role in providing a sense of community and belonging for QUILTBAG+ individuals who may feel isolated or alienated from mainstream society. Finding affinity and having access to queer spaces contributes to individuals' self-esteem, advocacy, and self-empowerment as well as enhances their physical health, and improves their psychological well-being (Bringelson & Glass, 2010).

When seeking psychologically safe social, affinity spaces, sometimes race trumps queerness. Black students might first turn to Black Student Unions before searching for support from the Pride Center (Collins, 2004; Fredrickson, 204; Lenning, 2017; Jefferies, 2023). "We called our African American space a Black space it was, after all, governed primarily by Black bodies, Black thoughts, Black culture, and Black histories" (Kedhi, 2019, p. 308). In this space, students could comfortably code-switch into African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Black vernacular in general, which consists of words, expressions, and tonality, is created to articulate the unique experiences of Black people and culture. The language of culture is deployed for survival, protection, and affirmation. A Black professional stated "Leveraging my access to certain spaces to level the proverbial playing field is how equity has shown up in my personal and professional lives. How might my position of relative privilege and access to resources shift the power dynamic for Black, queer people to the point where these voices are in the room when policy and practice are crafted?" (Johnson, 2021, p. 22). For the first time, Black students and

college spaces view themselves as inclusive, the intersection of queerness and race may often be neglected; therefore, some BIPOC folk sought solidarity within their affinity enclaves. As stated by Jenny Irene Miller (2021), "We wanted to create a space where Indigenous LGBTQ+ and our allies could come together and be their full selves. Some queer spaces can often be unaware of the realities Indigenous folks face and go through, so we felt it was necessary to have an Indigenous-centered group (Jackson, 2021).

To meet the psycho-social needs of QUILTBAG+ students, the space must not only be an affinity space, but a space for advocacy and self-empowerment in which the students live authentically and visibly with a sense that there is a place for me in a world filled with so much injustice (Alexander, 2006; Boverman, 2022). These spaces are designed to be safe, accepting, and non-judgmental places where people can be themselves without fear of discrimination or marginalization. "This has to be a place that feels like home so that when people who do not feel at home anywhere else have a place they can come and feel loved. No matter who you are, what your religion or sexuality, you are loved" (Naugle, 2021, p. 56). When we read these statements, we thought this was exactly what QUILTBAG+ students wanted. They wanted a space where queer bodies, thoughts, culture, and histories could be celebrated and expressions of the gay and queer community could reflect a nuanced language code that is not available in standard English (Davis, 2021; Rude, et al, 2021).

One author reflected on college experiences and thoughts of not feeling normal due to limited safe places.

During college, an author started wearing t-shirts that had screen-printed sayings on them. After seeing the movie Paul Newman, Absence of Malice, the author got a t-shirt printed with a reinvention of the title that said Absence of Normality. At the same time, the author purchased a vanity license plate that said Detached. As the author reflects on those times, it was an outcry for visibility. No one knew what was percolating inside his head as he navigated the daily life of a Black, gay man in the South. This was not the awakening of his sexuality, it was the realization that he had to do this alone with no blueprint and the only recognition he felt safe enough to proclaim were the sentiments of rebellion and loneliness (Watson, 2010)

This constant seeking and feeling of being lost and isolated is a common phenomenon for QUILTBAG+ students. In the Wiggins (2022) *Advocate* article, he stated that we needed to "save the children" (p. 20) from the ravishes of Republicans and right-wing conspiracy theorists. He spoke about how the high school and college-aged youth are fighting back as empowered advocates. The authors as university leaders must equip our students with truth, knowledge, skills, and tactical advocacy, agency, and activism to shape their queer development and identity to offset the tragic statistics captured in the Trevor Project's most recent report.

The study indicated an upward trend in suicidal ideation among queer youth. Many of whom are trans and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The rate of suicide of queer youth of color was 10 percent higher than White queer

youth. According to the Trevor Project (2022) study, 21 percent of Native/Indigenous queer youth, 20 percent of Middle Eastern/North African queer youth, 19 percent of Black queer youth, 16 percent of Latinx youth, and 12 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander queer youth had attempted suicide over the past year.

