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# A History of the Center for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students on the Campus of Minnesota State University, Mankato

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A History of the Center for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,  
and Transgender Students on the Campus of  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

By

Kellian Donna Clink

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This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

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A History of the Center for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students on the Campus of Minnesota State University, Mankato

CLINK, KELLIAN D., SPECIALIST DEGREE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
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This work presents a history of a center for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students on the campus of Minnesota State University Mankato from its inception in 1978 through May of 2004. This history is constructed from extant archival materials, interviews with most of the former directors of the Center, and a sampling of articles about the center (known by a variety of names) and issues pertaining to GLBT students during this period taken from the campus newspaper at Minnesota State University, Mankato and the local newspaper in Mankato, Minnesota.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This is a history of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center (the Center) at Minnesota State University. The Center succeeds in providing for queer students what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called in “Epistemology of the Closet” the “fragments of a community, a usable heritage, a politics of survival or resistance” (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1993, p. 54). This thesis explores the history of the Center by telling the stories of former directors Jim Chalgren, Jeanne Burkhart, Kim Luedtke, Scott Schroeder, Signe Hartmann, Kristina Wolff, Christie Mase, Kaaren Williamsen, Sidney Smith, Stacy Harbaugh, Jessica Giordani, and Jess Crary. The Center has helped queer students create a community, learn their heritage and forge a politics of survival and resistance.

The Center at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) exists first and foremost as a safe space for students to find each other. The Center’s mission is “to provide the campus community with educational resources, support and advocacy” (LGBT Mission Statement). It provides fragments of a community, a usable heritage and a politics of survival in many ways. The Center provides community by giving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning, hereafter referred to as queer, students a safe place to hang out, share their stories, strategize, politicize, and understand their experience. It provides a heritage with the GLBT library in the Center. The library includes histories of the gay civil rights movement. The Center helps build a politics of survival by facilitating panels. It is through articulating the issues inherent in their own queer lives that students understand those issues and help others to understand what it means to be queer. The Center also provides

politics of survival and resistance by having programming that brings queer speakers on campus, organizing Coming Out Week, World AIDS Day, and Eliminate Hate Week.

The Center, established by Chalgren in 1978, is the second oldest in the country, after the University of Michigan, which was established in 1971 (*When Campus LGBT Centers and Offices Were Established*, 2005). I write this to celebrate the work of the people who kept the Center going. Their stories are compelling, funny and engaging and part of the larger picture of the struggle for gay civil rights that has been fought during the last quarter century.

The title is “a history”, not “the history” because this particular history is situated in a specific set of documents and memories and not a comprehensive study of all of the literature written about gay students. This history is situated in a context of a student affairs literature review, and is based on extant documents and the memories of most of the former directors. Absent are those former directors whom I could not locate or who indicated their memory wasn’t clear about the events that transpired during their tenure. In addition, this history is informed by my memories and experiences with the Center.

A guide to some key terms

*Bisexual* -- Attracted to people of both sexes.

*Center* -- “The Center” has been known over the 27 years by a variety of names—this history will utilize this name as a consistent point of reference.

*Coming Out* --The process by which people reveal their sexual/affectional identity to themselves, family, friends, church members, etc.

*Gay* -- Same-sex affectional/sexual preference. Some think of this as inclusive of lesbians, others do not.

*GLBT* -- gay lesbian bisexual transgender, also herein referred to as LGBT or lesbian gay bisexual transgender, sometimes also referred to as b/l/g/t. Sometimes in the literature now referred to as glbtq (the q designating questioning). Queer is easier because it is an umbrella for all of these identities without resorting to an alphabet soup of initials, which is a mouthful to pronounce. Queer also reclaims language that has been used as a weapon.

*Homophobia* -- *literally, fear of homosexuality*. “Grounded in and related to sexism and heterosexism, homophobia also draws much of its power from ‘the social norms and codes of behavior that, although not expressly written into law or policy, nonetheless work within a society to legitimize oppression’ of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people” (Blumenfeld, 1992, p. 6). Homophobia is pervasive in American society and includes the silencing of people regarding the topic of sexual minorities, stereotyping, fearing visibility of LGB people, heterosexism (Tinney, 1983), the threat of violence, and violence itself. The root of homophobia-phobia-relates specifically to fear” (Love, 1998, p.306).

*Lesbian* -- Women’s same-sex affectional/sexual preference

*Out* -- A relative term. Some people are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender transsexual only to some people. A lot of queer people seem to understand this to be disclosure to their parents. People can be out at work, to family, to church people but choose not to other groups and certainly not the people who are peripheral...to plumbers, painters, casual acquaintances, etc. Also sometimes used as a verb. Outing someone means revealing their GLBT status to someone who does not know. This is controversial. Some feel that only when everyone is out will the society come to accept us. Others feel that individual's rights to privacy are more important than the political benefits of being out. Many historical figures have been 'outed.'

*Panels* -- Queer students at MSU have offered panels to inform students about the Center, and talked about their lives to educate MSU students, especially those who might be questioning their sexuality. The format is generally that someone on the panel provides definitions, panelists tell their coming out stories, often there is a straight ally who tells their story, and then there is a question and answer period.

*Queer* -- Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/transgender/transsexual. Used by some as a pejorative, but reclaimed by many GLBT persons as self-claimed identity. The word gay is perceived by some to exclude lesbians/bisexuals, etc. Queer is all-inclusive, but used by some, not by others. I use it to reclaim it.

*Student Affairs* -- The personnel on campus who are responsible for the non-academic side of campus life, usually includes residential life, counseling center, career center, social and other groups (Fraternities, Sororities, Student Groups, etc.)

*Service Learners* -- Service Learning Students are asked to rank their comfort with eight societal groups experiencing oppression in U.S. culture: age, ability, gender, etc. They are

asked to volunteer to learn about the group, and become comfortable in their presence.

Students place themselves in a community agency that serves that population.

*Transgender* -- Transgender is an "umbrella" term used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, and is used to refer to many types of people, including transsexual people; crossdressers; androgynous people; genderqueers; and other gender non-conforming people whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical. In its broadest sense, "transgender" encompasses anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside stereotypical gender expectations (Transgender Zone, 2005).

*Transsexuals* -- “Some transgender people are transsexual, identifying psychologically and emotionally as a gender different than their assigned sex at birth. Transsexuals may desire to modify their bodies through hormones and/or sexual reassignment surgery in order to bring their physical appearance into line with their gender identity” (Transgender Zone, 2005).

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

This history of the Center draws from a number of sources, including interviews with the former directors and extant documentation. Archived at MSU are two boxes of internal documents. The former directors were sent relevant documents prior to being interviewed. The former directors were interviewed via the phone. Their narratives were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the narrator, reviewed, and returned. The transcripts have been donated to the University Archives and Southern Minnesota Historical Center at MSU (SMHC Manuscript Collection 228) so that others may write alternative histories of the Center someday. In particular, the narrators were asked to look for the mention of names of people who are not 'out' as this history is not intended to 'out' anyone.

Oral history such as this has been a critical part of constructing queer history. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, best known for her work *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, writes about the importance of using oral histories in constructing queer history. She argues that "oral history has been central in creating knowledge about lesbian and gay male life before Stonewall" (Kennedy, 1995, p. 58). Oral history is central to creating knowledge and understanding about lesbian and gay males even now. Traditional history has been a record, crafted of laws, official documents, and news, of rulers and the ruling classes. There are many trends that have converged to include the lives of women, people of color, queers, workers, farmers, soldiers, and other marginalized members of the society in contemporary history. "Contemporary social constructionists have sought to uncover both the agency

wielded by homosexuals throughout history and their efforts to cement a common identity in the face of pervasive social oppression” (Miron, 1996, p. 41).

Many queer historians have explored in depth issues such as gender roles, class difference, and racial issues in their works. This history of the Center is limited in that it is the ‘basic’ story of the Center, without sociological analyses. The directors were mostly women, all white, and the queer student population has been largely white. I have attempted to give the reader a context by providing at the beginning of each section, sections being determined by the director, benchmark historical fact(s) taken largely from the chronology section of *Completely queer: the gay and lesbian encyclopedia*. I am unable to put exact dates on all of the directors’ times of service and was unable to interview some of the former directors. Documents were frequently without dates and the directors themselves did not necessarily remember exact dates of employment or the context of events that occurred years ago.

### *Limitations*

This history of the center is limited to a history as can be discerned from the memories of the former directors of the Center, and the extant archival materials and limited news reportage. Some of the people who directed the Center did so more than a dozen years ago. Their memories and the internal documents are the boundaries of this history. It is limited in other ways, the most obvious being that everyone’s story of the Center is not included. There are hundreds of students and dozens of volunteers and a handful of administrators whose stories would illuminate the story of the Center.

This history is simply the recounting of the journalistic basics: who, what, where, when, and a limited attention as to the why, except as it was articulated by the former

directors themselves. The major limitations are the lack of attention to gender, race, and socioeconomic status of both the former directors and the queer students served by the Center. Another limitation is the lack of attention to the role of the AIDS epidemic in shaping the Center. The gay rights movement was significantly galvanized by the threat of AIDS and this history doesn't discuss its role.

*Researcher Bias:*

This history is also shaped by my place in it. I am a white, middle class, out lesbian librarian. I have served around 100 panels on the campus of Minnesota State University, Mankato. I have offered a number of presentations at conferences on queer issues. These have included queer history brown bags on the campus of MSU, a presentation on lesbian photographers at a queer conference, and a National Academic Advising Association presentation/discussion on the idea of having queer-identified advisors for students, among others. I have often been a support system to the Center directors, have helped with training panelists, have helped students with queer research, and have helped queer students with academic hurdles. I have been on a number of thesis committees because the subject was queer-related. I took a dozen students to the *Third March on Washington*. I helped agitate for the *It's Time, Minnesota*, the campaign for inclusion of gays in Minnesota's human rights laws. My experiences with the Center have certainly colored and informed this history of the Center.

*The Center: An Overview*

The GLBT Center has two audiences. The first audience is the queer population of students at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU). The second audience is the general student population. The students are the primary focus of the Center. The Center is



a safe space for queer students. The Center serves both populations with panels, service learning opportunities, programming, and referrals. Following are the statistics for the most recent year, 2003-2004. There were 50 panels presented, 15 service learners educated, and attendance at various programming events totaled more than 1000 students (Crary, 2004, Year-End, pp. 9-11). The Center has migrated over the years bureaucratically. Initially, it was under the aegis of the Counseling Center, and then the Women's Center supervised the graduate assistant director of the Center. It is currently under the Student Leadership Development and Service Learning unit of the Division of Student Affairs.

Queer students have been served by the Center in several ways. The Center is a safe space to be and garner peer support. The Center has a library of queer materials. Both of these serve to make the Center a place where queer students can find affirming images of themselves. The space has changed from being a closet-sized space to a lounge-sized space and has physically been in many different places in the Centennial Student Union on the campus of MSU. The library has a relatively large collection of materials both for queer students and students doing research on queer issues. The LGBT Center's library has history, fiction, poetry, self-help books, documentaries and feature films. The Center's director has always done programming such as Coming Out Day/Week, World AIDS Day, Eliminate Hate Day/Week, as well as movie nights, lectures, and cabarets. There is a student group that is loosely affiliated with the Center that arranges dances and other social events. The history presented in Chapter Four will detail the kinds of events and programming in chronological fashion.

The secondary audience is the larger student body. Programming for queer students helps the larger student body understand the queer experience, too, and 'normalizes' it by

its very existence. Service learning, where students actually volunteer in the Center, was perceived by many of the former directors as highly effective. The Center's existence helps the larger student body understand that this is a 'valid' part of the student body. The institutionalization of the Center validates queer students. Educating the students through panels, however, has been the primary activity of the Center that targets the larger student body. The goal of the panels, for most of the former directors, is to reduce the fear of queers many students experience. Putting a face to the name homosexual is powerful. Discussion of the impact of the panels will be found in Chapter Five. A 'typical' panel is described here.

Five or six students gather in the hallway outside a classroom, a little nervous. The director of the Center gives a brief overview of terms and expectations. Students are expected to respect the privacy of the panelists and can ask any question as long it is asked respectfully. Panelists reserve the right not to respond to a question. The director gives definitions of some terms: gay, lesbian, homosexual, heterosexism, homophobia, and coming out. Then each of the panelists tells their coming out stories. The class is invited to ask questions. Panelists respond. Reaction papers from the panels indicate overwhelmingly that this is the first encounter most students have with someone they know to be gay.

Faculty from all of the colleges at the university have incorporated the panels over the years. Sometimes, the panelists have an opportunity to regroup afterwards, reflecting on the experience. One former director reported going home afterwards and collapsing. It is exhausting work. The response is usually good, however, and students do seem to start to both understand the pitfalls of being gay and start to look at their own prejudices, and especially their language, after the panels.

The service learners are there as class assignments to better understand a group they fear. They go through what one former director called queer boot-camp, reading the stories of queer people, journaling about their reactions, going to local stores to check out queer videos. They are usually assigned to do something of value to the center, some office work perhaps, or putting together posters. In some cases, they have decided to be straight allies with the panels.

The Center typically does programming around Coming Out Week. National Coming Out Day was founded on October 11, 1988 to celebrate the first anniversary of the 1987 March on Washington. On Oct. 11, 1987, half a million people participated in the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. This was the second March (the first was in 1979). Coming out is one of tasks queer students often perform in college. It is an important stage of identity development. “Those who self-disclose their identities to others, for example, are often psychologically healthier compared to those who don’t” (Alderson, 2003, p. 80). Coming Out Week usually includes film showings, panel discussions, and events that celebrate the gay rights movement.

The Center has programming around World AIDS Day, which is commemorated around the globe on December 1. It draws public attention to this epidemic and progress made in fighting the disease. The Center usually invites speakers, shows films with facilitated discussions afterwards and recently arranged to have free AIDS screening on World AIDS day.

A regular program is Eliminate Hate Week. This spring program originated out of a response to a group calling themselves “Zero Tolerance” which blanketed the campus with homophobic posters, called in bomb threats, and committed a variety of hate crimes for

three years in the mid-1990s. Eliminate Hate started with a day of presentations and workshops on homophobia but has expanded to a week's worth of films, discussions, workshops on unlearning racism and homophobia and other related hatred. It is co-sponsored with many other groups on campus.

### *The Need for the Center*

How do these activities support queer college students? The following will provide an overview of some of the research that demonstrates the need for the Center.

Students are at college to learn a body of intellectual matter, develop critical thinking skills, and learn how to write and to read critically. The process includes exploring the self and interpersonal relations, as well as learning the material for analytical thinking in many disciplines. While in college, students are learning a vast amount outside of the classroom, some of it practical such as time/money management, some of it deeply personal such as the understanding of their own values and belief-systems. Success in school means navigating all these waters: intellectual, personal, and practical. Students obviously need to persist to succeed in college. There have been many studies regarding student persistence. Research shows that support from family and interactions with faculty are “critical to student success” (Pike, 1997, p. 609). Students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (queer), have special issues in these two regards. The Center on the campus serves to help address these issues by helping support students who may have more complex familial issues and who may need help finding supportive faculty members.

Freshmen are making a huge transition when they come to MSU in many ways. Anecdotal evidence and the panel reaction papers discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis

suggest that this is the first time most MSU students meet GLBT students. Freshmen here are being exposed to a whole new world.

Queer college students are entering a new world as well, many of them being more 'out' than previously. They are in the process of coming out, which truly is a process and a voyage, and not a destination. Research by Savin-Williams (1995) and Cohen and Savin-Williams (1995), suggests that "most youth do not come out widely until they leave the parental home, and they report that telling their families is the greatest challenge they face with regard to being gay" (as cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 99).

One scholar, A.R. D'Augelli (1994), is the most oft-cited researcher who has postulated stages of queer identity development. The stages he articulates are: "exiting heterosexual identity, developing a GLB identity, developing a GLB social identity, becoming a GLB offspring, developing a GLB intimacy status, and entering a GLB community" (as cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, pp. 96-97). The attendant issues include deciding about being out in their residential life setting, their classes, their church communities, and deciding whether or not to respond to homophobic jokes in hallways, classrooms, etc. In Minnesota, more than sixty five percent of the state's citizens are church members (Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1992, p. 210). This and anecdotal evidence from reactions to panels and reactions from service learners discussed in Chapter Five point to the significance of religion for queer students and their support systems.

The easiest way for me to discuss the issues that GLBT students face is to outline some of the support systems straight students have and then compare those support systems for GLBT students. Over the last 18 years, I have served on a number of panels on being

queer. I always start by having the class members/audience articulate their support systems.

Family, friends, co-workers, and church community are always named.

First and foremost, most students have their parents and family for emotional and financial support. A recent article by Jorge Armesto (2001) in *Family Process* detailed some of the research findings about the impact of coming out. Definitive statistics are not available due to the difficulty of enumerating a population that is largely secreted, but many queer students initially, at least, experience parental rejection:

Parental rejection is a major health-risk factor for sexual minority youth (Hammelman, 1993; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998)... Some of the most widely cited problems include increased levels of isolation, loneliness, depression, suicide, homelessness, prostitution, and sexually transmitted infections (Gibson, 1989; Hammelman, 1993; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997; Remafedi, 1994). Several studies indicate that isolation resulting from parental rejection is one of the greatest problems facing gay and lesbian youth (see D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Feldman, 1989; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Savin-Williams, 1989). In their seminal study, Hetrick and Martin found that, in addition to rejection from parents and peers, many gay and lesbian youths are "kicked out" after disclosing their homosexual identity to parents. (Armesto, 2001, p. 146)

Kaaren Williamsen (2004), in her interview, discusses the impact that she saw for MSU queer students who lost their family when they came out to them. For students who are attempting to adapt to another environment, one rife with opportunities for rejection, the threat of rejection from home can be a huge hurdle. Students may have to contemplate the options for finding an alternative emotional support system and/or another source of financial support, if they choose to come out to their parents. The impact of such a fundamental rejection cannot be overstated.

Another support system for students can be their friends from home or the new ones they make at college. "The single most powerful source of influence on the

undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group,” (Astin, 1993, para 30) was the conclusion drawn by Alexander Astin after extensive study of the literature of student persistence. Unfortunately, campus climate surveys have shown, by and large, that college students are homophobic. In a recent survey of students at 14 universities with GLBT Centers, 43 percent of GLBT respondents described their campus climates as homophobic, and more than one-third said they had experienced harassment during the previous year (Rankin, 2003, p. vi). One researcher whose doctoral research centered on queer students wrote to illustrate this statistic,

Ben has a scar beneath his eye from the time he was beaten up at a party merely because he commented on the attractiveness of another man. Tito was harassed continually by fellow students in his residence hall. And Andrew was assaulted by several fraternity members. In fact, each of the 40 gay students I interviewed reported constant fear. One said, “It is something you learn to live with.” (Rhoads, 1995, p. 58)

Students on the campus of MSU reported as part of a research project that there was an ironic benefit in attending MSU; they felt they learned how to cope with homophobia and “develop a tough skin” (Clink, 2004, Campus Climate Presentation). This echoes the research, in particular work done by Renn (2000), who reported that queer students accrue an “ironically beneficial impact” as “they have already surmounted more obstacles than their heterosexual peers...They have learned to persevere” (p. 132).

The interviews with all of the former directors revealed their opinions that MSU was experienced by the queer students they came into contact with as hostile and homophobic.