One of the strategies for empowerment and advocacy is to build strong kinship and friendship connections. Bures (2021) states that a common measure of social connection is the number of people that you can call on in an emergency, but to call on these people you must first invest in the relationship. Denworth (2020) states that it takes 40 to 60 hours to move from being an acquaintance to a casual friend, 80 to 100 hours to become a friend, and 200 hours to earn consideration as a kinship or best friend. From affinity to relationship to friendship to a best friend takes time and commitment. Fredrickson (2014) says it is helpful to have a structure or a container for your friendship; built-in rituals that help you stay in contact. These rituals and routines are imperative to keep you from slipping into the zone where you are meaning to reach out, but you become too busy or forget to invest in the friendship. Having a safe queer space enables students to establish routines of friendship investment.

Freibert (2012) and Gleason (2020) envisioned an expansion of the idea of family beyond the heterosexual, biological family to include broader diverse social groups that come together and combine for a common goal. Queer spaces are important cultural and social places that weave together leisure, work, and community and result in homosocial associations of same-gender people working together for a shared purpose. Safe spaces for all including those who are still in the closet. You are still valid if you remain in the closet. *"Not everybody comes from a family who will love to hug and tell them they love them. Not everybody has a group of friends who will start crying with joy and asking if they can hook up with other LGBTQ+ friends. Not everybody works in a place in which they will have a job on Friday if they come on Thursday. Not everybody attends a school that will respect their pronouns and their name, and let them use the facilities they need. For some people, coming out can be a matter of life and death. It could also mean the loss of housing, family, and financial security. It's a sad, ugly reality, but it is a reality some people live"* (Powers, 2020, p. 32).

For queer spaces to meet the psycho-social needs of QUILTBAG+ students, they should be inclusive, accepting, and non-hierarchical environments. These spaces must aim to provide a platform for individuals to connect, network, and express themselves freely without barriers or obstacles. Successful queer spaces typically have certain features in common, which include:

non-judgmental and non-hierarchical environments that are accepting of diverse identities and experiences; opportunities for social support, advocacy, and education; safe, accepting, and physically comfortable spaces that are welcoming to all individuals; culturally rich events, workshops, and activities designed to foster a sense of community and belonging; and resources such as counseling, referrals, and other forms of support for queer individuals (Safe Zone. 2023)

Queer Development, Identity, and Pride: A Focus on Actualization and Self-Efficacy

The psychologist Erik Erikson has explained how that process of identity and self-efficacy formation works during young adult development when a person tries a series of roles and experiments with different kinds of relationships. Out of a potpourri of identities, some sense of self is formed (Bridges, 2019, p.33). The major tasks for traditional college-aged adults are living on their own, forging strong interpersonal relationships, and exploring their capacity for intimacy. This is a time when one is searching for a place (Bridges, 2019). To support this development, we listened to our students who said the key factors that will make them more comfortable would be to use correct names and pronouns, provide support for gay-straight alliances, integrate inclusive school policies, create a positive LGBTQ+ curriculum, and have access to at least one supportive adult.

All humans ask themselves who they are identity, where they come from - development, what should they do - self-efficacy, and should they feel about this journey pride and actualization? Identity can be dangerous according to Harari (2023) as people try to define a clear identity as if it is a blueprint instead of a journey. People grow up in a variety of cultural and ethnic communities that include celebrations, events, and holidays. But while some aspects of identity are shared by all members of a family like ethnicity, language, and culture, sexual orientation is not; therefore, opportunities to show pride in one's identity are the purpose of pride parades, pride week, and the month of pride (Stevenson, 2016).