Faculty can provide a support system. “Student-faculty interaction also has significant positive correlations with every academic attainment outcome: college GPA, degree

attainment, graduating with honors, and enrollment in graduate or professional school" (Astin, 1993, para. 14). Renn (2000) summarized the impact of faculty attitudes research from many different places, including the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Brown University in Rhode Island in her article in *College Teaching*. She documents that students do fear homophobic reactions from students and faculty alike.

Those students told of occasions when faculty made derogatory jokes, minimized or denied the contributions of LGB people, and denied, made light of, or dismissed as irrelevant the sexual orientation of artists, scientists, or historical figures. Furthermore, students reported incidents of professors making overtly hostile or demeaning comments, including some statements implying that violence against LGB people is justified and deserved (University of Minnesota 1993). Similarly, at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island, the Faculty Committee on the Status of Sexual Minorities (Brown University Faculty Committee, 1989) reported that 66 percent of LGB students feared harassment or discrimination by classmates; 40 percent feared harassment or discrimination by professors; 60 percent did not feel safe being open about their sexual orientation in class; and 53 percent censored their academic speech, writing, or actions in order to avoid anti-gay harassment or discrimination. Of all students, gay or straight, in the Brown survey, 10.5 percent reported occasionally hearing faculty make negative remarks or jokes that demeaned lesbians, gay men, and/or bisexual people. (Renn, 2000, pp. 129-130).

Students sometimes look to their faculty members as mentors, models, and even friends. A study at Pennsylvania State University reported, however, that 50 percent of students, faculty, and staff members held negative attitudes toward homosexuality (as cited in Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001, p. 91). A study at two Midwestern universities compared the homophobia of faculty and student affairs professionals. The authors found that while faculty and students affairs professionals "differed significantly" (Hogan & Rentz, 1996, p. 311), student affairs professionals being less homophobic. It seems that many faculty and student affairs professionals were uncomfortable with queer students. Straight students might benefit from interactions with their faculty and student affairs professionals in ways



that queer students do not. A study of southeastern universities a found that only 8 percent had gay/lesbian studies courses, 55 percent had GLB student organizations, and the 122 institutions had a mean hate crime reported for this population of 5.3 per year (McRee & Cooper, 1998, p. 52). Nearly half did not have a support system even through a student group. Faculty may hold, and even reveal, heterosexist or homophobic attitudes, which can be detrimental to their students. A survey done by the Faculty Association at Minnesota State University, Mankato (2003) included responses from faculty about whether they were out: “No—fear of losing job,” “Not tolerated in a male dominant office,” “It would be professional suicide,” and “Easy scapegoat in economically difficult times.” If faculty, who are tenured and ‘grownups’ don’t feel safe, how safe can students feel? Closeted professors certainly were vehement in their reactions to the question posed. Gay male faculty members at MSU are largely closeted, meaning that young gay men don’t have role models...or they have role models who are closeted, if they guess their professors are gay. While queer students may in fact relate successfully to their faculty members without needing to disclose their GLBT status, they also might fear trying to interact with them at all, for fear of revealing their authentic selves. Faculty can’t support students who are unsure of their reception.

The Center can alleviate some of these issues. If gay students find themselves in difficult situations in the dormitories, in their classrooms, in the hallways, where they are rejected because of being gay, a Center can provide succor in many ways. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote that queer students grow up uniquely alone. Parents, teachers, coaches, priests, family members are not only straight, but very possibly homophobic. Young gay people, when they come out, first have to navigate a negative image of the group they find

they belong to when they come out as gay. When they get to college, the people who might be really important support systems for straight students—parents, teachers, and peers, have to be studied to see if they can be support systems and statistically, it is likely they will not be. The Center can alleviate that by helping them, as Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) wrote “belatedly to patch together from fragments a community, a usable heritage, and a politics of survival or resistance” (p. 54).

Straight students have many communities—their family of origin, church, perhaps a group of students in their dormitories, perhaps a group of students from their major, perhaps a group with whom they share music or art or chess. They have a heritage that is ethnic or national or municipal. They may not even need a politics of survival or resistance, because they are not the frequent targets of homophobic epithets or a culture that finds them lesser, sinners, different, other.

Queer students need a community more than other students because their experience involves being stigmatized in casual and hurtful ways almost daily. Queer students need to understand who their queer ‘ancestors’ are because who they are, as queers, has perhaps been vilified by their families and communities. They need to combat negative images so that they may accept themselves. They need a politics of survival and resistance because they can not coast. Most students can choose a major, career, and spouse in college. Queer students have to think about resisting homophobia in their daily lives, in order not to succumb to self-loathing in the face of a culture that says you can’t get married, you’re not a family, you can’t be a member of my church, and you can’t be a member of this family. Queer students have to think about whether they can be queer and an elementary school teacher, queer and a priest, queer and a nursing student. There is just more territory to be

navigated. In the face of the hurdles to be overcome, a center for queer students can be a refuge in a storm, a place to strategize, politicize, and resist the homophobia that is part of the queer person's daily lot.

## CHAPTER III

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*Queer Theory: An Overview*

Being queer, whether it is a result of nature or nurture, means loving someone of the same sex. There are parts of the experience that lie between the lovers. The larger parts, perhaps, are shaped by societal reaction to the internal state being experienced by the queer person: family, friends, the state (police, the law, and the courts) impact the queer person by their acceptance or rejection, acknowledgement or desire to silence. Queers have both created and experienced a civil rights movement during the existence of the LGBT Center that has led to many more queers being public (being 'out') about their existence. The more queers have come out; the more vehement has been the counter reaction. A clear understanding and articulation of heterosexism and homophobia are articulated in an article in *Political Theory*: “Heterosexism [is], a structure of power in society (as racism and sexism are) that privileges as superior (natural, healthier, normative) heterosexuality over homosexuality, and, through a variety of procedures of subjectification creates homophobic subjects. Thus heterosexism is a form of domination and within it and as a support for it a structure of domination” (Blasius, 1992, p. 643). The author defined homophobia as “an individual’s revulsion toward homosexuality and homosexuals and often the desire to inflict punishment on the latter as retribution, or to cure them” (p. 643). I offer up this brief review of queer theory, queer student identity development theory, and the role of Student Affairs in support of queer college students.

Queer/Gay/Homosexual: What's in a word?

Homosexual, the word, was first coined in 1868, and is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) thus: "Involving, related to, or characterized by a sexual propensity for one's own sex; of or involving sexual activity with a member of one's own sex, or between individuals of the same sex" (p. 345). Since the 1970s, the word homosexual has been increasingly rejected and replaced in both the gay community and common usage by terms such as gay, lesbian, same-sex and queer. The word homosexual "has an overly formal feel for most everyday contexts and [has a] long association with heterosexism in medical, psychological and political discourse" (Hogan & Hudson, 1998, p. 293). Other controversial terminologies include affectional preference and sexual orientation. People who feel strongly about their sexuality do not want the sexual component invisible in the language. Conversely, some feel that the relationship/affection/love bond is the primary component, so being labeled with something called 'sexual orientation' doesn't work for them. Every GLBT person has their own sensibilities around the language of this part of their being.

Queer, the word and the usage, is indicative of a change in our culture. Engel (2001), writing in a book about the queer civil rights movement noted, "The power of labeling is exemplified in the evolution of labels in the gay and lesbian community. 'Queer' best expresses a response to this cultural power of labeling; the term embodied a backlash against pigeonholing identities" (p. 127). He quotes sociologist Steven Epstein: "the turn to 'queer' was an act of linguistic reclamation, in which a pejorative term was re-appropriated to negate its power to wound" (p. 127). Heterosexism and homophobia are the problems necessitating this reclamation.

Any discussion of queer topics must start with Foucault, who first argued for this historical being, the homosexual, as opposed to the *act* in the ‘taxonomy’ of sexuality. When people self-identified as homosexuals, instead of sometimes performing homosexual acts, they started a process that would lead to some sense of community. The community is formed by both the commonality of the people who share this one characteristic and the societal response to that one characteristic. He argued that the labeling of the person, as opposed to the act, “made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf” (Foucault, 1978, p.101). As queers became more visible and articulated their very right to be, three entities worked against gays. *The Encyclopedia of Communities* put it succinctly: “Hegemony of heterosexuality in Western culture is in its social forms and norms, and in discourses of rectitude from established religions (which saw homosexuality as a sin), modern medicine (which saw it as an illness), and the law (which regarded it as a crime)” (Downsett, 2003, p. 530). While it has been theorized that homosexuality has been part of almost every historical period and culture, it has always been stigmatized by the ruling religions and states. Many have theorized about the reasons for the strong reaction against queers. Suzanne Pharr (1988), in her oft quoted book *Homophobia*, argues about the importance of the timing of the most rampant homophobia—adolescence. This is when young people in this culture start calling their peers ‘queer,’ faggot,’ and ‘pervert.’ She argues that homophobia is another function of the sexism that exists to keep women and men in their traditional roles (Pharr, 1988, p.16-17). Others have argued in a Marxist fashion that homosexuals have been stigmatized because they don’t produce cheap labor in the form of offspring. Some religious thinking labels it sinful. Some think because the union cannot

result in offspring, it cannot have merit. It can be discussed as a phobia because the reaction is so often without reason, simply a visceral fear of the state of being and the individuals.

To some, the discrimination queer people face can seem unimportant. Barbara Smith (1993), a Black feminist writer and activist wrote about this particular myth: “Lesbian and gay male oppression is not as serious as other oppressions. It is not a political matter, but a private concern. The life-destroying impact of lost jobs, children, friendships, and family; the demoralizing toll of living in constant fear of being discovered by the wrong person which pervades all lesbians and gay men’s lives whether closeted or out; and the actual physical violence and deaths that gay men and lesbians suffer at the hands of homophobes can be, if one subscribes to this myth, completely ignored” (p. 100). Recent discourse about gay marriage makes it quite clear that most Americans do not regard gay families as real families with the attendant perquisites.

Queers grow up in a unique environment, uniquely *alone*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) wrote,

Gay people, who seldom grow up in gay families; who are exposed to their culture’s if not their parents’ high ambient homophobia long before either they or those who care for them know that they are among those who most urgently need to define themselves against it; who have with difficulty and always belatedly to patch together from fragments a community, a usable heritage, a politics of survival or resistance. (p. 54)

Queer theory is about exploring what it means to persevere in a homophobic culture. Queer people need to understand why the dominant society feels as it does, in order to combat it, in order to feel okay about themselves. In the last quarter century, many theoretical and philosophical treatises have been written grappling with the ideas and the impact of homophobia. In this history, the queer college student’s experience is the topic at hand.

### *Queer Student Identity Development Theory*

Scholars have been interested in describing the development of queer identity. Why? To understand is to be able to think of ways of mitigating some negative consequences. The three names the researcher encounters again and again are Cass, Troidon, and D'Augelli. Vivienne Cass used a social psychological model. Her research was published in 1979, which was a whole different world for queer folk, but she posited the following stages: 1/identity confusion; 2/identity comparison; 3/identity tolerance; and 4/identity acceptance (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p.93-94). Troidon's research led to similar conclusions. D'Augelli wrote about the complex interactions between identity and the environment. His posited stages include "leaving heterosexual identity, developing a queer personal identity, a social identity, dealing with parental reactions, developing intimacy and finally community" (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, pp. 95-97). Neither of these deals with the complexity of multiple identities (e.g. gay/Native American, gay/disabled, gay/immigrant) or the kind of college environment specifically. Other scholars have built on the research of Cass, Troidon, and D'Augelli and started to explore the relationship between identity development and the college milieu. One study found that it was important to break down thinking about identity development into two categories, one being identity development (Am I queer?) the other being 'reference group identification' (what does it mean to be queer in this culture?), (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 509). One work found that it was important to explore five "integrative categories: self-acceptance, disclosure to others, environmental influences, individual factors, and exploring multiple identities" (Stevens, Jr., 2004, p. 185). While Stevens, Jr.'s include only eleven gay students, it did at least examine multiple identity pieces as well as the environment.



Stevens, Jr. reported that Christian schools that emphasized the “sinful” aspect of homosexuality had a negative impact of the self-concept of the individual interviewed (Stevens, Jr, 2004, p. 185). While a formal study wasn’t located comparing the identity development of students on a campus with a Center versus a campus without a queer center on campus, all the former directors who headed up the Center agreed on the important support function this Center provided simply by its very existence. They agreed that having the Center on campus affirms the very existence of the queer student population.

Queer students largely come from “communities where few lesbian or gay adults are visible, attend schools without openly gay staff, and belong to friendship groups where ‘fag’ is a favored insult and ‘that’s so gay’ is a common put down” (Jennings, 1994, p. 262). The reaction papers studied from 2004 after panel presentations at Minnesota State University, Mankato showed a very consistent pattern of students reporting they would try to reduce their use of homophobic epithets (Clink, 2004, A Preliminary Study).

#### *Student Affairs and Queer Students*

There is a nascent body of literature in student affairs about queer students. A study done in 1998 looked at the professional literature and noted that only since about 1993 had there *been* any professional literature” (Lark, 1998, p. 157). Some of the areas that are impacted are residential life, counseling centers, and career development centers, as well as, naturally, the centers specifically created for this special population.

Surprisingly, there has not been much research on the residential situation. Evans and Broido (1999) reported that “with the exception of Rhoads's (1994, 1995) work, no literature discusses the coming-out process on college campuses, an environment in which pairing of roommates who don't know each other is commonplace” (p. 659). The campus at

Minnesota State University is aware of some of the issues. They are committed to obliterating homophobic graffiti within 2 hours of its having been reported (T. Akey, personal communication, summer, 2004). They have attempted to have a diversity floor, but it failed due to lack of interest. Conversations with MSU GLBT students have indicated that they would not, overall, be comfortable identifying themselves as GLBT on any kind of form that might facilitate the pairing of queer students in residence halls or the idea of a queer floor. The detrimental impact of being an easily identified target would outweigh the benefit of offering support to one another.

One article published in 2000 talks about college counseling ‘coming out of the closet’ (Mitchell, 2000, p. 12). Students who are queer may need some special expertise in the Counseling Center as they negotiate the coming out process. Internal reports at Minnesota State University, Mankato, have recommended a professional trained in queer students coming out needs in the Counseling Center. “It would seem to make sense, for example, to have one counselor with special expertise in working with sexual minorities” (Gallagher, 1987, p. 16). The Counseling Center at Minnesota State University does not have a counselor specially trained in this area, despite the plethora of literature that has explored increased need for counseling for students who are coming out.

The Career Development Student Affairs professionals are helping queer students with websites, publications, and studies about queer college student’s needs in terms of career counseling and academic advising (Nauta, Saucier, & Woodward, 2001, p. 352). The Director of Minnesota State University’s Career Center has been very proactive in providing websites and materials for queer students as they contemplate different majors and careers (Pam Weller-Dengel, personal communication, summer, 2004). A recent

Student Affairs article found that queer students actually delay decisions regarding majors and careers because of the work they are doing on identity development (Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003, p. 845).

The GLBT campus resource center has even been discussed in the literature in the last few years, despite the fact that GLBT Center directorship is a relatively new field. An informal study done by students in the *College and Student Personnel* program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, found that more students are looking for a queer center as one of the criterion they seek in college (Fitch & Patterson, 2003). In comparing the establishment experiences of 27 offices. Ritchie and Banning (2001) found that Centers fare better if they have institutional and student support as well as solid, ongoing financial support (para. 12). The desired qualifications of a GLBT Campus Resource Center director are described in a recent article. These included levels of education, and personal characteristics that include having a “positive regard for all students and courageous commitment to leadership and advocacy” (Sanlo, 2000a, para. 11). One of the former directors of the Center, Kaaren Williamsen (2004), talked about figuring out during her tenure in the Center that the GLBT really was a new profession, with a skill set, a knowledge base, and a mission to accomplish. One researcher urged that student affairs professionals celebrate by having a ‘lavender graduation,’ (Sanlo, 2000b, p. 643), which is something the GLBT Center director at the University of Minnesota-Duluth does, calling it ‘The Fabulous Farewell.’

Student Affairs professionals can help queer students in all their arenas. Financial Aid can actively seek out and publicize queer scholarships. Campus Recreation could arrange queer intercollegiate teams. The bookstore, even, could make sure they had books that

reflect a positive image of queer students for their reading pleasure. The people who do programming for the university, whether it is films, speakers, or art shows, could be encouraged to have queer themes. At the very least, they could screen speakers to ensure that they are not delivering a homophobic message.

## CHAPTER IV

### A HISTORY

The stories of the former directors illuminate the ways in which the Center provided a community and heritage and a means of survival and resistance. Each director's section will be prefaced by some national benchmarks of the gay civil rights movement, in order to provide a context for those readers less familiar with queer history. The dates following each former director's name are those of their years of service in the Center. Their comments were edited slightly to improve readability.

#### *Some National Benchmarks*

1973 the American Psychiatric Association declares that 'by itself, homosexuality does not meet the criteria for being a psychiatric disorder.'

1974 Minnesota State Senator Allan Speak becomes the first gay male state officeholder to come out.

1975 The US Civil Service Commission decides to consider applications by lesbian and gay men on a case-by-case basis. Previously, homosexuality was grounds for automatic disqualification.

1976 Jimmy Carter expresses support for a federal gay and lesbian civil rights bill.

1978 Dan White is found guilty of manslaughter rather than murder in the shooting deaths of Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone.

1979 First March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights 100,000 in attendance.

1980 In Rhode Island, after winning a suit against his high school, Aaron Fricke takes Paul Guilbert to his senior prom.

1982 Wisconsin becomes the first state to approve civil rights protection for lesbians and gay men.

1984 US Conference of Mayors overwhelmingly approves a resolution advocating gay and lesbian rights protection at all levels of government.

1985 Cleve Jones conceives The Names Project quilt at an AIDS candlelight vigil in San Francisco.

1986 After 14 years of debate the New York City Council passes a municipal rights ordinance for the city's gay men and lesbians. (*Completely Queer*, 1998, pp. 647-660)

*Jim Chalgren (1978 – 1987)*

The Center emerged from a consciousness raising group. A letter dated May 18, 1973 to Ron Wallace from Bill Kolbinger of the Student Senate wrote that the Gay Consciousness Group had become an approved campus organization (Kolbinger, 1973). The purpose of the group was to “bring gay people together socially and politically to deal with gay issues, and to serve as a resource for individuals needing personal assistance, as well as promoting gay awareness on the campus and in the community” (Kolbinger, 1973). Gay folk were combating some pretty negative feelings as is demonstrated in a letter to the editor in 1974. “What the hell is this paper coming to? I’ve read a lot of trash before in my time but this gay shit is something else. Yesterday’s article was so repulsive I about puked” (Van Gundy, 1974, p. 8). The United Way, in 1974, voted to stop the funding for a local Youth Emergency Service (Y.E.S.), a crisis line, because of their affiliation with the Gay Consciousness Group. The Y.E.S. people dropped their affiliation with the Gay Consciousness Group to ensure their continued funding (United Way funding for Y.E.S., 1974, p. 13).

The Gay Consciousness Group averaged 10-15 people at each bi-monthly meeting with as many as 30 attending at one time (Gay Group, 1972-1974, p. 2). Some group members feared coming to the Gay Consciousness Group meetings ‘for fear of being recognized’(Gay Group, 1972-1974, p. 2). The Group did a survey of clergy, did a presentation before the Human Rights Commission, and had speakers such as legislators, University of Minnesota faculty, and health educators. The group did panels, including

MSU classes, and attended regional conferences in Minnesota, Iowa, and Michigan. They published a newsletter to help connect people.

Jim Chalgren was one of the incorporators of the Mankato Gay Consciousness Group and was active in pressing for more public acknowledgement of the issues gay people face. Because he passed away in 2000, I was unable to interview him. He moved away from Mankato after suffering much in his public efforts to have a gay rights legislation passed for the cities of Mankato, North Mankato, and Skyline in 1987. He was interviewed for an article in the *Forum* in Fargo, North Dakota a year later:

Last summer, while attempting to get a gay rights ordinance passed in Mankato, Chalgren and other gay men and women found themselves the targets of a group that perpetuated gay stereotypes and warned that homosexuals and lesbians should be shunned. The groups' anti-gay sentiment was expressed in words and acts of 'overt violence and hostility'...Chalgren said that rocks were thrown at a gay man; some men drove a truck across the lawn of a home where lesbians lived and proclaimed that lesbians should be killed. 'I found Mankato to be an oppressive environment. It's simply not healthy to live in a situation where people are constantly condemning you and calling you names. You're always looking over your shoulder in fear.' (Gerboth, 1988, p. B1)

I am relying on documents written by Chalgren and about him to document the initial decade of the Center. The atmosphere he was working in throughout his tenure was clearly homophobic. As he said in a panel about being gay in Mankato, "I constantly have to edit how I act. I have to keep asking myself, what should I say? What should I wear? How do I appear most acceptable to other people?" (Ugland, 1987, p. 4). His obituary read, "He was openly gay at a time when such an admission was rare not only for small towns, but for a small town family" (Tougas, 2000, p. B1). His mother had a difficult time when he came out. "I thought it was the end of the earth,' his mother said with a gentle laugh" (p. B1).

Chalgren was always actively and very publicly agitating for gay rights, facing familial, church, and societal rejection and even violence. He was courageous beyond measure.

The following are some of the events that Chalgren participated in that give the reader a sense of the environment the Gay Consciousness Group confronted and the homophobia in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Mankato. When Senator Allen Spear came out as a gay man, The Gay Consciousness Group sent Spear a congratulatory letter (Gay Consciousness Group letter, 1974). It was a huge move for anyone in public office to simply name who they were. Spear had been elected as Minnesota's state senator two years earlier. These are some of the early days of gay people being out. It was not easy for the larger community to adjust to gay civil rights. In Mankato, in January of 1976, six men were evicted from a local bar, the Trader and Trapper, for dancing with one another. This led to conversations and later the recommendation of the Human Rights Commission on June 2, 1976, that the city councils of Mankato, North Mankato and Skyline amend their human rights ordinances to prohibit discrimination on the basis of affectional or sexual preference (Marks-Jarvis, 1976 June 3, p. 21). The Mankato City Council voted to delay, which essentially tabled the issue. (Council lacks courage, 1976, September 21, p. 2). The Trader and Trapper closed the week of Jan 21, 1977. The owner, Dennis Garin, (Neitge, 1977, p. 14) cited the "gay incident" as one of the reasons it closed. This incident epitomizes the times for gays. Some gays were out enough and forthright enough to demand protection for their right to work and having a living place, which was a relatively new development. Some straight people, as was evidenced in the Human Rights Commission's recommendation, were sympathetic, which was also new. There were not many instances prior to this of small town agencies



lobbying for gay rights. Institutions, influenced by the overall public opinion, were rarely in the late 1970s able to legislate protection for gays.

In 1977, a gay rights bill, the sixth, was defeated in Minnesota, Chalgren (1977) wrote in the May 11, 1977 school paper. “The gay rights bill is dead again this year as a result of a massive telephone campaign. It was fronted by anti-homosexual Catholics, fundamentalists, and pro-life forces coming under a new umbrella to ‘save our children.’...Denial of rights is a denial of personhood. You may be tired of hearing about gay rights, and I may be tired of fighting for gay rights, but the truth of the matter is that people are being oppressed. Carter can talk about human rights overseas; let’s talk about human rights here” (p.2).

The same year, on May 12, 1977, the Student Allocations Committee denied all funds to the Minnesota Area Gay Consciousness Group, saying that a group with a community focus shouldn’t be supported with campus funds. Chalgren at that point changed the name to the MSU Gay Consciousness Group. At this point, the Mankato and MSU community joined the gay community in openly talking about gay issues (Traditional Societal Values and Homosexuality brochure, 1978-1979). This seemed a sign of progress and a sign of courage on the part of the organizers and participants. It was a nine- part community forum, sponsored by the Minority Groups Studies Center at MSU and made possible through a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission. Included were sessions called “A Cross-Cultural Approach to Homosexuality,” and “Gay Rights and the American Reform Tradition,” as well as others. The fact that the conversations about gays were happening spoke to a turn of the wheel. A decade earlier, I can’t imagine it would have been possible to have a state organization fund a gay event. This had to have created community for

both the gays in the community and their allies, and helped build a politics of resistance and survival.

In 1978, Jim Chalgren was hired for the head of the Gay Advisor's Office on the university campus, which "provide[d] confidential information, referral, resources, counseling, and workshops and arrange[d] speaking engagements. The purpose was "to reduce prejudice through education and prevent discrimination so that integration is possible" (MSU Gay Ombudsperson, 1977-1978). This was the formal beginning of the Center. The Center sponsored special events such as Gay Focus Weekend and participated in special programs such as the downtown area churches panel discussion on 'Homosexuality and the Church' (*Gay Concerns, n.d.*) Chalgren apparently authored a document entitled *Hurts*, which articulated a long list of issues that closeted gays and lesbians experience followed by a list of issues for those in the process of coming out. In an undated document, Chalgren outlined some of the concerns he confronted in the new office:

The Gay Advisor's office deals with eight to ten people per week. On the average two new people are dealt with each week. According to a sample quarter, approximately 90 office visits were made. Eighty percent were male, twenty percent female. Ten percent were heterosexual, including married people. The clients were mostly MSU students, but also included faculty, several classified employees, alumni, community members, high school students, out state residents and students from other college. The most common usage of the office was as a reference center. Thirteen people checked out information available. The most common usage (10) involved general information regarding the gay group, usually indicating a desire to meet other gay people. ...Gay students made a number of office visits with dormitory concerns. Problems involved discomfort, coming out to roommates, and being hassled by floor residents... Coming out was major concern. Two visits involved discrimination... One person thought he was having difficulty getting a job because people might have thought he was gay. The other person was kicked out of the Explorer Scouts for being gay (*Gay Concerns, n.d.*).

The early 1980s showed both progress and regression. By 1980, Mankato State University had passed a new student constitution including a proviso for non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation ("Tomorrow" Gay Newsletter, circa 1980).

The Center was called the MSU Office of Gay/Lesbian Concerns by 1982. It sponsored such events as *Christian Sexual Issues: Challenge and Affirmation* (Brochure, n.d.). There was progress and reaction to progress made by gays. Officially, by 1982, discrimination was outlawed on campus. However, during the same year, the student senate took away funding from the Office of Gay/Lesbian Concerns. Student Senate President Gregg Asher vetoed moneys appropriated for two gay student groups in May of 1982 (Kennedy, 1982, p. 1).

Significantly in 1982, the authors of a report about the Counseling Center recommended that full time staffing be hired to support gay/lesbian students (Final Report Program Review Task Force, 1982). "The gay/lesbian campus community continues to receive effective delivery of direct and advocacy services and that the administration insure continued funding. That the university examine the appropriateness of this office's continued liaison with the counseling Center. If the liaison continues, it is recommended that the position be made full time as a regular Counseling Center Member" (Final Report, 1982, p. 5). Programming included a lecture on gays in politics (Student Activity Fund request, 1982). In November of 1982, the Student Senate denied on-campus recognition for a Christian group because the group discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation. Another dancing fiasco ensued similar to the 1976 Trader and Trapper incident when men were bounced from a local bar called R.J. Noodles for dancing together. The Department

of Human Rights looked into it and it was settled a few years later in 1985, when the bar owner agreed to allow same sex dancing and Chalgren, who had been involved, agreed not to talk about it for a minimum of 2 years (Internal Document, 1985). This was more evidence of the changes happening. On the one hand, there is support for the Center by a task force empowered to study the issue, support for gays as evidenced by the Senate action on the Christian group. But the larger community still was uncomfortable at this point with gays acting like regular people and dancing together.

In 1983, the Minnesota State Legislature again failed to pass a gay rights bill. The MSU Reporter's editorial supported the bill, saying that arguments against it were 'ridiculous' and that "gays should have the same rights as any other human beings" (Kennedy, 1983, p. 4). Another name change occurred in 1983. It was called the Office of Alternative Lifestyles. On Mankato's campus, Dr. Margaret Cruikshank, noted editor of the first ever book on lesbian studies and first director of MSU's Women's Studies program, was honored as Mankato celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their gay community group, the first of its kind formed in Minnesota (Anderson, 1983, p.2). A film festival was held which included screening of *Word is Out*, *Out of the Closet*, and *Women Loving Women*. A conference called *Roots* was held on April 15-17, 1983. The conference included speakers, films, and a religious service. The Student Senate vote to give \$2,000 for the Alternative Life Style Group was controversial in 1983 and stirred up anti-gay letters to the editor. Funding was stripped in 1985. In November of 1983 the Center brought the Improvisational Dance Theatre to perform *Nobody Gets Pregnant*. Campus issues included the situation such as was reported in the October 18, 1983 article when two straight men wanted out of their roommate assignment with gay men (Reporter, 1983, p.1). In 1984, a

second *Roots* Conference was held from May 4-6. The conference included a screening of *Before Stonewall* and there were workshops on 'Coming Out to Families and Friends,' and 'A Positive Approach to Aging for Gays and Lesbians.' A worship service was held, cosponsored by the Lutheran Campus Ministry and the United Christian Campus Center (Roots Brochure, 1983).

The word bisexual showed up in a workshop for the first time in 1985. A workshop was held on April 24, 1985 called "Understanding the Misunderstood." The campus climate was still mixed. The Student Allocations Committee withdrew the \$2,000 for the Alternative Lifestyles Office, saying that the members were reluctant to make themselves visible. "We don't see that as integration into the community" (Allevan, 1985 May 14, p. 1). The Mankato-Gay/Lesbian group was denied use of a party room at the Applewood Night club after initially being told the room was available (SMHC Manuscript Collection Number 188). There are many levels of acceptance and discomfort evident in this. The fact that a workshop on bisexuality could happen was significant, because if gays make people uncomfortable, bisexuality makes them very nervous. It was a positive development that the workshop happened and could also be seen as a development towards community. Many bisexuals feel rejected both by the straight and gay communities, so having a workshop devoted to bisexuality must have been affirming for the students who identified as bisexual. When the students, such as those on the Student Allocations Committee, can not understand that gays are not 'visible' and hold it against them, it's clear that they don't understand the price of visibility. Gays have survived through the years by staying in the closet. In 1985, despite the policy on non-discrimination against gays, gays felt the campus

had an “ongoing hostile atmosphere” (ALO Task Force, 1987, p. 9) and when the allocations committee withdrew the funding, it must have felt even less safe.

Robert Gallagher (1987) authored a second office university report about the Counseling Center that also commented on the Center, then known as the Alternative Lifestyles Office. He wrote,

The Alternative Lifestyles Office (ALO) functions out of the Counseling Center [but] has received very little attention in the Counseling and Health Service self-study. This is of great concern for the Coordinator of the Alternative Lifestyles Office who feels that this office is not receiving the moral or financial support it requires...One concern that emerged from this evaluation is that the graduate student who is assigned to the ALO appears to be handling the psychological counseling of students who seek help through this office. This graduate student is not supervised by an appropriated credentialed clinical supervisor. This is unethical, legally risky, and should be corrected immediately. It would seem to make sense, for example, to have one counselor with special expertise in working with sexual minorities, as part of the core counseling center staff. (p. 16).

The role of the Center was determined by Jim Chalgren, as Don Craig (2004), former supervisor of the center said in an interview:

I think initially the Office was so closely tied to Chalgren that it was almost the Jim Chalgren Office as over against the ALO. That was no fault of Chalgren's but, because he had such a presence within the university community as well as the larger community, that office was very much identified with him. Probably, that was not necessarily a good thing because its mission got lost in the person. Depending on how people were feeling about Jim Chalgren on any given day that kind of colored their thoughts about the ALO. So that was very much the initial situation when I arrived. That really changed as we moved, to Jeanne [Burkhart] and Scott [Schroeder] and Sig [Hartmann]. Also when the fairly significant change was made, where Jeanne had an appointment within the Counseling Center and was a general therapist and saw GLBT students but also saw general, straight students, then you had a counseling function within the Counseling Center and the programmatic function through the Grad Assists... I think that worked pretty well (p.3).

There is a minute-by-minute log of the activities for 1987 through 1989 indicating several requests for information, a request for a homophobia workshops (Unitarian Church, September 12, 1989) and others, for example, on 2/3/1987, there were several requests for information, both men and women, several people in just to hang out, requests for upcoming events by two people, and 3 phone calls regarding speaking requests. (Logs, 1987-1989).

A period of change happened in 1986-1987, which was a transitional year, when Jeanne Burkhart filled a dual role, as credentialed counselor in the Counseling Service, and programming director of the Alternative Lifestyles Office (ALO) doing educational outreach. "The way that I got hooked in was, the first year that I was here, Chalgren was diagnosed" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 3). Craig said that there were no separate program funds for the ALO and the only specific support directed to the ALO was that for Chalgren's salary and Burkhart's. For a long time, the ALO depended on support from the Student Allocation Committee for the programming funds, and then that funding was cut off. Chalgren's visibility and AIDS status were responsible, in the opinion of Don Craig, supervisor of the Counseling Center and thus the Center's supervisor. "I think the other thing that was definitely at play, was Chalgren's presence and Chalgren's illness which was very much a part of things. So there was that whole dynamic going on" (Craig, 2004, pp. 7-8). This was echoed in a study of the ALO written in 1989. It reported that "the creation of a staff position in Alternative Lifestyles was tied not only to perceived need but also because of the availability of Chalgren...who served as a model and a spokesperson for gay and lesbian persons in the community. The mission of ALO and its role within the spectrum of services provided to the larger student body do not appear to be clear" (ALO

Task Force, 1989, p.5-6). In 1986, Chalgren pondered his ability to continue in the ALO in an article in the *Free Press*:

Chalgren said ignorance reinforces the assumption that all homosexuals have AIDS and that all AIDS victims are homosexuals. That has led to a degree of fear of homosexuals—homophobia—even in San Francisco, a city known for its strong support system of AIDS victims and carriers, Chalgren said. The threat of homosexual branding, similar to that during World War II when homosexuals were forced to wear pink triangles to distinguish them from the heterosexuals, exists today in San Francisco. “There is still important work I can do here. Part of it is simply that this is my home. I was born here. I grew up here. I went to school here. I came out here, and I have worked here. This is my home. Under preferred circumstance, I would like to stay here. I do not know if that will be possible.” (Weleccki, 1986, p. 11)

It was not possible for him to stay. After Mankato’s Human Rights attempt failed in 1987, he left, hurt and disgusted with how homophobic his home town really was. The Center, which had been his creation, would, from 1987 through the spring of 2004, be headed up by a director who was a graduate assistant. They would always reinvent the wheel that Chalgren created. The lack of continuity in the person who headed up the Center along with a lack of administrative support would make the work of the Graduate Assistant in the Center difficult.

The finding of the task force members that "the mission of ALO and its role within the spectrum of services provided to the larger student body does not appear to be clear" (ALO Task Force, 1989, p.5-6) would continue to be an issue. On the other hand, the fact that Chalgren created the office always meant that it was something the students could fight for under the premise that the Center existed and had provided a necessary and positive service for the campus community. If it hadn’t already existed, it’s not clear that students could have argued successfully for the creation of the Center.



The ambiguity of the role of the Center was clear in the interviews with the former directors. Many of the former directors of the Center couldn't remember what they were told about the function of the Center. They usually just followed a rough pattern left by their predecessor, doing certain programming, panels, and keeping the Center open to the students. This constantly revolving door of personnel along with the lack of a separate role, budget, and place at the table, would be a problem for the duration of the Center led by a director who was a graduate assistant, new to the job every year or two.

Chalgren's contribution cannot be overstated. For critical years, when homophobia was rampant and access to support systems and what Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) called "fragments of a community, a usable heritage, and a politics of survival or resistance" (p. 54) were scarce, Chalgren almost single-handedly created a safe space for queer students and community members. He forced the dialogue, invited the speakers, and made the safe-space in homes and workshops. In doing so, not only did he substantially give succor to queer students, he educated the broader student body and community.

*Some National Benchmarks*

1987 Lambda Book Report, the first periodical devoted exclusively to lesbian and gay literature, makes its debut.

1988 Urging thousands of lesbians and gay men across the country to be open about their sexuality with friends, families and coworkers, Robert H. Richburg, and Jean O'Leary, executive director of National Gay Rights Advocates, launch the first National Coming Out Day. (*Completely Queer*, 1998, pp. 660-663)

*Jeanne Burkhart (circa 1986-89)*

The transition from the Center being both an arm of the Counseling Center and an educational center for and about gays happened during Burkhart's tenure. The funding for the Center, according to an internal document entitled *Alternative Lifestyles Office Task Force Report*, had been the responsibility of different areas through the history of the Center. Initially it was apparently a graduate assistantship paid for through the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences in 1978. The situation for Chalgren was as half-time faculty in the Alternative Lifestyles Office and half-time in the Counseling Center. In 1986-1988, Jeanne Burkhart was hired as three-quarter time counselor and a fifteen hour per week graduate assistant to do educational programming in the Center. Her memory of the purpose of the Center was to be there, offer the panels, and support the students. "They saw the role of the office as being a place where students could come and talk and find resources and, you know, that we were not supposed to be political at all. The administration did not want us to be activists. Don Craig really believed in the activist component, but he also talked a lot about how we could do that without pissing off the administration" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 21).

The educational and referral services were “prominently noted by consumers as essential to their well being” (ALO Task Force Report, 1989, p. 8). Burkhart (2004) echoed that sentiment in her interview.

For GLB people, I think that it was just, even if they never walked in the office; I think that all of the GLB people on campus knew it was there. And knew that there was somebody advocating for them and a lot of them never did walk into the office, you know, it was a scary thing to walk into that office but, just having that visibility on campus and having somebody who would write to the newspaper and say, we are not evil, you know?”(p. 33)

There it was, creating community for the students who came in and even those who didn't, a place where they could learn their heritage and learn a politics of resistance and survival. “We had a fairly extensive library given the time. It covered an entire wall” (Burkhart, 2004, p. 21). The panels provided the survival and resistance.

Burkhart facilitated a lot of panels, following the pattern set by Chalgren. A study done as part of the ALO Task Force shows the quantity and quality of services offered during Burkhart's time. In 1987-1988, panels were provided for 70 classes in Women's Studies, Psychology, Sociology, Educational Administration, Law Enforcement, Health Science and Biology, as well as others. Burkhart said about the panels,

I think that the thing that stands out the most for me wasn't anything that we said, but it was the point when there would be people, and it was usually older women, it was usually non-traditional female students, who would realize that we were people. You know? And there would be this moment of, they would just be able to separate, you know, this stereotype that they had from the reality and so we would always have, always it seemed like, this group of women, toward the front of the classroom who were very, very supportive, who smiled, who nodded, who asked really appropriate questions and then we would always have these like, five or six, asshole men in the back, who were like, ‘What do you do for sex?’ (Burkhart, 2004, pp. 16-17).