To feel prideful about one's sexual identity, D'Augeli (1994) theorize that queer folk must evolve through stages of identity formation. These stages include personal subjectivities and interactions, interactive intimacies, and socio-historical connections. As campus leaders, we must assure the campus environment is not only open and affirming, but conducive to queer students' developmental explorations and self-efficacy as they strive to become accepting, actualized, and prideful of themselves. Actualization is the ability to reach one's full potential, while self-efficacy pertains to an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish a specific task. Queer campus spaces that support student learning and growth which includes being a part of a supportive community, participating in peers' and queers' activities, and receiving personalized attention foster an individual's self-efficacy and actualization. Self-efficacy is a fundamental component of actualization because it improves an individual's capacity to deal with stress and trauma while attaining personal goals (Menakem, 2017; Venet, 2021). When queer students have high self-efficacy, they can persevere, perform better academically, and are more active on campus. Similarly, actualized individuals have a heightened awareness of who they are and what they want in life, setting them up for a long-term vision of success (Nealy, 2017, 2019).

Actualization and self-efficacy do not occur without personal subjectivities and actions in which queer students interpret and live their experiences emotionally and behaviorally (Evans, 2000; Tobia, 2019; Love, 2021). Personal subjectivities include intersectionality, gender nonbinary expressiveness, and overcoming pain, trauma, and sexual abuse (Meyer, E. J., &

Pullen-Sansfaçon, 2018). These experiences begin with self-reflection and focus on the micro and macro dimensions of one's personage.

The intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and others can be a barrier to self-efficacy and actualization due to the identity politics of the interconnected confluences. The prideful task is to find the connectivity amongst the disparities. Collins (2004) expresses this intersectionality as identity politics. "Analyses how relations of gender and sexuality within contemporary African American communities reproduce and/or resist new forms of racism such as poverty, unemployment, rape, HIV/AIDS, incarceration, substance abuse, and intra-racial violence" (p. 7) is necessary so that intersectional queer students can find synergy. Queer campus spaces can provide support for individuals experiencing challenges including mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety. Queer campus spaces should offer mental wellness programs that provide students with tools to manage their well-being or provide a safe space for them to express their concerns.

Most people think of gender as a binary choice; there are only two genders, male and female. However, scientists have come to recognize that in any society, there can be much more than an either-or choice. "The term *fluid* is used to reflect that gender is not fixed into male and female roles. They exist in a whole range of behaviors that can combine different aspects of both" (Bronski & Chevat, 2019, p.15). For gender non-binary students, personal subjectivities and introspection may lead to prideful gender expression. Tobia (2019) discussed in their memoir, how emancipating it was to wear heels and lipstick to class while walking through the cafeteria at Duke University. Serano (2022) stated, "Far and away, the most difficult sexual double standards that I have grappled with involve sexualization: when an individual is reduced to their sexual body or behavior rather than viewed as a whole person. I found myself keeping my guard up to avoid being cast in a role that I had never auditioned for" (p.4). Campus support services must assist queer students in listening, providing, and protecting. Queer spaces play an essential role in fostering self-efficacy by providing a positive environment that promotes a sense of comfort and well-being. Specifically, peer support groups, mentoring programs, group study sessions, and academic activities. Programs should offer a platform for collaboration, highlighting the shared interests and aspirations that unite the campus community. These opportunities improve individual self-esteem, leading to a more positive learning experience and higher academic performance.

Today, people who are QUILTBAG+ experience higher levels of acceptance and visibility than ever before. While people in same-sex relationships are used to fielding questions about their families, many heterosexual parents, teachers, and professors do not know how to talk to queer students, especially gender nonbinary students in allied ways (Vaid-Menon, 2020). Professors often feel they have the knowledge and dispositions to support queer students, but lack the skills and tools and often do not know if it is their place to insert these conversations into the classrooms (Freibert, 2022). Alan Downs (2006), discussed in his book *Velvet Rage* what it took to overcome the pain of growing up in a straight world. He discussed life choices, increasing