One of the issues that arose in the panels was religion. Burkhart (2004) said, that when religion came up they could refer them to a pamphlet Chalgren had created that said, "What did Jesus say about homosexuality?" And you'd open it up, and it would be empty" (p. 14). Offering the panels allowed her to work for social justice. She said that "it was, just this whole sense for me of I don't get why people don't like me, because of this and so I am going to do something to change it. I'm going to go, you know: make them see that this is not, not this big, scary monster" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 19). She did the panels as a means of both her survival and resistance to the culture around her. She said it was much harder when she did queer activism in northern Colorado. "In some ways it was more scary because people had gun racks" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 18)

Another issue in the news during this period was AIDS, looked at by many as a gay cancer and by not a few as just retribution for sin. Burkhart said they were also panels on AIDS "because we were the only office doing AIDS education at that point" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 6).

Representative Allen Quist from St. Peter said in a Phi Delta Kappa Educators Association forum that the ALO was 'indirectly encouraging the spread of AIDS and condoning the homosexual lifestyle and the practice of sodomy. He also compared the ALO to the Ku Klux Klan, saying "You wouldn't have a center for the Ku Klux Klan" (as cited in Ugland, 1988 January 14, p. 1). The local paper, in an editorial, wrote that Quist's attacks on the Center were "a transparent effort to turn schools and other agencies that should be islands of sanity in the crisis into propaganda bureaus for gay-bashers" (Quist is Over Zealous, 1988, p. 4). Dr. Margaret Preska, President of MSU at the time, was interviewed, saying that Representative Quist "doesn't understand the program or what

MSU is trying to do about the disease” (Smalec, 1988, p. 13). Basically, though, Preska ducked the issue, saying that “the ALO is no longer strictly a university program” (Smalec, 1988, p.13).

The Center at this time started keeping hate crime statistics. Burkhart said, “When I came here, you know, we started keeping statistics when I was in the office for the first time on hate crimes and there were, there was lots and lots of verbal harassment. I personally continued to receive death threats, although, not as frequently but probably four or five a year” (Burkhart, 2004, p. 7). The ALO Task Force Report (1989) noted that ‘Gay/Lesbian students report an ongoing hostile atmosphere at the University’ (p. 9).

The atmosphere for queers at this time was perhaps illuminated by the *MSU Speaks* section of the *Mankato State University Reporter* in January of 1988. The question was: “Should MSU have an Alternative Lifestyles Program? (MSU Speaks, 1988, p. 2) Students’ responses were divided between the sentiment expressed by student Randy Christensen, saying, ‘Yes, I think this gives all students the choice of lifestyles they want, and helps others to understand them.’ The sentiment of Dan Goerdts was the opposite, ‘Yes, maybe it will keep those types of people together and out of the lives of normal people’ (MSU Speaks, 1988, p. 2). In the Center, there were a number of incidents that spoke to the discomfort students felt with gay students. The Center was broken into and pamphlets and posters were ripped up (Bauer, 1987, p. 1). At the time, in June of 1987, the Student Senate representative was quoted that the signs for the Center had been defaced or taken down so many times the Senate wouldn’t pay for any more signs to be made. Burkhart said, “I think, it was more Christian-based groups. Kind of fundamentalist groups, you know, the bulletin board outside of the office, you could expect to be vandalized at least once a week. We

were always, you know, we just had extra copies of everything and we'd take down the stuff that got vandalized and put up new stuff" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 8). Letters to the Editor in the 1987 *Free Press* in Mankato clearly demonstrate the religious component of the homophobia. One letter to the editor from Karen Holte described God's condemnation of homosexuality as an "abomination, unnatural, indecent: it is a sin and there are consequences such as separation from God, the pandemic of AIDS" (Readers' points of view, 1987).

Besides the panels and the library, the ALO provided some programming, included having Karen Thompson speak about her legal battle to care for her lover, Sharon Kowalski. Sharon Kowalski was injured gravely in the course of a car accident. Karen, her lesbian partner, tried to get guardianship so that she could care for her. A court battle ensued between Kowalski's family and her lover. Burkhart said in a *Reporter* article that the case would affect civil rights for gays and lesbians forever after. And she was right.

All of the former directors were asked about lessons learned and the impact of being in the position. Burkhart had these insights to share:

It was, I think, a lesson in both the humanity of most people and the inhumanity of some people. You know, I found out that there are really, really some basically evil people out there who are just mean. But that at some level, most people are you know, they want to understand, they want to, and they certainly don't want to hurt us. (Burkhart, 2004, p. 32)

On a personal level, it was a difficult position for someone who is reserved and shy. She came to the position, despite her shyness, because of her innate sense of justice:

Back then, and it was really hard for me to be in that position, to be that public, to be going out and talking to classes all the time, but I was just very committed to, being an activist. I think that, for me, you know I don't know, it's kind of hard to say for sure, in retrospect, but, I grew up with a sense that things aren't fair you know, I had eight brothers and things weren't fair

in my family. So I grew up with this sense somehow, that things weren't fair and that things should be fair. And I think that it was, just this whole sense for me of I don't get why people don't like me, because of this and so I am going to do something to change it. I'm going to go, you know, make them see that this is not; it's not a monster at all, in fact (Burkhart, 2004, p. 19) and I think on a personal level what I learned is I can do this stuff. You know, I can go out and speak and I can be an effective public speaker and I can, you know, I can be an activist and I can be visible and not you know, well, it does make me cringe to think about how, ahhh, how visible I was then just because of I'm so introverted (laughter) (p. 30). It was a huge learning experience, I mean, it was, and I would not be who I am or be where I am today if I hadn't done that (p. 32).

Burkhart's time in the office provided the students with an advocate, a support system, and a friend. The library was used both by queer students to find their heritage and the general student population to study queer issues. The panels were a means of resistance for both Burkhart and her panelists. Offering the panels, doing the programming, and having the Center provided some sense of community for the queer students.

*A National Benchmark*

1990- The Hate Crime Statistics Act, passed by the 101<sup>st</sup> Congress is signed into law. The act requires the Department of justice to collect and publish statistics for five years on hate crime. (*Completely Queer*, 1990, p. 664)

*Kim Luedtke (circa 1989-1990)*

Luedtke (2004) said the mission of the Center was: “Well I always told people that that was the greatest job I ever had was because all I ever did was sit in my office and drink coffee and eat doughnuts with my friends and talk about stuff that was interesting to me” (p. 2). More seriously, she said the Center was ‘to provide advocacy and support, to provide education” (p.3). The administration was only supportive in a marginal kind of way. “They thought that we didn’t have very many gay and lesbian people and even if we had, big deal, what kind of services do they need and it was sort of like that. Why should they have special services?” (p. 18).

Her typical week was spent arranging and offering panels. She also spent a lot of time just being available to students in need. “Individuals would come in and just want to talk. It wasn’t really counseling because we weren’t counselors but it was individuals who would just want to talk and just kind of make connections and then, doing ...social events and then any activism that was going on, of course, we wanted to be a part of that. There was really so much more you could do in terms of programming, in terms of like, groups, in terms of just helping people feel good about who they are” (Luedtke, 2004, p. 13). Back then, she noted, there were no positive role models. No movies, no novels, no easy access to gay and lesbian music, art, or other cultural messages that was positive for queer folk. On television, she said, now, there are queer folk. “Even though a lot of them are straight,



typical gay person, at least they're still like a gay person on TV. We didn't have that. There wasn't that" (p. 14). Having positive role models to combat the homophobia was important.

Having the Center and being able to come and talk to a queer person was reassuring for students, according to Luedtke (2004):

I just definitely think that there's a need for a separate, you know, a separate place, you know. Until things are fairer and more, you know, legally equitable, there certainly needs to be a separate place. In terms of like completing college, I think that, like if someone took a quarter or a semester or whatever they had, and were trying to come out to their family, that is a major, major big deal. That's going to interrupt your life in a lot of ways and it is going to make it hard for you to study and if you don't have some kind of support and help to do that, you could end your college career right there. I think the people that don't, that have never had that experience, just don't have any idea. How tough that is, they're just like, tell them, big deal. I just think it was really important for people, I think it was important for people's self esteem, for people to be able to say this is who we are, I think it was really important for people to go and let off steam. Like when you spend your whole life, like with people that don't understand you. (laughter) People to cut loose and be with people who have an instant understanding. Not a complete understanding but at least an understanding of who you are. (pp. 20-21)

The Center was also the nexus for social things. "We did more social things then. We would sponsor dances and parties and potlucks and so just a bringing together of people and then we had sort of a referral network of people could call and say, I'm looking for a counselor you know, do you know of any queer-friendly counselor or they would say ...They would call about groups, they would want to know like is there queer AA groups or something like that" (Luedtke, 2004, p. 9). Community was forged amongst the gay students and community members who attended the dances and parties. Some of the issues students were dealing with then were deciding on how 'out' they wanted to be and coming out to parents. Her sense was religion was the sticking point for many parents. "I think some of it was religion, you know? They would come out and the parents would hit them

with religion, that's against their religion and God thinks that's bad and, so I think there was that going on." (Luedtke, 2004, p. 15). Having the Center helped them resist the negative messages they received from the culture at large and negative parental reactions.

Luedtke (2004) talked about the panels in depth. She reported being careful choosing panelists. "I would choose people that I knew because I knew that they would just say things that would not inflame people. You wanted to be careful. You wanted to get people that were articulate and not too over the edge because that puts people off" (p. 3). She chose carefully:

I was always accused of only having the "pretty lesbians" on the panels I organized. This was true and not true. What I mostly looked for was people who were articulate, could speak from the heart, had stories different enough from each other to make it interesting and who would not incite violence. I did not want people who would shame listeners for being heterosexual or blame them for being homophobic. I was looking to find allies, not start wars. So it was education, but with a particular agenda – give people information and try to elicit their understanding and if possible, support. Angry people are more difficult to support than those that appear sane and harmless (Luedtke, 2004, p. 22).

She thought of it as trying to introduce the idea that queers are humans, too. "And try not to make them hostile or if they were already hostile to try to kind of, just mellow that down" (Luedtke, 2004, p. 3). Luedtke tried to temper the religious questions with biblical knowledge, "you know Sodom and Gomorrah was about inhospitality it wasn't about hating gay people or so we wouldn't go real deep with that, we would just address it like, you know religious issues are kind of separate from political issues" (Luedtke, 2004, p. 4). She added humorously, "Like here are some human beings, do you think they should get to have jobs? Do you think they should get to have insurance? Do you think they should get to live indoors? You know? With running water?" (Luedtke, 2004, p. 4).

The panels, she thought, achieved the goals of acquainting students with queer people and allaying their fears, “Here are some people, these people are lesbian and gay, and interact with them and also to bring down the fear people, the fear factor of you know, that they are going to hurt your children. That was a big thing at that particular time. And just that, like that, pedophile and gay were the same thing” (Luedtke, 2004, p. 4).

The panelists did these educational offerings together a lot. Luedtke (2004) thought it was a process that was therapeutic. “It was good. In the beginning it was good because it sort of helps you affirm who you are. Like oh, this is who I am, this is my story.... And then after awhile, we had done it so much, we used to laugh about we should just switch stories, you tell mine and I’ll tell yours. You know? We never did that, but we’d laugh about that” (Luedtke, 2004, p. 4). A lot of the audiences, she felt, were neutral. “They didn’t even have feelings about it at all. And it’s not a bad thing, it’s just like oh okay, that’s interesting, okay good, go have a job, go have a house, go have, you know, go get married, we don’t care” (p. 5).

For her, being in this position did carry its burdens.

When I first took the job, there was something like I was in the paper, like in the school paper, like my picture and it said that this is the new person in that office and like, that really freaked me out. Because it was like being out in a really, really public way. There was like being out selectively. So that you know and then being out, you know, to be out on the panel, but then when it’s in print, like you don’t know where it’s gone, you don’t know who has seen it, like you’re out to everyone. There’s certain vulnerability with that. I got used to it after I was in there for awhile but that was kind of, in the beginning, I didn’t know that that would affect me that way because I had done a lot of panels and stuff before I was in the office but like that first time they put my picture in the newspaper, it weirded me out. I didn’t expect it to. It was sort of like you never knew where someone was going to stop and say something to you or you know, throw a tomato at your car or you know. You would feel kind of, like you hoped you wouldn’t run into

those people, you know, when you were walking through the parking lot in the dark to your car. (Luedtke, 2004, pp. 7-8).

Luedtke brought to the job a sense of humor that carried her through the roughest seas. She is a librarian now up North, and the Center was lucky to have a reader in the office, as well as a stand up comedienne. She laughed when she said during the interview, “I just read like a maniac, I’ve always been like that... I won’t read like one book or ten books or one hundred books, I’ll read you know, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. Thousands of billions of words. I like that because it gave me, like I was reading all that stuff anyway, I knew all that stuff anyway so it was like an outlet for all that stuff that was in me (laughter) (Luedtke, 2004, p. 7).

In the end, Luedtke talked about the need for the Center simply for survival. At that time, many people who came out to their family lost their family. For those students, she said, “It is going to make it hard for you to study and if you don’t have some kind of, support and help to do that, you could end your college career right there. I think the people that don’t, that have never had that experience, just don’t have any idea. How tough that is, they’re just like, tell them, big deal” (Luedtke, 2004, p. 19). The Center offered a place where they could learn to resist the pressure to think they were bad just because they were gay, a place to find community among other outcasts, a place that could help them survive college.

*A National Benchmark*

1991 In Minnesota, Karen Thompson is named Sharon Kowalski's legal guardian. The decision, which comes eight years after a car accident left Kowalski paralyzed and speech-impaired, is seen as a precedent-setting victory for the disabled as well as lesbian and gay couples. (*Completely Queer*, 1998, p. 665)

*Scott Schroeder (circa 1990-1991)*

Schroeder's story of coming to the ALO is maybe not an uncommon one. When he was an undergraduate at MSU he sat in on a coming out support group. "At that time, I was real early with my own struggles in coming out...So, I went there and I had a very interesting time in that, the comments out of my mouth were 'Well, I'm not sure that I'm gay or I don't think that I'm gay, I'm just here for information' " (Schroeder, 2004, p. 6). He went to the Twin Cities, did some work at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and returned, eventually to head up the Center while doing a degree in Experiential Education with Dr. Jasper Hunt. He wanted three things in order to continue at MSU: to work with Dr. Hunt, to complete the Master's in Experiential Education, and to get the Graduate Assistant position in the Center. He laughed, "And of course, one should always be careful what they pray for because that's exactly what I got" (Schroeder, 2004, p.8).

The Center for Schroeder meant listening to students, giving referrals, providing information and giving panels. "I was a printed directory junkie," Schroeder (p. 11) laughed, commenting on providing referrals in a pre-internet age. "There were faculty people who came to me with those kinds of questions and there were other students that came to me with those kinds of questions. There were students who, for example, were about to leave campus, they got their first job going somewhere and they would say, what do you know about the gay community in that city?"(Schroeder, 2004, p. 11). There were

lots of students questioning their orientation. “I think I’m gay but I don’t want to go to that student organization. I don’t think I’m like the other gay people on campus and so on and so forth” (p. 20).

He felt like then and now, the Center is important. The issues students deal with, in his mind, remain similar. “That conflict between being out and open and not being out and open, being closeted and quiet, or being very private or being very public. That conflict or that friction is still there. It will always be there. It will always be a dynamic to cope with. Because we may have organizations like Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) for 1,000 years but there will still, and God bless them, there will still always be a need” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 25). He was trying to build community, to seek unity. He had a message for everyone “we come in contact with, that there is one kind of sexuality and that’s human sexuality. Everything else is just extraneous description and that those things serve more to divide people from each other than to bring people together” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 3)

He wanted students, especially questioning students as he had been himself, to know about the Center, get to know other gay people. “I think what we stuck to was a very simple philosophy of being visible in the sense that we were bending over backwards to make ourselves available to give presentations in the classroom” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 1). He was also the advisor for the gay student organization and did film festivals with Student Activity funds. The Center was important for the students to find other gay students, so they could have someone that they could be open with. “And it’s very difficult for people to reach that point when they’ve been told that there is something wrong with them” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 22).

Mostly, though, there were the panels. “The thing, sort of, academically and developmentally, kind of, there is that philosophy and I picked that up from Women’s Studies that act of telling your story is very powerful. I think that does more good in the world than all of the parades combined” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 26). He wrote of the panels in his alternate plan paper. The presentations began with an overview of the work of the Center, definitions, and participant expectations “in order to maintain a climate of respect and emotional safety for both the panel presenters and the audience” (Schroeder, 1998, p. 10). He was clear that the panels were not ‘to fix’ everybody in the classroom... “We were going to walk in there and try to be as neutral as we could in the sense that we wanted to meet people where they were at; whatever process or whatever stage of acceptance they were at” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 1).

Panelists in the early 1990s were described in an article in the student paper, “Although most people at Mankato State University never experience the fear that by being who they are they risk the danger of being verbally or physically bashed, there are those students who have to conform to societal norms in order to be safe”(Feitl, 1990, p. 6). The reporter had talked to Schroeder and understood the dangers inherent in being out at MSU. Offering the panels was courageous. Schroeder never let the panels happen cold. “We met a couple of times [with the teacher] to talk about the process, to talk about my philosophy and to get them at ease so that they wouldn't be surprised by any of the terms or any of the concepts that I would bring up in the opening presentation” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 2). The teachers had often prepared their students with readings and discussions and the panelists would try to reciprocate. “We would try to respond to some of the things that were in the syllabus or in

what they had talked about in class, a little bit. ...Or how would you respond to that research or what was your experience like in comparison to that?" (Schroeder, 2004, p. 4).

Schroeder was really sensitive to the potential dynamics in the panel situations:

Every once in awhile, speaking of disarming, every once in awhile there would be someone in the classroom that might get on their high horse and get, you know, maybe with a real conservative, maybe fundamentalist Christian background and the thing that I always told the presenters, is that you have to be very, very careful when responding to those anger and angst ridden questions and statements. You never know exactly from what position those comments are coming from. You don't know if the question or comment is coming from someone who is struggling with coming out issues on their own, all by themselves or if it's a basic fundamental social conservative background... and the real key was to not shut out that person in the audience and they were always there, that was in the coming out process. ...So when we left that room, everybody in that room knew that we were available to talk to as a resource if they needed us in a time of crisis. (Schroeder, 2004, p. 5)

A constant for the directors of the Center was vandalism of posters and door decorations. Schroeder said mostly, "They would just take everything or dump everything out on the floor and scribble something on the door and it was fairly minor, juvenile stuff" (Schroeder, 2004, p. 18). But every once in awhile there would be something that was pretty nasty. Schroeder waxed philosophical about the homophobia he encountered. His strength in life is being able to meet people where they are at.

You can, you can show somebody all the data and all of the sociological information until you are blue in the face but until that individual experiences a friendship with someone different from themselves, they are not going to have a personal context for it and they are going to have some trepidation most of the time. (Schroeder, 2004, p. 18)

Schroeder understood so much more about himself and about people through being the Center director.

It ended up, to being really the high point of my life. In terms of an educational activity, a social involvement activity, and then I've spent the



rest of my time since then, trying to recapture some of that spark and trying to maintain that same attitude of being open and meeting people one on one in life wherever I was at the time (Schroeder, 2004, p. 22)

Schroeder's tenure was interesting in that he was the only male director since Chalgren.