positive emotions, and focusing on relationships as opposed to substituting sex for substance. As queer college students, the campus may be the first place in which students get to express themselves around their identity, gender, sexuality, and discussions about sex. Queer spaces allow discussing coming out as their gift to give, which means it must happen on their timeline when they are ready. The discussion enables QUILTBAG+ students to discuss the harsh reality of rejection. Sometimes queer students wrap themselves in a cocoon of primary relationships. They quickly find a lover, and then get attached too soon, and usually to the wrong person. The allure of love quickly fades and becomes ripe with codependency, abuse, and rejection. When queer students finally embrace their true selves, queer spaces for fun and enjoyment should be made available on college campuses. There is a community in belonging, in dancing together, in laughing together. In these queer entertainment spaces, queer students learn socialization skills in a safe environment. In the public environment, many queer people come together just for the sake of coming together and then separate in sheepishness fumbling with phones, slowly shuffling their feet, as they eye possible exits (East, 2020). We want our students to move beyond just the hook-up as an expression of their identities, and to be able to seek meaningful connections that are lasting and life-fulfilling and not merely lustful. Those trappings of yesterday's tropes are not what we want them to inherit from those who have paved the way for their expressive brilliance.

These truisms are those that need to be nurtured in campus queer spaces. On our campus, we are fortunate to have a Pride Center. The Pride Center is decorated in rainbow colors, comfortable seating areas, and a conference table. This spotlight space is cozy, welcoming, and affirming. The Pride Center provides the campus with an inclusive, safe, and fun atmosphere that embraces diversity and allows individuals to explore issues of gender and sexual identities. The Pride Center strives to support the social, emotional, academic, and professional development of the QUILTBAG+ community and allies by providing high-quality services, information, and opportunities to empower students, foster leadership, strengthen awareness, cultivate community, and advocate for equality.

In addition to the Pride Center, there is a queer student organization called Impact. Impact is a support organization for students and faculty/staff members of all gender expressions and romantic and sexual identities. This organization centers its vision and goals around community, coalition building, and belonging. In doing so, Impact aims to create a safe, confidential, and open space for all for discussion, support, and activism for QUILTBAG+ students and their allies. Impact also provides education and awareness of QUILTBAG+ identities and issues.

Queerating Spaces: Practices, Procedures, Protocols, and Policies

For the Pride Center and Impact to be effective, it is also important to make sure that practices, procedures, protocols, and policies are in place. A practice is what a campus does that is usually the impetus of a person in a position who is responsible for annual events to celebrate certain occasions. These practices are not necessarily sustainable because they are the storied history of one person and if not codified then the practices are not



institutionalized. For example, the director of QUILTBAG+ programs is responsible for Coming Out Day in October and some sort of Pride Celebration in June. These practices might change from year to year based on the person in charge and the willingness of student volunteers. The more actively engaged the student volunteers are, the more robust the activities. These queer practices have included speaker symposiums, Drag Shows, pop-up events, and a Pride Festival. Again, these practices' sustainability is based on the energy and industry of a coalition of the willing (Meyer & Pullen-Sansfaçon, 2018).

Protocols are a system of rules that explain the correct conduct and procedures to be followed in formal situations such as the onboarding of new faculty or the installation of the campus president. The protocols are captured in manuals that are housed in Human Resources or managed by the Chief of Staff. Protocols are formal and are often sanctioned by professional organizations and are similar across institutions. Some protocols are provided by the System and all universities within that System must adhere to these guidelines. Our University System has a lead diversity officer that serves the needs of 13 institutions within the System. This is an office of one so most of the work is transactional, not transformational. The protocols about the QUILTBAG+ campus community are the equal education opportunity statements that are inclusive of sexuality and gender.

Procedures are guidelines that are captured to implement an event or a policy. Procedures may be augmented based on need and the person orchestrating the event (Pham, 2020; Powers, 2020). At our institution, procedures often refer to a policy that instructs how best to enact the policy. These procedures are written down, and codified, in handbooks and manuals that house the policies.

On the other hand, event procedures are usually created by an office, committees, or task forces that are responsible for planning and implementing the event and may have temporary sustainability. For example, the annual planning and implementation of the Pride Festival or Coming Out Day are the domain of volunteer task forces. This committee has a list of procedures committee members are tasked to complete. These services include soliciting organization vendors, organizing the food vendors, completing permits and rental agreements, securing volunteers for set-up and clean-up as well and generating marketing materials that are specifically designed for the events.

Policies are principles of action adopted or proposed by a government, institution, organization, business, or individual. At our institutions, policies are the most formal and dictated by the System or created by the institution through the formal governance process. As we focus on QUILTBAG+ students and campus support, we wanted to make sure there were official policies embedded within the strategic direction of the institution as well as a statement that guided our dispositional thinking and actions.

Diversity Statement

To assure and *queerate* safe and affirming spaces on campus, it is best to have justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion embedded in the institution's strategic plan and its diversity statement. The diversity statement for our campus is as listed:

We make it our mission to showcase diversity as a multifaceted construct that encompasses a variety of visible and invisible differences including, but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion, and sexual identity. We will assist the institution in creating an inclusive community in which students, faculty, and staff feel safe, respected, and valued. At our institution, we would demonstrate openness and respect in our interactions with each other, but also help students develop multicultural competence in their future professional endeavors. Multicultural competence includes awareness and understanding of how one's own biases might affect one's worldview and interactions with others and an openness to developing knowledge about other cultures. In addition, this understanding and knowledge would be used in working with individual differences and diverse cultures within our workplace and communities.

Our diversity statement guides the work that we do across all aspects of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI), but especially for queer students because we want to always be intentional about awareness, agency, advocacy, action, and accountability. This intentionality and accountability guarantee freedom of expression which is often suppressed on some campuses. We want our students to recognize that being queer is not just okay; it is good. It is great. It is important to come out. It is important to work with a wide range of people on a wide range of political issues and never to compromise one's queer identity and to speak with authenticity and experience. "Sexuality is one of the most important aspects of our lives. By acknowledging this is important with ourselves and others, we will be able to relate to one another in more harmonious and respectful ways" (Bronski & Chevat, 2019, p.175).

Campus-based affirmation policy

Often policies on campus focus on acceptance and tolerance. "Tolerance is the ugliest word in our language. I cannot see why anyone would be struggling to feel tolerated. If people are not good, they should not be tolerated and if they are good, they should be accepted" (Pholen, 2016, p 10). "People always say go where you are accepted. However, you can't always go where you are accepted. You have to go and break down some walls and say, "This is my space too." (Anderson, 2021, p.30). We wanted our students to feel empowered so that they could break down walls of injustice and situate spaces that focused on affirmation, equal rights, and equitable treatment of all people. The objective of this policy is to ensure equal rights and treatment for students of all gender identities. Specifically, the policy aims to: 1) Foster an educational environment that is safe, welcoming, and free from stigma and unlawful discrimination for all students, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. 2) Facilitate compliance with local, state, and federal laws concerning bullying, harassment, privacy, and discrimination. 3) Ensure that all students have the opportunity to express themselves and live authentically.



This policy allows our students to think of their queer presence as about the right to be, and the celebration of being seen. Our students do not choose to be queer, but they do choose to be visible in whatever way possible (Rierner & Brown, 2019).

Use of correct pronouns

For students to be visible and present, using correct pronouns is essential. For gender non-binary students, they feel recognized when affirmed names and pronouns are used appropriately and correctly. This step shows the most basic of human kindness and acceptance and shows that others appreciate the courage it takes to be who they are in this world (Nealy, 2017). Our campus is intentional about codifying our pronoun policy to offset the cycle of socialization in which people are born and are first socialized with people in their families, the people they love and trust. QUILTBAG+ students' personalities, values, expectations, and gender expressions are shaped further through institutional and cultural socialization in which society tells them who has the power. This inculcation through the media, schooling, and religion can lead to those who conform and those who do not. Those who do not tend to have misconceptions about those who think otherwise, and tend to internalize these feelings for the future. This can lead to racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Those who see the big picture begin to challenge the system that has been set against them from the beginning. The changing of one's name and pronoun is an act of re-socialization. On our campus, we vocalize inclusion so that pronouns are a part of our introductions; we visualize inclusion by making sure our pronouns are on email signature lines, bios, name tags, social media profiles, and resumes; and we explain inclusions by having our talking points available to make sure others understand why pronouns are important (Safe Zone Train, 2023).