He thought the males in the community appreciated it. "There had been three or four women in that position since Chalgren had left campus...All of the sudden, there is another man there and they felt that they could talk to me and come to me and they could, you know, make use of me. Just like they did with Chalgren, ten years before or six years before" (Schroeder, 2004, p. 15). The creation of community has probably been easier for gay males when a gay man was in the Center, but more often, a lesbian has been in charge of the office, which probably has helped lesbians forge bonds of community and resistance more readily than their gay male counterparts. Ideally, perhaps the Center would be staffed by one gay man and one lesbian.

*Some National Benchmarks*

1992 The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is displayed in Washington, DC for the fourth time. More than 400,000 people come to the Washington Monument grounds to view the Quilt's 20,000-plus panels, which extend over more than 13 acres.

1993 In Washington, DC, the third gay and lesbian March on Washington brings 1 million participants. (*Completely Queer*, 1998, pp. 666-667)

Signe Hartmann (1992-1993)

Hartmann was the director of the ALO from 1992 through 1993. The Center went through some controversial and tumultuous times during her sojourn there, and she was there to help. "I found out about the position in the Alternative Lifestyles Office and thought that it sounded pretty wonderful ... I realized, yes, I was bisexual and you know, clear on that and that I think was helpful in applying for the job and just coming from that perspective. So, anyway, that's how I came to be interested in working in the Alternative Lifestyles Office, wanting to support students who are trying to figure out their own sexual orientation out or who already knew it but needed some support" (Hartmann, 2004, p. 1).

"I think what I felt like the mission of the ALO was to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students on-campus in their pursuit of college degree. Supporting them both, I guess, psychologically, if you want to say that or kind of giving them support in terms of who they were" (Hartmann, 2004, p. 3). It was not an easy role for her. It was very much a public role, a non-activist role, and a support role. "I couldn't really separate ... I realized oh god, that's really heavy in my heart, I can't really hear all of those people's stories and not just, you know, be down about it or whatever" (p. 7).

Besides acting as a support system to students, Hartmann arranged panels. She is bisexual, and like the other directors, found being so publicly queer a little daunting. The panels were "a huge part of what we did and what I realized was, that was my identity

100%. I felt like on-campus, I'm Sig, I'm bisexual and anybody didn't know me before, now you do know me and that's what you know about me" (Hartmann, 2004, p. 2). She left journal entries as part of an internship report. In it, she wrote after the first panel:

I had this feeling, an image, standing at the edge of a very very tall cliff, sheer rock, and as my mouth open to address this class simultaneously, I bent my knees and sprang off my feet into the air with knowledge of what would meet me from below...I realized that I was landing in water, swimable, floatable, water, and now I was swimming as I would continue to do for the next year and a half" (Hartmann, 1993, p.1).

In the fall quarter of 1992, Hartmann organized 17 panel presentations, serving more than 593 students. There were 75 visitors to the office and she handled 62 phone calls. The panels, she feels, were very important, although she would, if she had it to do again, choose to spend more time in support of students and less time on panels, which serve the greater student body. About the panels, Hartmann (2004) said,

Other people could see that we were not like green aliens kind of thing. I felt that was a big part of the panel and the whole presence of panel discussions was for people to take away some of the fear for people that felt like they didn't know anybody who was queer even though you certainly do, you just might not know that they are queer. That it was fine to meet somebody who said they were and then realizing that they act fairly normal, you know? That is, whatever normal is. (laughter) ( p. 8).

Sometimes the preparation by the teacher was inadequate, "A lot of the classes that we would go to, hadn't done much work prior to our coming and so it was really like being in the zoo kind of thing or being the animal in the zoo " (Hartmann, 2004, p. 9). This was evidence of the problems inherent in the transient nature of the graduate assistants to staff the Center. Schroeder had insisted on conversations with the teacher before he would let the panelists into the class. There was no continuity. Every new director had to reinvent the wheel.

The panels, she acknowledged, were draining, “I remember like needing to go, like going out afterwards or having to go out or wanting to go out with the people on the panels just to socialize or kind of debrief a little, to deplode, I don’t know, implode” (p. 10). “The hatred about people loving each other, it was just really dark for me” (p. 12). Sometimes the panels devolved into the biblical:

I thought it was helpful for the other people around who are maybe a little religious but they heard there was another side to how you could interpret Leviticus or whatever ...It was like, man shall not lie together like a man lies with a woman or something like that. In the same part there’s like a thing like a man should not lay with a woman when she is bleeding or at that time of the month or that kind of thing or they shouldn’t wear such and such type of cloth and all these things. It was like; we don’t pay any attention to those things anymore so why do we pay attention to this one? (Hartmann, 2004, p. 13).

The Center offered panels to the residential life personnel and even the high schools during Hartmann’s tenure. “There had been some negative stuff going, some violence, and some hate crimes going on towards people in the dorm...so definitely felt like a helpful thing to do and a positive thing to be more involved with the, like house fellows and stuff like that, Resident Assistants and educating them more” (Hartmann, 2004, p. 19). The panels in the residence halls were designed to help the residence hall staff help queer students living in them create a politics of survival. In retrospect, she had these thoughts about the panels, “I definitely felt that we got closer by doing them but I think they were taxing and I feel like I wish I had done more things that were positive for people” (p. 10). Offering the panels in the high schools was controversial, as this *Free Press* Letter to the Editor penned by Teresa Mann suggests: “As a parent, it is my opinion that bringing an alternative lifestyles panel into the high school classroom is inappropriate. It strongly suggests not only acceptance, but also approval by both the classroom teacher and the

Mankato school district (Mann, 1993, p. 4). Don Craig, who supervised the Center, responded a few days later, “Contrary to the view expressed from Teresa Mann, I support the alternative lifestyles panels that have become a regular part of the senior sociology curriculum. We parents impede critical learning process when we cloak our own fears in the guise of protecting our children” (Craig, 1993, p. 4).

As part of her job, Hartmann put up displays outside the office. These were means of resistance, as the expectation was that homosexuals should not be ‘in people’s faces’ about being queer. As Schroeder experienced, those displays were vandalized. One in particular made the front page of the student paper. It had a poster with one lesbian, one gay, and one biracial straight couple kissing. Underneath were images from Pride events, so more unapologetic displays of gay affection. As she remembered it,

So that, I can remember some of the pictures that were up there. Basically there was that whole United Colors of Benetton was one of the posters, that was like, and here it was like this company that was kind of you know, what do I want to say, in vogue or you know in fashion and they were using queer people in a positive light. So I guess I didn’t really think that there was going to be this big reaction because I thought hey, you know the city buses in Minneapolis would have that poster on their bus. That kind of thing or whatever, it was out there. But then, I didn’t really, I wasn’t expecting such a big reaction. I put those things up and I think I had some postcards, I just thought they were all, you know, really celebratory, you know what I mean, celebrating our, who we are and I thought it was a beautiful display and wonderful and I guess I wasn’t anticipating any kind of negative reaction or such a negative strong reaction (Hartmann, 2004, p. 11).

The strong reaction that she referred to is the Reverend Rick Rudquist’s comments quoted in an article in the campus newspaper, *The Mankato State University Reporter*. “Rev. Rick Rudquist said he thought the display outside Mankato State University’s Alternative Lifestyles office was ‘pornographic’ and urged his members of his congregation to ‘take a

stand against such wickedness' ” (Hareid, 1992, p. 1). The situation evolved into what felt like a threatening atmosphere.

The way that he came to me was a little strange. Because he came in almost pretending to be someone who needed support or something and then all of the sudden went off on what he thought about it in his religious take on the thing. Really kind of took me by surprise. Then used such violent terminology and words and language that it was like, wow, I felt like, this guy is scary. I think after that, we actually did a little patrol thing or something where people from the gay student group would come and hang out a little bit in the ALO so that I wasn't there by myself (Hartmann, 2004, p. 11).

Letters to the editor in response included an appeal for homosexuals to find Jesus Christ and thereby be 'set free' from their sin” (Coming out of the closet not the solution, 1992, p. 9).

The programming Hartmann did included the Second Annual Cabaret. “That had drag and that was definitely very controversial.” In her internship journal, she wrote in these words:

The final act in the Cabaret was a last minute appearance by the infamous Felitia Fontaine and the rest of her drag queen friends. This final act included some disrobing and an S & M leather theme clearly brought the (necessary?) controversial element to the show. Some women in the audience walked out during the final act, and others were offended but chose not to leave, while still others were offended at the waling out of those who chose to leave. I chose not to take the controversy personally for two reasons. (1) My job was to organize a Cabaret that was representative of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Communities, (not all of which are going to be in agreement) (2) I had no idea what was going to be presented in the final acts because several of these performers arrived as the show was already taking place. (Hartmann, 1993, p. 2)

Other programming events included a trip to the *March on Washington*, organized primarily by myself but the Center helped some with logistics. I asked several queer faculty to come up with fifty dollars each so that students could go free. Students had to

write an essay about what going to the *March* would mean for them. We stayed with a good friend of mine a few blocks from the capital. Long and good conversations were had going out and coming back from Washington D.C. Hartmann wrote in her internship journal of this experience, “What an amazing feeling to take over the cities (sic) mass transit system and see thousands and thousands of friendly happy queers” (Hartmann, 1993, p. 5). She reported that “I really believe that everyone who attended the event came back with an increased sense of self worth, pride, and direction” (p. 6). The *March* created community for the students and became part of their gay rights heritage.

Hartmann arranged for a conference entitled “Redefining Leadership: Recognizing and Developing Our Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Community.” Included in this was a display of queer elected officials and a memorial honoring victims and survivors of anti-Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Violence (Hartmann, 1993, p. 7). In 1993, there was also, arranged by Sig, a workshop on understanding gay youth. She helped with Women’s Herstory Week, did a “Bi-Shy-Why” workshop, and helped with a multidisciplinary violence prevention course.

The more people have come out, the more counter-reaction there has been. The times that Hartmann was in the Center were times of increased ‘outness’ by the gay and lesbian community. Reactions against gays included the following scenario Hartmann described in her internship journal:

Hey did you know that today has been declared: “Heterosexual Coming Out Day?” Yes that’s right now all of the closeted heterosexuals who feel unsupported by this extremely homo/bisexist society can come out and feel proud. In addition, the College Republicans will give you a lollipop to suck on. Wow, now that’s progress. I was on my way to the A.L.O. this morning...when we came upon one of these signs put out by the College Republicans. By the time we arrived at the office employees of the Violence

Prevention Center, and the Women's Center, were on their way down to the first floor of the union. They had already reserved a table and were in the process of setting up a table right next to the College Republicans. Our table included buttons: Straight but not Narrow; GLBA, Silence=Death, National Coming Out Day (the real one) and several others. I was overjoyed with the response and support from the Violence Prevention Center and the Women's Center. ...It was heartening to hear some Republican people stop by the College Republicans table and tell them that they were ashamed with this display of bigotry, and the College Republicans using their platform to support hatred. (Hartmann, 1993 p. 8-9)

Hartmann negotiated a year of uncertain continued funding for the center. In the Southern Minnesota History Center is an amusing letter from her to the Vice President of Student Affairs, in which she and her colleague, Wendy Griswold, argued for the continued existence of the Center and concludes with an invitation to join the memorial for victims and survivors of violence against GLBT people. Their postscript reads: Your students are also welcome, and for a more lively celebration join us at the "Kiss-In" Wednesday, May 19, 1:00 on the Mall by the big fountain" (Hartman & Griswold, 1993, p. 2). She was adamant in support of the students she served, in spite of administrative ambivalence about the Center. Hartmann's tenure increased community, built heritage, and exhibited resistance in a big way!



*A National Benchmark*

1994 Deborah Batts becomes the first openly lesbian or gay U.S. federal judge.

1995 For the first time in its history, the United Nations considers lesbian and gay rights abuses at its International Tribunal on Human Rights Violations against Sexual Minorities, following testimony...the tribunal recommends that the U.N. document sexual orientation and gender identity issues around the world and integrate them into the organizations' human rights agenda. (*Completely Queer*, 1998, pp. 669-671)

*Kristina Wolff (1993-1995)*

Wolff started her annual report with a concise explanation of the role of the Center. She stated, "My primary purpose is to serve the b/l/t/g [bisexual, lesbian, and transgendered, gay] students on campus and to work on the elimination of homophobia and heterosexism at MSU" (Wolff, 1994, p. 2). In the interview she did in 2004, she said, "It also showed me how important it is that we have Centers like this, so people don't feel so isolated. Like it goes back to the initial reason why I think they wanted the Center, and that was just so people had a safe place to go because I don't care, we can educate ourselves to death but those students need a place to be, where they can just be with other gay kids" (Wolff, 2004, p. 23). Community is critical. As Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) noted, queer kids grow up uniquely alone. They must create a community in ways that other students do not.

The institutional support, Wolff thought, was token. "I was always reminded of the fact that I was there because the University was being nice to me and that the queer students should be happy that they have a little room that they can go sit in with a chair and a computer" (Wolff, 2004, p. 26).

She noted the number of visitors in her annual report for 1993-1994: 320, the number of phone calls, 198. The Center provided 68 panels, serving 1843 students. Wolff holds a PhD in sociology, a long term interest, and she wrote back in 1994, "Subtle homophobia is

difficult to identify. ...As lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, we live in an atmosphere where we are continually on guard, continually evaluating situations to determine if they are safe or not” (Wolff, 1994, p. 19).

Wolff includes descriptions of bias incidents, including one woman denied service in a store because of the clerk’s perception that she was a lesbian, a flyer bombardment that attacked queers, and a ‘happiness ministry’ that sent letters to queers on campus offering to ‘save’ them”(Wolff, 1994, pp. 20-21). There were obscene phone calls, car sabotage, and Center posters announcing events were defaced with “Death to All Sinners, Die Fags, etc.”

This is the start of several years that an individual or group calling themselves Zero Tolerance was active. The only known facts about them/him/her is that they were homophobic, knew how to make and copy posters, and knew how to make bomb threats on the phone. A bomb threat occurred at a session during University Development Day entitled “What Needs to Happen To Make This Campus more Queer Friendly” An article in the university newspaper described the scene: “Flyers around the room read: “Faggot Free Zone. No more lezbos, no more fags! Get your ugly ass off our campus now! This inspirational message of intolerance is brought to you by Zero Tolerance. Z.T.” (Murray, 1995, p. 1). The MSU administration was sympathetic. Joe Metro, Vice President for University Operations, said “I think this type of incident is troubling at an institution of higher learning where we hope for an open exchange of ideas and open dialogue” (Murray, 1995, p.1).

The student newspaper was sympathetic. The editorial read, “We’ve stated on numerous occasions our loathing for people who preach hate, and who believe their moral compass is somehow screwed tighter and with a little more elbow grease” (Extra! Extra!

1995, p. 4). When the Center was hit the year before with homophobic vandalism, student reporter Robb Murray wrote an opinion piece in the school paper, saying, “You know who you are, and you know what you did took about the brains and balls of a flea...Whoever did this, please, wake up. Random hatred is something we can do without” (Murray, 1994, p.5). Wolff experienced fear for her personal safety. “I would have at least one if not multiple hang ups on my home phone when I got home. So I knew people were following me ...The bomb threats, the Zero Tolerance, all of that developed as we increased our outreach in the Center. And so people would get scared and I’m like, well, that means that we’re doing our job well” (Wolff, 2004, pp. 11-12).

Wolff’s last extant document is for her final quarter, winter of 1995. During that quarter there were 320 visits. It was during Wolff’s tenure in the Center that an organizational shift occurred. The Center had been under the aegis of the Counseling Center since Chalgren’s time. When Jeanne Burkhart was working there, she had a counselor role in the Counseling Center as well as an educational role in the ALO. From the tenure of Scott Schroeder through Signe Hartmann, the Center was supervised by the Counseling Center, but wasn’t part of the Counseling Center. During Wolff’s tenure, the Center moved to being under the aegis of the Women’s Center. Wolff (2004) theorized “I think part of it was because we were trying to move it out of just being a counselor thing. It seems like a disorder. That something is wrong with you and that, and you know, I would argue a lot of times that they don’t even have somebody that can deal with these issues in the Counseling Center” (Wolff, 2004, p. 6). They also changed the name to reflect the reality. Wolff challenged the administration to change the name. She reported in her interview a conversation she had with Malcolm O’Sullivan, who was her boss and temporarily supervising the Center, “I

said, from here on out, I said, you just tell Dr. Healy, if we don't get the name changed [to the LGB Center instead of the ALO], we're just going to stop offering panels and when they ask why, then I will tell the instructors why. Because you are getting this free service on campus, you know I am working way too many hours while I am trying to get my degree, and if she doesn't want to change the name, that's fine. We just won't do the work anymore. And by the end of November, it [the name change] was approved" (p. 13).

Resistance, indeed. To actually articulate the target audience for the Center less than a decade ago was considered revolutionary. The change from 1978 until this time though *is* revolutionary. Having an office that students can identify as queer was a radical notion. Wolff said that part of the issue was solicitousness on the part of Malcolm O'Sullivan, her supervisor. "So we had a lot of talks about that but finally one day, he said, you know, this could be embarrassing or whatever. I'm like ..., we are the ones who wear the labels, we're the ones who are subject to this, you should allow us to name ourselves and have our Center be what we want it to be"(Wolff, 2004, p. 11).

The Center finally had its own significant budget and Wolff had access to a copy card for the Center (many former heads talked about the awfulness of having to beg, borrow, or pay for copying out of their own pockets) and \$300 for the Center, which was 300 percent more than they had ever had. In her interview, Wolff remembered how she came to the job:

When Hartmann announced she was leaving, the school was going to shut down the Office. And then we had this big meeting and stuff to argue for keeping the Office open, so I had completely forgotten that. Things were really heated during the meeting because MSU was considering not filling Sig's position for the rest of the year. ... Things got so heated that I actually yelled at President Rush. We were all really pissed off. After that meeting, I was sure that there was no way I'd get hired, that I would be seen like a hot

head – you know, some kind of really radically lesbian and that would look bad for MSU. ..but when I was interviewed for the job, you know, Don Craig came out and said, you know that this has to be a safe place for all people and that’s what connected the Counseling Center and all of this stuff and that this is not a political office. During the interview I actually (mostly) promised that I would not make it a ‘political’ office but did note that if successful, the office would take on a life of its own. ... It was clear during the interview that if I wanted the job, I could not make any waves. (Wolff, 2004, p. 4)

Wolff offered the panels. She trained the panelists and she took care of the panelists. She understood the pressures, and during her tenure in the Center, there were many incidents of violence and threats of violence which increased her solicitousness of the students who bravely did the panels. She said in the interview:

I changed the structure of the panels because the first semester that I did them, I was going through my notes and they were really hostile. You know, I was like, how do I; you know it’s up to me to protect my panelists, so I brought in; I made it standard practice that we have a straight person on the panel. I did a lot of things to coach the panelists and to be, to make sure that they were okay before we got into a tense situation. They knew if they started to get tense that I would just take over. I also made sure we had debriefings after each panel, that before and after each one, I checked in with all of the panelists to make sure they were doing ok. (Wolff, 2004, p. 5)

She did a lot of thinking about the panels, the benefits weighed next to the costs. She said in the interview:

A lot of the hostility depended on how the instructor set up the class. Some instructors did a really good job and other instructors; it was like walking into a lynch mob... I talked to her [black choreographer who remembered doing panels about being Black] about the panels and how, at that point in time, I was going to eliminate them because I thought it was too, it was too detrimental to our students, that we were like, freaks on parade, kind of thing. And then, I started to realize, it was a matter of how we controlled the conversation. (Wolff, 2004, pp 10-11)

Later in the interview, she went into some detail about how she would verbally try to guard the panelists:

I would say things like, you know, you need to know that we are coming out and that this is an okay thing. And if you are not comfortable with that, then I recommend that you leave or just listen because you know, we are not here, we are here to tell you our experiences and to tell you what we know. I can give you information on different topics and stuff like that. We are not going to debate the issue of whether or not homosexuality or bisexuality is right or wrong. (Wolff, 2004, p. 18).