Preferred name and pronouns policy and procedures

Our institution is committed to fostering an inclusive campus that values self-expression and respect for the variety of communities it serves. It is the policy of the university that any student or employee may choose to identify themselves with a preferred first and/or middle name on all educational or employment records that do not require a legal name. Additionally, any student or employee may choose to identify their pronouns on all educational or employment platforms, including the learning management system, the student information system, and conferencing software used by the university.

University members can use a specified name, pronouns, and/or other gendered personal references that differ from their name listed on legal documentation. They can share that information with whomever they want, however, they want. Units and University members are held to the same responsibility of using the preferred pronouns/names except as legally required. They should always maintain the confidentiality of a member's legal name whenever possible.

A change of legal name requires an official document or court order verifying the correct information at the time the request is made. The Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment and Retention, or designee, Director of Human

Diversity, or designee, and the Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, or designee, shall be responsible for ensuring that the policy and procedures stated herein are properly carried out.

Gender inclusive housing

Gender-inclusive housing refers to residential housing made available to people who wish to room with someone of the opposite gender or gender identity. Gender-inclusive housing is only available in certain buildings due to accessibility and is only approved by the Director of Residential Life. To qualify for gender-inclusive housing, a student must complete a separate application and provide a rationale for why the student is seeking approval to live with someone of the opposite identified gender.

Even though we have some statements and policies in place, we still have much work to do to keep our QUILTBAG+ students safe on and off campus. Our community is small and the political climate of the town is very conservative. Although students may feel somewhat safe on campus, their interactions in the community are also a part of their psycho-social development and self-efficacy.

Harassment, bullying, freedom of expression, and campus safety

Our policies recognize that the desire to belong is a driving need among college students, and it greatly contributes to their emotional well-being. Their relationships with family and friends and how they view themselves affect who they are and their ability to interact and form relationships with others (Scales, 2020). Those who are viewed differently often suffer from ridicule from their peers and have a difficult time making friends. Bullies prey upon those who are viewed as the most vulnerable and disenfranchised. Some queer students, when they enter college grew up unscathed and others have been victimized. The bullies are often peers, but adults also set poor examples and we as educators must combat this bullying by creating policies that prevent bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment.

An incident occurred on campus where a football player at a nightclub asked a feminine-appearing man to dance. The football player had already told his buddies to let them in on the joke. While dancing, he made lewd and outlandish overtures toward his dance partner that caused several people to take notice and laugh at the jocular, but offensive behavior. This incident was brought to the attention of the Vice President of Student Affairs and because of the harassment policies that the university had in place, the offending student was suspended from classes and the football coach sanctioned the student by preventing him from playing for the rest of the season.

Our policies provide a safe zone where all students can feel comfortable, whether they are QUILTBAG+ or heterosexual. Our purpose was to create an environment committed to diversity and mutual respect, where students can feel safe in discussing the issues that shape and individualize students, regardless of affectional orientation, political perspectives, or religious beliefs. Campus policies should be extensive enough to govern the actions of students in the classroom, residential halls, throughout the campus, and the community in which students interact. These policies include computer interaction, etiquette, and cyberbullying, especially about QUILTBAG+ students.