The panelists were always free to leave. “They could quit at any time. They knew that I would do anything to help them. They actually became stronger, in themselves, because of it” (Wolff, 2004, p. 19).

In 1994, the first year of the service learners occurred. Wolff wrote, “The purpose of this program initially was to have students volunteer with ‘oppressed’ groups to build a better understanding of that particular group...Each volunteer read a book about coming out stories. They observed three panel presentations. They also wrote their own coming out stories and created a project that would help them and contribute to the center” (Wolff, 1995, p. 3). Wolff said the idea was started by Dr. Janet Lee, in Women’s Studies. She wanted “them to go to places where they were uncomfortable. So we had people, who can’t, don’t like gay people” (Wolff, 2004, p. 8). The service learners continue to be part of the Center. Typically, service learner students now are supposed to volunteer for 18 hours during the course of the semester.

Wolff talked about the role of the Center as a place of learning. “People were going in there to do research because we had this library and we had this collection of materials ... more people were coming in there saying, my brother is gay, what does this mean? You know, or my cousin or my daughter, you know, all of those things. But also people were like, I have to do a paper for so and so’s class, you know, they suggested that I come here first for the information” (Wolff, 2004, p. 7).

Like the other former directors, Wolff felt that she got a lot out of being the director, despite the threats of violence, the workload, the bad behaviors sometimes exhibited in panels.

But it definitely made me, because there is still a part of me that is always like, I feel like that wallflower, an outsider and then to be queer on top of it, I'm not as always strong about that. There is still a part of me that thinks that, not as if there is something wrong with me but yet you still have that kind of feeling and so it made me stronger in who I am, it made me a better speaker. It made me a better teacher. It really helped me to solidify who I am as a person. (Wolff, 2004, p. 20)

Wolff's tenure in office represents, in my mind, a shift, between a focus on the queer students to a focus on education for the general student body, which of course helps the queer students insomuch as it lessens homophobia. She said of the Center, "It was as strong as we could do outreach. It was as strong as we could keep people interested in us. So by virtue of the outreach that we were doing, a lot more people were coming up to us. Sometimes in panels, but also just in general, wanting information because we were the only place in the phonebook, in like the nine county area, but just more information about doing things or holding programs for high school kids or whatever, because there was nothing else. My interactions with people doing that, I realized that we really needed to get straight people involved in order to keep the Center viable" (Wolff, 2004, pp. 7-8) Creating resistance to the dominant culture, which at this time did call in bomb threats, did blanket the campus with homophobic brochures, which did react negatively to the panels, meant responding with outreach for Wolff! She created a community for the panelists, provided heritage for both queer students and their allies, by promoting the library as an educational source for anyone, and helped queer students survive what were truly frightening times.

*A National Benchmark*

1996 President Bill Clinton signs the Defense of Marriage Act, which bars same sex partners from receiving federal spousal benefits. (*Completely Queer*, 1998, p. 672)

*Christie Mase (circa 1995-1996)*

It never worked out that Mase was available for an interview. This is unfortunate in that she may have been the first to organize the Eliminate Hate Day in response to homophobic incidents sponsored by Zero Tolerance. This event was initially organized in conjunction with other campus groups after a bomb threat had been called in to a Gail Hand performance by Zero Tolerance. Hand did stand up comedy about being a lesbian. The Eliminate Hate Day idea was apparently generated at a meeting with many Student Affairs personnel present.

In any case, there is a report covering the winter and spring quarters of 1996 that sheds a little light on the time Mase was the director of the Center. There were 314 visitors winter quarter and 323 visitors spring quarter. The Center helped victims of four reported hate crimes winter quarter and seven spring quarter. Twenty students were service learners during that period. The service learners created bulletin boards, wrote letters, and helped with staff projects. The student group doubled its membership. This was a time when Zero Tolerance, referred to in the previous narrative, was really busy. There were four incidents of homophobic epithets on residential life doors, one anti-gay letter, homophobic stickers in the student union, flyers, Z.T. scrawled in chalk on the sidewalks, one death threat, homophobic posters found in residential life hallways, and chalkboards in classrooms scrawled with homophobic epithets (Mase, 1996). The bomb threat called into the



performance of Gail Hand warned that ‘there is zero tolerance for faggots on campus’

(Berg & Thomas, 1996, p. 1). As an editorial in the student paper stated,

There have been three bomb threats in the past year directed toward gay, lesbian and feminist groups at MSU. There have been Zero Tolerance posters and flyers left in virtually every building on campus over the past year or so, but they have all held one thing in common. They have all been anonymous. It’s hard to confront a faceless enemy. Just ask the people in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Center, Straights and Gays for Equality or the Alliance for Justice Groups. They’ll tell you how difficult it is to move rooms every time they want to have a speaker. This is not a national norm. In 35 appearances Hand has made on college campuses across the country, MSU is the first to treat her to threatening violence. (Faceless Enemies, 1996, p. 4)

Mase, not surprisingly, had a strong reaction to this threat of violence. She was quoted in the *Reporter* saying “It makes me feel unsafe. I’ve had nightmares since then and I can’t sleep. I feel like this is a place where I’m here to learn. It should be a place of tolerance.”

One aspect that upset Mase was the fact that when she was told the Gail Hand event had to moved, no one told her there was a bomb threat” (Miller, 1996, p. 1).

The first Eliminate Hate Day was organized in response to a meeting that Alliance for Justice Coordinator Genet Pierce summarized. In her memo she said that meeting participants had agreed to have an opinion piece in the *Mankato State University Reporter*, implement a better back up system, in the event of bomb threats, post incident reports, implement a safe sticker campaign, and organize an Eliminate Hate event for May 22, 1996. The University’s opinion piece was written by Dr. Margaret Healy (1996) in the student paper. She gives the university credit for the panels, writing “we provide training about discrimination, oppression, harassment and inclusion to many campus groups (e.g. community advisors in the residence halls, CSU staff, and IMPACT team). The intent of the training is to have the responsibility and the positions to make a difference in the

campus environment” (Healy, 1996, p. 5). It is ironic that she is giving university credit for something that was student-generated by the directors of the Center from a time before the existence of the Center. She also takes credit for administration support of the Center. “It is evidence of the university’s interest in providing support to our students” (Healy, 1996, May 1, p. 5). By 1996, there had been three internal documents (ALO Task Force Report, 1989; Gallagher Five Year Program Review in 1987; and a Final Report, 1982) that are extant that recommended full-time support for the Center and noted the hostile environment for queer students. None of those recommendations had been acted upon and the Center had almost been closed twice, one of them in the interval between Kristina Wolff and Christie Mase. Dr. Healy’s words were misleading and inaccurate.

The students, gauging from the letters to the editor in *The Mankato State University Reporter* and editorials, were disgusted by the cowardice of the Zero Tolerance folk. One letter to the editor from Chris McCarthy compared the courage of gays to the cowardice of Zero Tolerance. “I hereby challenge all members of Zero Tolerance, the gutless anti-gay group; to come out of the closet...The truth is that every member of that group shows zero courage, while every openly gay person on campus shows more courage than most people you will ever meet. I have never seen someone wearing a t-shirt or hate pin letting the rest of the campus know that they are a member of Zero Courage, or Zero Tolerance, as they call themselves” (McCarthy, 1996, p. 5).

The Eliminate Hate day was held in the Ballroom of the Centennial Student Union. There were tables of vendors and nonprofit groups, as well as a series of speakers on a single platform in a speak-out fashion. It was an all-day event. It emphasized education, dialogue, and community response. The goals were to help students draw connections

between systems of oppression, cultures of violence, and hate crimes. Also, it is to help students identify actions they can take to help end sexism, racism, and homophobia (Eliminate Hate brochure, 1996).

Mase held things together during this difficult time. Queer students and other panelists were frightened. Having the office then was especially important in terms of giving students a feeling there was a safe space they could where they could retreat and know that they were safe. The Center would have represented a place of survival quite literally when there were public threats and death wishes based on identity.

*Some National Benchmarks*

1997 Barney Frank, Representative from Massachusetts, openly gay member of Congress, takes to Gay Pride Celebration a statement from the President of the United States in which he “reaffirmed his commitment to fighting anti gay and lesbian prejudice“ (Frank, 2004, p. 722).

1998 The documentary *Out of the Past* comes out. The film explores Kelli Peterson’s history-making experience of forming a Gay Straight Alliance in her public school in Utah and the ensuing chaos, with legislators choosing to eliminate all student groups rather than have one gay student group.

*Kaaren Williamsen (1996-1998)*

During this period, the Center did about 18 panels per quarter, including those given to West High School students and one panel was delivered to a sorority group. There were 13 service student learners, on average, each quarter. The student group was averaging 10 to 15 students per week. Events included Coming Out Week, Eliminate Hate Day, Steven Capsuto, a speaker who presented on “Alternative Channels: Queer Images in Network TV 1950-1990. There were reading groups, SAGE (Student Group) dances, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Potlucks, Film Showings, including discussion of *It’s Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School*. The Center was under the supervision of the head of the Women’s Center.

Williamsen, in a memo entitled *Reconstructing the LGBC*, advocated for an independent office with a \$5,000 budget, one full-time person with one graduate assistant, two work-study students and one receptionist! Scrawled on the document in pencil are the numbers of queer students at MSU, using an estimate based on Kinsey’s landmark study of sexuality. If so, there would be as many as 1,500 queer students compared to what Williamsen guessed as 500 Athletes and 250 Greeks (Williamsen, circa 1997). Different directors have dreamed up different comparison groups, such as the multicultural offices, to

try to argue for more staff and more budgets. Clearly, Williamsen's hopeful restructuring plan was never implemented. Williamsen felt ambivalent about institutional support for the office. In the interview, she stated,

I think as long as we were not rocking the boat too much, we were okay. There was a funny thing about hate crimes, in that; it fueled our existence when they happened. We depended on reports of harassment. We depended on having people who were victimized regularly. I think that is where the problem with having the Grad student thing is, you know, there was just no, there was no consistency and there is no real institutional commitment one way or the other. Like I mean, there was the appearance of an Office, the appearance of support but it was you know, I remember leaving and thinking the best thing that I could do is close the Center. (laughter) It was so tokenized and it was, I was so burnt out. We're just killing people and its too much work for a half-time Grad Assistant with a closet of an office. (Williamsen, 2004, p. 21)

The office existed as a safe space for students. Furniture was rearranged to make it more comfortable. A number of volunteers helped in the office, so Williamsen learned about being a volunteer coordinator. In the guide book she produced in leaving the Center, she wrote about the volunteers, "They each just wanted to give back to the community by working in the center. Each volunteer has a different reason for being there, and a lot of coordination is involved making sure each volunteer gets what they want out of their involvement in the office" (Williamson, 1998, p. 9). The Center, Williamsen said, was about the students keeping alive and sane. "Survival is first and foremost. One, keeping yourself safe and second, you know, figuring out how to deal with the hostility around you and to not let it impact your own, sort of, self image. To have a positive self and a safe space in the midst of all of the hostility" (Williamsen, 2004, p. 26). She knew that a lot of students had no contact with their families," they been kicked out by their families" (Williamsen, 2004, p. 25-26). Williamsen is the only one of the former directors who went

into this field as a Student Affairs Professional afterwards, and she had this to say about the role of the Center as a whole:

Just having some sort of gathering space and I really, just having the office open was one of those things. ...I think the sense of isolation is huge. Part of you know, coming out models and queer identity development includes getting to know other queer folks. I think it is a key part of learning to not hate yourself is when you meet other queer folks and you say, oh, they're okay. Then you sort of are tricked into thinking that if they're okay and I don't have to hate them because they are gay, I should really maybe rethink how I feel about myself. So, I think it is part of identity development to get to know other queer folks: I think its part of, I want to say retention. Because a student is going to have a better experience if they feel included, if they feel recognized and if they feel that they have some sort of meaningful connection to other people at the place. (Williamsen, 2004, p. 23)

Williamsen initiated training for the panelists from *Out Front Minnesota*, a gay lobbying and educational organization, and Scott Schroeder, who had been director before. She created an evaluation sheet, ground rules, and defined better what the panels were about and how they should operate.

When asked about the atmosphere of MSU for queer students, Williamsen was succinct. "I think it was a really blatant and you know it was definitely a place where it was okay to be homophobic" (Williamsen, 2004, p. 5). She talked about how many of the queer students she was helping had been rejected by their parents. They would rely utterly on their new romantic interest and then when they broke up, the cycle would start again. "Emotionally their girlfriend at the time or their boyfriend at the time became their family. And when they broke up then they lost their family again. So it was just, it was a bad cycle where really the base level was survival, and it was hard to get out of that loop." (p. 27).

The Center was not directed by a philosophy or a mission to help these students, though:

It was all guided by tradition and what other people asked of us. It wasn't us sitting down to say, what should the office do? It was a Grad Assistant coming in every year or two years and saying, oh, people are calling us for panels. I guess we have to do that. People are sending us Service Learning students; I guess we better do that. Oh, there was a hate crime, I guess we better do some sort of program about that. And then, Eliminate Hate day was an annual thing and so we were really guided by tradition. And sort of annual events or programs that we were supposed to do. But there wasn't a point, really in my tenure where we sat down and said, do we want to be doing this? Should we be doing this? Is this what our mission is? It was really more of what had we been doing and what are people going to be expecting us to keep doing. Honestly, I feel like at the time, the mission of the office was way more about educating straight people. Supporting queer folks was sort of a byproduct of, oh; you had some camaraderie by doing that panel together, great. Accidental support and I think that really formed my own thinking in my future work and here. I got to Carleton and said, you know what, there is a real disconnect here because a lot of these offices, I think started by, we have to educate this heterosexist population and that will make it better for queer kids. But when you put all of your energy into that, you are not really supporting queer kids. (Williamsen, 2004, pp. 5-6)

Williamsen (1998) talked about the panels at length. In her manual for incoming directors, she wrote "Panels are really hard. Or I should say they were really hard for me. Each one simultaneously invigorated and exhausted me. In the beginning I was so traumatized by these, I had to go home and recover after each one" (p. 10). The levels of preparation were uneven. "Sometimes they would just bring us in and not tell the class" (Williamsen, 2004, p. 9). The impact for the students, "putting a face to a label, I think it was probably the biggest thing. And I think how to sort of, modeling how open people were and how okay people were with themselves, I think it's just, when you are confronted with something, you are going to, and your stereotypes are going to be, sort of squashed" (Williamsen, 2004, p. 11). She urged the new GLBC head to take control:

It takes time to get used to the job, but you will make it! Just remember that you are in charge. You can always answer only the questions you want to, and there are plenty of ways of only talking about what you are comfortable with. The introduction to the panel is crucial. In it you are setting the stage

for dialogue. I found it important to be open, honest, and confident. I also used ground rules to help create a context for respectful dialogue. (Williamsen, 1998, p. 10)

Williamsen created a template for the panels, which included introducing the Center, talking about its role and function, outlining ground rules for discussion, and articulating that the panelists are volunteers. .

Williamsen had many service learners over her two-year tenure. In her quarterly reports, she almost always commented that they were excellent, that the students were excited about their new knowledge. She had to turn away at least 15 students who were interested in doing service learning in the Center (Williamsen, Spring, 1997, p.2). About the service learners, Williamsen (2004) had this to say:

It was definitely a pain in the ass. But, it was really effective. In the end, I found it really educational, for me. And for them. I really felt like, wow, you don't really get to meet with one homophobic person on an ongoing basis about their homophobia. Exactly. I would never really have them interact with queer folks because, besides me, because I didn't want to put the queer kids in that place. I felt like they were coming to me for support not to again, educate the homophobic populous. But most of the time I sent them through, sort of, anti-homophobia boot camp. You know, I had them watch a series of different films. I had them read a bunch of coming out stories. I sent them to the video store to check out a queer film. To the bookstore to get a book, with gay in the title. Just so they could feel it. And then I would be brief with them, after each of those sorts of things. You know, the conversations were really amazing and productive. The journals were pretty amazing. You know, some of them probably made up stuff but at least it felt like there was some genuine learning going on. (p. 14)

Williamsen did a staggering amount of programming during her tenure in the Center. She held discussion groups every week, attended the meetings of the student group, put on a workshop on homophobia for the Women's Center, invited a speaker, Steven Capsuto, to talk on the theme of "Alternative Channels: Queer Images in Network TV 1950-1990,



hosted a concert, arranged dances, screened films, made picnics happen, and invited Erica Ellsworth to speak on sodomy laws.

In terms of the personal impact of the job, Williamsen remembered it being...“Stressful. I do remember being advised not to have my home phone number or my address published anywhere” (Williamsen, 2004, p. 16). She came out of the job with the idea that she wanted it to be a Center director for a living.

I learned that it was a profession. I didn't come into the job knowing that it was one more people are coming out of Student Affairs and sort of a minority of people are coming from other atmospheres, academia or community organizing kinds of things. But that has changed but it is still in process, but I think I learned that I wanted to do it as a profession and I wanted to be trained to do it as a profession. Which is why, as soon as I left Mankato, I went to the University of Minnesota for my Counseling and Student Personnel degree (Williamsen, 2004, p.29).

Williamsen is full of ideas on how to make the position work for the queer students. She said she would vision a gadfly role, making other service areas on campus responsible to their gay student constituency. “Making sure that other offices are also following up and doing outreach. The Counseling Center doing specific outreach to GLBT students Res Life really doing training for their own staff about GLBT stuff and homophobia” (Williamsen, 2004, p. 31).

*A National Benchmark*

1998. Matthew Shepard, 21, was bludgeoned with the butt of a gun, burned, tied to a wooden fence, and left for dead outside the city of Laramie, Wyo. (Good Shepard, 1998, p. 13)

*Sidney Smith (1998 – 1999)*

Smith came to MSU due to its reputation as a Women's Studies program with an activist focus. After a number of changes of positions in the Women's Center, where Smith initially was placed, she became the LGBC director about mid-semester of 1998. The Center served a range of students, she said, "For the most part, we had people coming in that were either struggling with their own sexuality and issues around that or you know, wanted to learn more because somebody else around them came out" (Smith, 2004, p. 9). During her sojourn in the office, there was this functionality, the safe space, the panels, Coming Out Day, Eliminate Hate, and a candlelight vigil after Matt Shepard died. "We had people come in and people actually called us that week, I was running around like crazy, you know we were talking to churches; we were talking to community leaders. We had so many people come in and like talk" (p.10).

This was a rocky couple of years for the Center. There were a couple of changes in personnel in the Women's Center, which supervised the Center, and well as a number of power struggles with a male who had been hired and then fired in the Center and who was also part of the students group. In addition, the administration "as a whole was very homophobic and there was a lot of internalized homophobia. Certain members of the administration would come into the office, look at books or whatever, and I knew that they were 'family.' But would then end up saying these horrible things about the LGBC and

how you know, we need to, like they were basically trying to work behind the scenes to almost shut us down” (Smith, 2004, p. 12).

Some students sent a letter addressed to Dr. Margaret Healy, copied to all the administrators, offering a sarcastic look at the staffing issue. Students have always understood the need for full time staffing. “The center cannot possibly get a director for the LGBC because it is your job to eliminate director positions, not create them” (Johnson letter, 1999, p. 2). Dr. Margaret Healy, Vice President for Student Affairs during this period, sent a letter in response, saying that “Any consideration of a position in the LGBC Center would be made in the context of university needs” (Healy, 1999). And in fact, after Smith, the Center was closed for a semester. The students who penned the missive to Dr. Healy contemplated using groups like the ACLU, SAGE, OutFront to agitate for a real Center with serious staffing and services. Then they graduated and moved on.

The panelists offering the panels as a result of general turmoil during this period were fewer, sometimes only two or three panel members. The format was an introduction of the Center, talking about some ground rules, “You know, there were certain things that we weren’t going to discuss. That it wasn’t really important to talk about, I mean, not important, but we weren’t there to talk about religion and morality” (Smith, 2004, p. 6). It’s clear that the panelists, by this time, were talking to a more receptive audience.

Actually, for the most part, everybody was really interested and welcoming to the information and there really weren’t that many people that were hostile and, but I also, I think it was the nature of how I ran the panels as well, because I tried to keep it you know, that we’re not here to make everybody uncomfortable. .. This is information and I definitely used and I was also very strict on, not necessarily like censoring people, but making sure that when we said stuff we weren’t talking about things that were inappropriate for a panel. (Smith, 2004, p. 19)

Smith reported that students requested the panels during her tenure. “They would end up coming to us. It was usually a group of three people and they would come to us and it would be like, we are supposed to pick a group that we really didn’t feel very at ease with and so we would like you to come and talk to our class” (Smith, 2004, p. 7). It was important to take the panels on the road.

What really spoke to me were the classroom panels and the moments for education and I just really felt at home doing that and I tried to expand as much as possible, the outreach that we were doing and the classroom panels and the churches, we were going all over. (Smith, 2004, p. 19)

Her experience, like Williamsen’s, was that helping the student service learners was really valuable. In the end, she said, friends would recommend the experience to others, saying that it was “just an amazing experience” (Smith, 2004, p. 8). She was amused, a little, by how frightened they would be to approach the office initially.

They would kind of circle the office, and you would see them walk by like three or four times and then finally, I would come out and pretend like I’m, fixing the shelf with the magazines (laughter). Then they would finally come in they would be scared to touch anything or look me in the eye that was what I really felt comfortable doing. I feel like I’m the kind of person that can make people feel at ease in those situations. (Smith, 2004, p. 8)

When Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered, Smith organized an event called a day of mourning and awakening. Shepard was ‘pistol-whipped and left tied to a post in near freezing weather’ (LGBC Plans Candlelight, 1998, p. 1). Smith arranged for a table in the Centennial Student Union where students could stop by and sign cards to be sent to Shepard’s family, friends, and the students at the University of Wyoming. The administration, in response to a request from Smith, flew the Rainbow Flag at half-mast. The Rainbow Flag is an emblem of the Gay Community. Emails flew on the *campus announcements*, such as the one on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October: “Why is there a rainbow flag? I

really do not think that it is appropriate. Can I get the administration to allow me to raise a Jolly Roger flag or maybe even a MN Vikings flag? I highly doubt it” (Campus Announcements 1998). Another communication on the campus announcements was: “the flying of the Lesbian/Gay flag below that of Old Glory is totally inappropriate and against the law. There is a time and place for everything. The time and place for flying political, sexual, and ethnic symbols is not on state property or underneath old glory. (Campus Announcements, 1998)

One of the issues that percolated for years was the transgender issue. Kim Luedtke back in 1989 was helping transgendered people. Smith, like a lot of others before her, tried to tackle this issue in terms of adding a "T" for transgender to the name of the Center.

But when we approached them to have the "T" added, add transgender to our name, then it was like, well, we are not equipped to do that kind of counseling. Well, we're not equipped to do counseling for lesbian, gay, bisexual people either, so it was just kind of odd, you would get lots of mixed signals with them and I think, I guess I think it was window dressing. You know, oh well we have this so you have no reason to complain. (Smith, 2004, p. 19)

One of the issues this history does not explore is the impact of having mostly women in the position. Smith felt pressure to have more male-centered programming. Smith had this to say about the issue:

I was getting a lot of pressure telling me that I needed to have more gay-friendly, like gay boy-friendly programming, because, we tend in Mankato it tends to be very white bread and I felt like it really needed to be more multi-cultural and more inclusive and really to reach out in that direction because we just tend to pretend we're all country folk people out here and they are all white and middle-class and that's just not the case. (Smith, 2004, p. 15)

Smith also brought to campus for the second year for Eliminate Hate Daphne Scholinski, the author of *The Last Time I Wore a Dress*. “It was very powerful and that was probably

the highest turn-out I ever had” (Smith, 2004, p. 16). Scholinski talked about her experiences being incarcerated for ‘gender disorder’ in Minnesota and when she escaped, she came through Mankato, which she discussed in her book. “She lives in San Francisco now but it ended up being three hours and there were over 200 people there and nobody even made a sound” (Smith, 2004, p.16).

For Smith, as with the other former directors, this time was a hugely important milestone in her life. “And it was so hard for me to let go because that’s the first time that I really felt connected to who I was. I really felt like this is what I want to do. This is who I want to be and I just felt so free. You know, here I was coming from Texas, where I felt so oh, I couldn’t breathe. It changed my life. And to tell you the God honest truth, it was very, very difficult for me to let go” (Smith, 2004, p. 16).

I actually learned at that point, how much it means to truly love and accept yourself for who you are and when you do that, you can shine that onto other people and how that changes other people’s lives as well. Because I have an extreme comfort that I’d never felt in who I was and with everything, not just my sexuality. People picked up on it and people really reacted to it and that is the biggest lesson that I’ve learned and that I’ve taken away from that. (Smith, 2004, p. 17)

Smith did a great job of creating community during a difficult time for the Center as well as nationally. She described some very difficult personnel issues that were happening during her tenure. Schisms between groups and individuals were difficult to bridge. In addition, the death of Matt Shepard was very difficult for gay people everywhere to confront. Smith’s day of mourning and awakening was a brilliant response to a great tragedy felt both by the gay community and the larger community. It has the hallmarks of a politics of resistance and survival in the face of a clearly homophobic culture.

*Some National Benchmarks*

2000 The Supreme Court ruled five to four to overturn a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling that had found the Boy Scouts of America in violation of a state anti-discrimination law for excluding a gay Scout leader (Downey, 2000, p.22).

2001 A former high school student in Visalia, California, says he was removed from his school after being tormented by his Spanish teacher and fellow students because of his sexual orientation filed a federal lawsuit against the school district January 24. Among the many indignities the 19-year-old George Loomis said he faced in school: a teacher who looked at him and said, "Only two kinds of men wear earrings, pirates and faggots, and there isn't any water around here" (MacIntosh, 2001, p. 17).

*Stacy Harbaugh (2000-2001)*

Ironically, Harbaugh organized previous directors' records for the MSU Archives but she herself left no annual reports, or they didn't survive. She was good at sending out press releases, so this account of her sojourn in the Center is largely dependent on news accounts and her interview. "It was probably back in 1995 when I was an undergrad, somehow through Women's Studies or whatnot, there was some kind of a light bulb that went off in my head and I really thought gay and lesbian rights were like the last frontier of civil rights in this country" (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 2). She said that the role articulated to her was "just to keep the Center open and provide referrals for students that come in and need help with, like coming out support groups or counseling or if they need to know where to go in town to get a special kind of service"(Harbaugh, 2004, p. 5). She, like the other former directors, thought the Center's very existence was critical for students. "They could also meet up with each other and hang out and see each other's faces there. That was incredibly important" (p. 12). The Center had been technically closed and inactive for an entire semester (p. 5) She felt that "the administration was feeling frustrated because the students were frustrated ...I don't know if they knew how to properly support the Center" (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 7).

Eventually, “with a little bit of student pressure, at the end of that first year, student government approved, I think a \$2,000 line item for the LGBC, which was a radical thing” (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 7).

Harbaugh started the position after the Center had been closed for a semester and the student group had taken responsibility for the panels. Therefore, “they were either resistant to training or didn't want to do the training at all” (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 8). She did think the panels were important; it was just hard grasping them from the control of the gay student group. The teachers were critical, she thought.

So once you start building a good rapport with them, then other teachers will call you to bring in. Your Women's Studies classes, other Psychology classes, there's some Philosophy classes that will have you come in and that's how it starts growing. Then, teachers will tell each other. Really, the teachers told the other teachers, if you want an easy and very, very effective way of teaching about sexuality development, you can give your students whatever chapters you want but to have these people come in on a panel, it was very effective, because then the students get their questions answered honestly and truthfully and that kind of thing. (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 8).

She liked offering the service learning, although she would probably agree with Kristina Wolff that it was a ‘pain in the ass.’”

I had to teach them, you know, this is what coming out means, this is the Gay 101 stuff. It was that educational role that was crucial and I would totally not have changed that at all. I think that trying to make that more of an established part of the Center, making the Center known for that. Come to us if you need educational stuff about GLBT. That was crucial and I wouldn't have changed that at all. That was wonderful (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 13).

The Safe Zone, which Kristina Wolff had initiated, and the legacy of the Eliminate Hate series were two of the programming activities for the Center during Harbaugh's sojourn. “The Safe Zone program was huge. That was very important to have at our school and Safe Zone was basically the idea that we would have a training that was geared toward



teachers, administrators, staff to get them to understand gay and lesbian and transgender issues” (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 9). Harbaugh is very committed to unlearning racism and helping people understand the multifaceted nature of oppression. So, during Eliminate Hate, she brought in Vernon Wall. “He talked about racism and homophobia, how they are connected. He was also talking about transgender issues and he was talking about how we deal with homophobia, how we deal with racism in the gay community, the inter-relatedness of oppression and that was, that was a really radical thing to be talking about” (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 10). She also brought in someone popular with the college-age crowd, Danny Roberts, who spoke on popular and queer culture. "He was huge because Danny was someone who was very easily identifiable by anybody. You know, everybody knows what MTV is and everybody knows what the Real World is so he was easily identifiable... There were, I don't know, a couple thousand people that came to see that" (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 10).

Harbaugh talked about the importance of cultural understanding in her interview.

We had African American students come in and they would talk about how they would have a hard time balancing being black and being gay. That, you know, they were tokens in the gay community and if they went to their African American friends that they wouldn't understand the gay thing and so we had to talk about that. We had a young man who was from Pakistan and he had relatives and friends from back home that were at the school and he lived in fear of being out because it had a direct connection to the very conservative Muslim religion from back home. I mean, there were issues that we had to deal with on a daily basis as far as cultural, racial conflicts with gay and lesbian issues. (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 11)

The job had a huge impact on her, and she makes activism her professional calling now. She was good at it, sending out dozens of press releases, doing an open house, and recognizing her predecessors in a number of ways. She organized all the extant records of

the LGBT and got them to the archives, so that they could be used by scholars today. She celebrated Chalgren by organizing students to march in the Twin Cities Gay Parade when Chalgren was honorary, and posthumously awarded, Grand Marshall. She arranged for students to walk with a banner with his face emblazoned on it with Mankato in big letters.

One of the things she learned in the job is that you can't help everyone. "The other thing too, I think, had to do with frustration that I couldn't fix everybody. You know, I saw so many kids that really needed support and I could only be there part-time and I guess that's the frustration that every, you know, like a social worker or a counselor or anyone in that kind of a role, may face but you know, I wanted to have everybody come out and be happy" (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 13).

Harbaugh was an energetic organizer and helped create the heritage that is the history of the Center. Over the years, someone had been piling documents in a big box. Harbaugh one summer organized those documents chronologically and it is largely due to her labors that the history of the Center is preserved. The heritage that MSU queer students can explore is largely due to her work.

*A National Benchmark*

2003 The majority based the decision on the equal protection and due process provisions of the Massachusetts constitution, saying they guarantee the right for same-sex couples to marry. The ban against gay marriage, like the earlier ban on interracial marriage, is rooted in prejudice, Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall wrote for the court. "The Massachusetts Constitution affirms the dignity and equality of all individuals," Marshall wrote. "It forbids the creation of second-class citizens." (Burge, 2003 November 19, p. A1)

*Jess Giordani (2002-2003)*

No annual reports have surfaced from Giordani's tenure. Not many articles were written about the Center during her sojourn there, so much of the information about this time is from her interview. The office was a place where students came to hang out, a resource center, a place for the service learners, and of course, the place where panels were organized.

Giordani valued having boundaries. She talked about the best advice she could give anyone coming into the office was to "really think about it and establish their boundaries. Figure out what kind of space they need to work in to keep themselves a healthy, functional person so that they're able to make positive impacts on the community and the campus as a whole" (Giordani, 2004, p. 16).

While she was happy that the Center was a safe space for students to be, she also remained mindful of her separate role as a student. She thought about her relationship to the students who made use of the Center as a resource person:

I'm here to be a resource for you. I'm here to be you know, your kind of, administrative voice so when you need to talk to someone and they are not talking to you, maybe I can ask you and hopefully make some headway and yeah. I'm here. I've got a library for you, I've got places, I've got physical space for you to be in, and you know, I want us to have a working relationship. I think we can do really good things this year. And at the end of my first year at school, my participation in SAGE had waned. I was really busy with my academics and I didn't move halfway across the country

to, be part of the student group. I came out here to go to school (Giordani, 2004, pp. 12-13).

Giordani articulated the need for the center for the students, to have a space to both celebrate and commiserate:

They need to you know, there have been a number of students who have come and they don't want to talk about which professor it was or which class it was but things like professors don't think... You know, slips of homophobic comments that come out in their lectures or just their over-heterosexism modeling where they are constantly talking about my wife and my family and this is, you know, kind of making this something to aspire to. Like that's your ultimate goal, and for these kids that are in the developmental stages of their identity, it makes them uncomfortable and feel inadequate and they need more positive modeling from faculty. (Giordani, 2004, pp. 17)

The students she dealt with, she felt, needed all kinds of support, not just the support because they were queer. Where previous directors talked about the issues the students were dealing with being primarily coming out to parents and friends, finding queer friends, and working on their relationships, Giordani talked about more general concerns:

I think that there is, on MSU's campus, and I know this is indicative of young, queer people as a whole; there are a lot of substance abuse problems. Like, kids are drunk, they're depressed, they're students, they're stressed out and I think that they drink too much, I think that's detrimental to them in a lot of ways because, you're dealing with emotional things and you can't, you know, work that stuff out if you know, if you're drinking to anesthetize the situation and you know, you are putting yourself in a high risk situations. I think that they need to feel they are supported more by the professors. (Giordani, 2004, p. 17)

The administration, in her opinion, relied on the transitory nature of the Graduate Assistants in the office to placate and then vacate:

I'm a grad student and I want this and this is important and this needs to change and they say, okay, okay, okay, we'll get to that. A year or two years later and boom, you're gone. It's the reason that the grad students can't unionize on this campus, because we don't have any PhD programs. You are

there for masters, you're in, and you're out of the door (Giordani, 2004, p. 19).

Giordani's understanding of the panels was that it was too often a rote kind of exercise for the students and teachers. She's passionate about teaching, so she was a little dismayed at the attitudes she encountered sometimes.

It was mostly students organizing the panels, for their classes and they needed to organize them for their classes because they did diversity training, in these classes and it was okay, we're learning about gay people this week. So, I need to do a presentation on gay people and I need to have a panel come in and talk to my class about the gays. It was I'm doing a presentation, it's two hours long, I need you to come in and be an hour of it. We beg you to come in and talk to the class. We want you to answer their questions. So that was what organizing them was like. (Giordani, 2004, p. 2)

Her learning experience in the Center was both negative and positive. She felt like one of the things she did in the Center was hone her own instincts for the student in trouble.

And to trust their gut. If a situation doesn't seem right, it's probably not right. That means a whole lot of different things. Whether you're dealing with a situation with a student and you just don't feel right and they're saying that they are fine but you think you need to tell the Counseling Center about this kid. (Giordani, 2004, p. 16)

Giordani learned about herself as a member of a community and a teacher, offering the panels and being part of the Center.

I think I learned how happy it makes me to be a part of the community and to feel like I can play an active role in the community and not just participate in things that are going on but have leadership roles and have those things work out and be successful and feel like I am making a difference to people. That's something that's really rewarding for me. That's why I enjoy teaching. You can have a room of 30 people and half of them might not even be paying attention to what you are saying but you can see those two or three light bulbs going off in the room. (Giordani, 2004, p. 15)

She saw her role as being campus gadfly. She felt that the campus service points should be a little more aware of the needs of gay students, giving Health Services as one example.

Especially with queer kids because people who are just trying to figure out their identity you know, are dealing with a whole set of sexual issues that a lot of people just don't even think about. You know health services. I'm like on Lori's list as not a good person because I battled with her about dental dams and why are you making condoms completely accessible to students in the dorms but you're not providing free dams. (Giordani, 2004, p. 18)

She organized many events around Eliminate Hate. She was quoted in the student paper, "It is an opportunity for the campus community to come together to talk about a range of issues that don't come up in classes... For as much as we see our campus as a multicultural diverse environment, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done" (as cited in Dow, 2003 April 3, p. 1). There was a reading of *The Laramie Project*, which is a dramatization of the life and death of Matt Shepard, a talk by Chris Hedges cosponsored by the Center, a general queer panel, as well as other events. Another programming event was Queer Week. A transgender librarian came to talk about the transition from man to woman. "Debra Davis explained the difficulties and surprises in her transition, from a biologically born male to female, as well as the personal struggle and inner growth she went through. She finally felt OK after "coming out" as a woman and being able to live honestly as herself" (Dollens, 2002, p. 5). Transgender was not yet in the title of the Center in 2002, but it was an issue that had been percolating for a while.

During her tenure in office, Giordani witnessed Rhys Gaffer, the Student Body President, coming out as transgender. "Gaffer has never hidden the fact that he's transsexual. He has participated in panels via the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Center and spoken to classes on the subject. But he doesn't announce it to everyone he comes in contact with, he said, just as a heterosexual doesn't announce his or her sexual orientation" (Olson, 2003, p. 1). Transgender was added to the LGBC in the fall of 2002.

The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center is the current name of the Center. Adding the “T” was important to students. A class project done in 1999 was submitted as part of the LGBC’s records. It’s entitled *Project LGBC* and describes their action plan (which didn’t work out at that point) for adding the “T” for transgender to the Center’s name. Harbaugh, who immediately preceded Giordani, said, “But the other thing that was really huge was just the issue of the transgender stuff. Walking into the Center, we were a gay, lesbian, bisexual Center, and there was no “T” in our title. There was a very clear message that was given to me by various administrators that we were not ready to do the transgender issues. They were not ready to deal with the “T” so I was forced to not mention transgender stuff in print, in newspaper articles or anything” (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 11). Including transgender in the title was an idea that had been under consideration, at least by those in the Center, for more than a decade. The collective pressure of many voices over many years finally resulted in the addition of the “T.”

Giordani helped provide the continuity of having a Center for the queer students. The sanctuary provided helped students form community. The panels helped them form a politics of resistance and survival in what was still, in 2002-2003, experienced as a hostile environment.