We wanted to listen, learn, and lead as we navigated our policies about freedom of speech, hate bias, hate speech, and hate crimes. The policies governing our adjudication process indicated that members of the campus community have the right to engage in speech and expression on campus and to assemble and engage in spontaneous expressive activity if such speech, expression, or activity does not disrupt the functions of the university. Members of the campus community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus if their actions do not materially and substantially disrupt the rights of others to engage in or listen to expressive activity, such as heckling an invited speaker to the point that the speaker's message cannot be conveyed. This type of behavior may result in disciplinary action or sanctions. The First Amendment does not protect speech or expression that violates the law, falsely defames a specific individual, constitutes a genuine threat or discriminatory harassment, unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the university. As institutional leaders, we had to uphold these policies and support the voices on both sides of the argument.

As campus leaders, we must uphold these tenets of the freedom of expression of our queer students and the academic freedom of our queer faculty. We want our students to be able to think "Thinkers begin to see. Those who see often question. And those people who question, threaten the blind and the non-thinkers" (Scales, 2020, p. xv). We must talk about the principles of intellectual freedom and resist the diluting of the curriculum into superficial facts that do nothing to prepare our queer students for the realities of the world.

While queer spaces serve an important function, they are not without their controversies. Some people criticize queer spaces for being exclusive, arguing that they can perpetuate divisions within the QUILTBAG+ community based on race, class, gender, or other factors. Others have raised concerns about the commercialization of queer culture and its impact on the authenticity and accessibility of queer spaces. However, despite these criticisms, it is crucial to keep in mind that queer spaces continue to play an important role in the lives of many queer individuals by providing support, community, and a safe space for expression (Adams, et al, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, queer spaces provide much-needed support and resources for QUILTBAG+ individuals. By providing safe and accepting environments, queer spaces help promote healthy psychological well-being, foster meaningful connections, and create a sense of community. As we move forward, it is important to continue to *queerate*, advocate for, and

support queer spaces so that they can continue to play an essential role in the lives of queer students.

For instance, think about how space has affected queer individuals and their navigations, especially intersectional folk. We must embrace the intersectionality of sexuality, race, and religion. Jeremy Pope, an out queer actor of color, said this about his experience.

"I want anyone who sees images or reads about me to feel the affirmation and maybe feel clear, free to be themselves, to lean into whatever direction they feel on any given day. Pope asserts to the world that his body can be lucid, it can be free, it can be broken, it can be masculine, it can be feminine And I am allowed to possess all of those things. I want to be safe. I want to be healthy. I want to feel love. I want to be loved. I want to give love." Jeremy Pope stated that as a Black gay person, there is hypermasculinity as a part of the culture. There is religion as a part of the culture. If you come out gay, this is viewed as an affront to both the masculinity of blackness and the preaching of the Black church. To risk the loss of these foundational conditioning factors, many Black men stay closeted or exist on the down-low. "How can we queer these Black spaces so that Black gay men can be accepted by their race" (Reynolds, 2021, 78 & 79)?

Yes, we hope that this article provided insights into how campus leaders can provide the spaces that Jeremy desires for all of our queer students. We want our campus spaces to provide our students with mirror, window, and door opportunities (Bishop, 1990). A mirror opportunity is when QUILTBAG+ students can see themselves in the curriculum, program offerings, policies, and campus activities. These mirror opportunities provide a sense of belonging and validate the individualized identities and respect and dignity for the historical and current place and space of the QUILTBAG+ collective. A window opportunity is when queer students are provided insights into how others exist outside of the queer gaze and how to recognize the heteronormativity and micro/macroaggressions they must navigate. These are opportunities to equip QUILTBAG+ students with knowledge, skills, and dispositional stances that enable them to move beyond mere tolerance and acceptance, to a place and space of emancipation. In these places and spaces, QUILTBAG+ students are no longer egg-shell walking but are strutting their queer selves proudly so that finally they can seize the door to opportunities in which they can showcase their liberated and legendary selves and can contribute to the formation of a just and equitable society (Kendhi, 2021). The queer spaces on college campuses may be the first time that students realize their agency, voice, and life experience that matters.

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