*A National Benchmark*

*2003 In 2003 one gay man stood resolutely at the center of the contentious battle to shift religion away from hatred and exclusion and toward love and equality. V. Gene Robinson--elected bishop in June by the Episcopalians of New Hampshire confirmed at the church's national convention in August, and consecrated November 2--has handled the resulting anger from conservative Christians with poise and eloquence. For his grace under the pressure of a worldwide debate and for his steadfast focus on his mission to open God's church to all people on the margins, Bishop Robinson is The Advocate's Person of the Year. (Steele, 2003, p. 34)*

*Jess Crary (2003-2004)*

Crary left behind beautifully crafted reports, which allowed for an accurate account of her sojourn in the Center. The mission as stated in her annual report: The GLBT serves the entire campus community and strives to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn, work, and grow in a supportive and safe environment (Crary, 2004a). The report lists the annual events: National Coming Out Week, 190 students served with films, an open house, panels on how to be an ally, and a dance, World AIDS Day, 12 students served (with free screenings), Eliminate Hate, 700 students served. The panels went into 50 classes, serving about 1000 students (Crary, 2004a).

Crary felt that the graduate assistant position, changing over every year or two, was detrimental to the overall success of the Center: "That person changes every year so I mean, the continuity is another issue, but its, its almost structured to fail. It's almost structured to not be successful" (Crary, 2004b, p. 32). The students are the ones who suffer. "It just, yeah, I don't know. It feels I think if the queer students knew and realized how little support is really available, they'd be so disappointed and they would leave the school. I just, I don't think they know how much, I just feel that there is a lot of bullshit going on. They expect so little" (Crary, 2004b, p. 43).



At the same time, she stressed the importance, for the students, of the very presence of the Center:

It's a level of comfort and safety in a safe haven. And it's a symbol too, of, our University is, at least, is committed to this community, we're going to create the safe space for these students.... I mean, those spaces are important for kids who might otherwise feel unsafe or alienated or what have you. It's just a guarantee that they can always find their friends and they can always find a comfortable place to be. So, I had, I remember another, one time a student came in and his professor came out in his class and he was just, so excited about that and so happy. (Crary, 2004b, p. 9)

Crary and I worked in 2003-2004 in making the panels more meaningful by interviewing various faculty who requested the panels and by training the panelists, giving them articles with statistics about the realities for queer young people, etc.

The panelists are just students, anyone who is interested in being on the panels can be on the panels. *If* they go through training. The pluses are the satisfaction of, educating, you know, and just debunking myths and you know, answering student questions and supporting students, you know, being, knowing that there's probably queer kids in that class that aren't out or they are out or they're happy to see queer people up in front of them or people that have queer friends and want to support their queer friends, who are asking questions, how can I be a better ally? I mean, that just feels really good. I mean, that's the most interaction that we have is, at the Center, I mean that education piece, is that's, that's the most direct interaction that we have with students, so, it's really important that way. (Crary, 2004b, p. 27)

Crary wrote about the difficulties of offering the panels in her annual report. The panelists "have different levels of understanding of heterosexism and homophobia, so while some are extraordinary at speaking on these issues, others are not" (Crary, 2004a, p. 10). One might assume that students by 2003 would have had some understanding and even empathy with queer students, and therefore that the panel presentations would be easier. It is clear, though, that students in the classes listening to panels are still in an elementary place in terms of understanding the impact of homophobia. In Chapter Five,

comments from student papers after the panels will be shared that demonstrate some student unease with gay students.

Crary supervised 15 student service learners in 2003-2004. They were required to volunteer a minimum of 18 hours. After some negative experiences the first semester, Crary made the students take more responsibility for their work.

This semester I was more, you need to figure out a project, you need to figure out something that you can work independently on, because I don't have the resources to oversee you. That's worked very well. Being up front and saying you need to find something on your own, we'll work together on it to get it started, and I will be available if you have questions as you go but you need to work independently, in the Center. (Crary, 2004b, p. 19)

In her Year-end Report, Crary wrote the challenges of the service learning project included the energy and time to create and oversee projects. "Also, keeping students accountable is difficult. One would expect young adults to live up to their responsibilities, but this is not always the case. In other words, some students require a great deal of attention and follow up" (Crary, 2004a, p. 11).

Responding the question of what she got out of being the director:

I, there's a part of me that's really sad that those students don't get what they need... Because I have students come in with me, coming to me with serious issues. That I am not qualified to help with nor do I have the energy to help with. And so, I struggle with that because I want to be able to help these students and at the same time, they drain the life out of me... So it's hard to balance that. I mean, that's not necessarily something that I'm learning about, it's not just about having dances. It's about eating disorders and depression and custody issues with parents and it's just those calls that I get from the community that are serious. I got a call from a transitioning M to F and she's, I need support, I'm, is there a community down here? I have to, and that's not even the role of what I'm supposed to be doing, so I could say, I'm sorry, that's not what my job is. That's okay for me to say, but, I'm not going to say that... it's just, there's someone who is, connected in the community and trained in counseling and there's, I can list you all of the qualifications of the person that needs to, you know, that they need to have to have this, the person who has this job, ought to have. And that person is

out there, it's just a matter of, you know, getting the resources to pay them. You know? But it just college kids have issues and it's stressful and yada, yada, yada. But it's really sad, it makes me really sad. That I can't make these kids better (Crary, 2004b, pp. 38-40).

Crary was very successful at doing programming that brought students in. The *Laramie Project* Reading brought in a good audience. Tim Wise spoke during Eliminate Hate about white privilege, which had a full audience in Ostrander Auditorium. Altogether the events of Eliminate Hate included the above events, along with panels on strategies to combat hate, ongoing showings of the Laramie Project (the movie), *Shadows of Hate*, film and discussion afterwards, and a Disability Awareness and Advocacy Group Speak Out, as well as a dance. Altogether there were 700 students who took part in these events.

The finale for the year was a series of events that ended well. A proposal was taken forward to get student funding for a full time staff person in the office. "Another heavily debated issue was the request made by LGBT Center for \$50,905 dollars to fund a full-time program coordinator. Crary was quoted as saying, "Hate crimes against LGBT have increased. Nobody's fighting it right now. Nobody." (Seibel, 2004, para. 12). While the Student Allocations Committee had approved student funding for the position, it was thought, really, to be the responsibility of the University to pay for it. Dr. Davenport, President of the University, "announced the approval of funding for only a half-time position" (Murray, 2004, p. B1). There was a sit-in of dozens of people in response. Crary asked me to be one of the four who would speak to Dr. Davenport on behalf of the Center. We had a conversation where we advocated for the Center from different perspectives and in the end, in a letter dated May 5, 2004, President Davenport directed Vice President for Student Affairs Diane Solinger to "proceed with hiring a full-time position in the Lesbian,

Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Center” (Davenport letter, 2004, p. 1). Crary and the queer student population had succeeded, finally, in 2004, in getting what the queer students had needed since the Center was started in 1978. She and the community succeeding in securing a full-time person in the position. Davenport had a very generous comment at the end of his letter:

Please convey to the students how much I appreciated the thoroughness of their research, and their willingness to speak openly to me. The research they provided was very valuable to me in reaching this decision. I also want to commend them for the organization of the sit-in and for following the established University process for scheduling such events. (Davenport letter, 2004, p. 1)

The academic year of 2003-2004 was the last year that the Center was staffed with an overworked, underpaid graduate assistant. One of the objectives of having a fulltime Center director was to create continuity. During the years between 1978 and 2004, each Director started with a rough idea of what the previous director had done. They did not often benefit from the lessons learned by the previous director. It was both an opportunity to be free of the shackles of the past and a tremendous burden to come up with a philosophy, goals, and means to accomplish them every one or two years.

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## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS

In this section, I would like to bring together thematically some of the issues treated earlier chronologically. Echoing the introduction, this chapter uses the ideas of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) about the needs of young gay people who grow up uniquely alone and need to find for themselves “fragments of a community, a usable heritage, a politics of survival or resistance” ( p. 54). That phrase helps shape the meaning I have found in this history of the Center. Particularly, I would like to bring together the impressions of the former directors of the following issues: administration support of the center and campus climate for queer students, the panels, service learning, and the role of religion. The panels, because they have been the major commitment of the Center, will be discussed both by bringing together the impressions of the former directors and through examination of reaction papers submitted after panels in Education classes during the fall Semester of 2003. Another aspect of the Center worthy of reflection is the service-learning experience offered by the Center, looked at through the impressions of the directors and some reaction papers of service learners that Jess Crary included in LGBT Center records given to MSU Archives. What the former directors learned about themselves through being the Center director is presented. Finally, a brief examination of the role of religion in queer students’ experience and straight students’ homophobia will be offered.

*Administration and Campus Climate Issues*

One theme that emerged from the narratives of the former directors include what seems to have been an almost conscious strategy by the Administration of the University to have a relatively weak Center. Even a report written in 1989 noted the issue:

The University concern with the needs of gay and lesbian students is admirable and appropriate. The services provided by ALO have been significant in aiding students. Lack of clear mission, lack of delineation of services, appropriately trained personnel and limited funding has been a major handicap for ALO. The focus of all gay/lesbian services upon an understaffed, underfunded, entity which operated on the fringes of the formal services provides students an 'illusion' of the university's meeting the needs of gay/lesbian students. In fact, services to those students were often due to the personal sacrifices of ALO staff (ALO Task Force, 1989, p. 11).

The Center thereby simultaneously signaled the purported commitment to queer students while failing to support them. In reality, by staffing it with transient, powerless Graduate Assistants the university was assured of a weak Center, one absent at any decision-making table, absent in budgeting rounds, and one lacking any clout to press for support of queer students from other Student Affairs offices on campus. Most former directors alluded to this issue. Giordani (2004) said it was easy to get verbal agreement on something, but the administration would just wait the term out. She said she could say to her boss, "I'm a grad student and I want this and this is important and this needs to change and they say, okay, okay, okay, we'll get to that. A year or two years later and boom, you're gone" (p. 19). Luedtke (2004) said "They thought that we didn't have very many gay and lesbian people and even if we had, big deal, what kind of services do they need and it was sort of like that. Why should they have special services?" (p. 18). Wolff (2004) said, "It was just really frustrating because I was continually reminded that the Center was there by the mercy of the powers that be" (p.7). Williamsen (2004) said, "I mean, there was the

appearance of an office, the appearance of support but it was you know, I remember leaving and thinking the best thing that I could do is close the Center. (Laughter) That's how I felt at the end of my two years. It was so tokenized" (p. 21). The fact that the Center was there at all was helpful to the students, but the administration was not, from the perspective of the former directors, supportive of the Center. This would not be important except that every former director described the campus climate as homophobic. National data, internal studies and anecdotal local data clearly supported the need for the Center, but the administration didn't support it, I suspect because they did not understand the burdens of being a queer college student in a homophobic environment.

This brings into relief, then, the importance that Chalgren played. Not only did his courageous championing of the rights of queers make a difference during some of the most difficult times for queer people in our country, his role in starting the Center is the reason that it existed all these years. There were many attempts to let the Center quietly go unstaffed. The students often had to agitate for the continued existence of the Center. This was successful. If Chalgren hadn't started it up in 1978, however, it would have perhaps been impossible for students to agitate for the *start-up* of a Center.

Despite the lack of administration support, the very existence of the Center has been critical, in the eyes of the former directors, for the queer students. The Center provided community and a means of survival and resistance. Kaaren Williamsen, now the Director of a similar Center at Carleton College, said,

I think the sense of isolation is huge. Part of you know, coming out models and queer identity development includes getting to know other queer folks. I think it is a key part of learning to not hate yourself is when you meet other queer folks and you say, oh, they're okay. Then you sort of are tricked into thinking that if they're okay and I don't have to hate them because they

are gay, I should really maybe rethink how I feel about myself. So, I think it is part of identity development to get to know other queer folks (Williamsen, 2004, p. 24).

“Validation, absolutely. It gives some degree of validation even no matter how screwed up the format was or whether the commitment was really there or not, is that there was an Office that was listed and it used the words, lesbian, gay, bisexual and eventually transgender” (Williamsen, 2004, p. 26). Hartmann (2004) talked about it from the importance of counteracting the negative, “The hatred about people loving each other, it was just really dark for me.” (Hartmann, 2004, p. 12). Dr. Kristina Wolff (2004), reflected back on the purpose of the Center, “ [It] was just so people had a safe place to go because I don’t care, we can educate ourselves to death but those students need a place to be, where they can just be with other gay kids” (Wolff, 2004, p. 23).

Jess Crary (2004) said, “I think if the queer students knew and realized how little support is really available, they’d be so disappointed and they would leave the school” (Crary, 2004, p. 42). The Center, no matter how understaffed, underfunded, and unempowered, gave students a certain sense that their safety and student success is important. An email survey of gay student group members (SAGE) in 2004 elicited the following comment from a student who identified as GLBT, “I am very happy that it’s there, its a nice place to just go and hang out and be who we are without worrying if someone is going to hear us and start bashing us or even worse. It’s also a wonderful place to get information that I would not otherwise have access to!” (Clink, 2004a). Another email sent said, “I hope I never see the day the GLBTC is not there. Without it many will fall through the cracks or



just become another statistic on campus violence towards the GLBT community.

We need to have the GLBTC or we will go back to being Invisable (sic) and that is no way to live” (Clink, 2004a)

The underlying issue here safety. Homophobia has at its root the word for fear...phobia. It is clear that many queer students at MSU have felt unsafe and continue to feel somewhat unsafe because of societal reactions to their sexual identity. The Center has given queer students a safe space, as Williamsen (2004) put it: “Survival is first and foremost. One, keeping yourself safe and second, you know, figuring out how to deal with the hostility around you and to not let it impact your own self image. To have a positive self and a safe space in the midst of all of the hostility” (p. 26). Crary said, “I mean, it’s just and it’s a symbol too, of our University is, at least, is committed to this community, we’re going to create the safe space for these students” (Crary, 2004, p. 9). A recent article in the *CQ Researcher* reported the following:

The 14-campus survey by the Task Force found that a majority of gay and lesbian students responding had concealed their sexual orientation within the previous year to “avoid intimidation.” Slightly over one-third said they had avoided disclosing their orientation to a teacher or administrator for fear of negative consequences. More than one-third of the GLBT undergraduates and 29 percent of all respondents said they had been harassed because of their sexual orientation. Derogatory remarks or verbal harassment were most common, but the survey found 10 reported instances of physical assaults against GLBT students on campus and 11 other threats of physical violence. (Jost, 2004, para.34)

The threat of violence, violence itself, the fear of violence, the rejection or fear of rejection are part and parcel of the college student’s experience. The Center is a place to form community that gives queer students an empathic support group, a place to resist the hatred, so that they may thrive in college. Schroeder’s narrative

is consonant with the research about queer student persistence. He said, “coming back to Mankato State to finish my undergraduate and I think really, the length of time that it took to finish my undergraduate really speaks to the kind of emotional, developmental kind of stuff that I was going through as a gay person coming out and trying to find my place in society” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 7). Homophobia has a price paid by queer students.

The Center’s existence was never fully supported with staff or budget between 1978 and 2004. Despite that, it seems clear that in the minds of the directors it played a positive role in providing a safe space in a campus climate perceived to be unsafe by queer students. That safe space was provided through the generosity of the former directors. They gave of their time, their energies, and their empathy. They sacrificed to some degree their privacy and their safety. Their contributions are enormous.

*Panels: Impact on Panelists, Questioning students, and the Audience*

*Panelists.* The panels had an impact, both positive and negative; on the panelists in the minds of the former directors. Kaaren Williamsen (2004) said, “I think they learned a lot about themselves, their own identities, they definitely learned about each other” (p. 8). She said, I think individually, there was a lot of development, in terms of your own identity. I think people had to think about how they thought about their lives and what kind of choices they were making and who they were out to and who they weren't out to” (p. 10). Wolff had a protective note in her voice when she talked about the panels, “it’s up to me to protect my panelists... They knew if they started to get tense that I would just take over. I also made sure we had debriefings after each panel, that before and after each one, I checked in with all of the panelists to make sure they were doing ok” (Wolff, 2004, p. 5).

Schroeder thought that “the act of telling your story is very powerful” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 25). The power of telling the story means that every time a panelist tells his or her story, they make meaning of their stories. Offering the panels encompasses all of the often mentioned ideas of Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993). The panels create a usable heritage as queer students understand their history so they can articulate it. The panels form a sense of community by the students as they come to understand each others’ stories. A sense of survival and resistance are formed as students understand that they can tell these stories and actually garner empathic responses. They galvanize the students into resisting the power of homophobia.

The directors both arranged and performed in the panels constantly. This took its toll. Williamsen talked about the importance of prepping before and debriefing afterwards. “I think at the beginning I wasn’t ready to emotionally handle all of those eyes on me. At the beginning, I would have to go home and just lie down for 4 or 5 hours after a panel because it was so emotional and draining” (Williamsen, 2004, p. 10). Luedtke said she had to fight some anger. “There was a point where I had just got so, like I did it so much, that like people would ask like, inflaming questions and I would just get mad....And I had to kind of really work with that for awhile....That you would get to a point where you just would want to shake people and go, why don’t you understand this? (laughter) Like I’ve explained this 4,000 times, why don’t you get it?” (Luedtke, 2004, p. 6). The directors did the panels constantly, confronted strong emotions, positive and negative. They all knew that there would occasionally be what Burkhart called “these like, five or six, asshole men in the back. Who were like ‘What do you do for sex?’ ” (Burkhart, 2004, pp. 16-17). There were also the people who came into the Center later and were grateful for the panels and the

connection it had made for them to the Center. Good or bad, the emotions stirred up by the panels were strong and exhausting for the directors. They sacrificed emotional energy to make them happen.

*Questioning students.* Another impact of the panels was the impact for students who were questioning their sexual identity. Coming out is a long road for most. "Sometimes people, who felt all alone, found their way to us and even eventually became panelists themselves" (Luedtke, 2004, p. 22). Schroeder noted warning panel members, "You don't know if the question or comment is coming from someone who is struggling with coming out issues on their own, all by themselves or if it's a basic fundamental social conservative background...and the real key was to not shut out that person in the audience and they were always there, that was in the coming out process" (Schroeder, 2004, p. 5). Hartmann said students realized during the course of a panel, a person questioning their sexuality might think "that it was fine to meet somebody who said they were [gay] and then realizing that they act fairly normal, you know? That is, whatever normal is" (Laughter) (Hartmann, 2004, p. 8). Questioning students would see 'normal' queer students and understand that there was life after coming out...that it was possible not only to be gay and happy, but actually telling the hard stories about being gay and being okay with it. Most importantly, questioning students found out about the Center through the panels.

*Audience.* Students who listen to the coming out stories of the panelists are changed by the experience, especially if they are prepared for it beforehand with articles and discussion. Hartmann said, "People could see that we were not like green aliens kind of thing. I felt that was a big part of the panel and the whole presence of panel discussions was for people to take away some of the fear for people" (Hartmann, 2004, p. 8). While many

of the classes that panels present at are not adequately prepared, or as Hartmann put it, “I did feel like they were definitely you know, the queers on display for the most part” (Hartmann, 2004, p. 9), they still seem like they make a difference. Research shows that personal knowledge of an individual who is GLBT reduces homophobia and that is what the panels did. Finlay and Walther (2003) reported in their study,

Other than religion, the strongest predictor of attitude toward homosexuality and GLB persons were the measures of number and types of interpersonal contact. This still is a powerful explanation of variation in diverse types of prejudice. Those who have more contact with GLB persons and contact of a closer nature are forced to question their assumptions about the ‘immorality’ of GLB persons, for example. ... On the other hand, it is very difficult, sometimes even dangerous, for a young person to ‘come out’ to their friends and family. (Finlay & Walther, 2003, p. 388)

The panels have been examined to understand their impact. Scott Schroeder did his alternative plan paper on the panels and outlined some of the positive impacts:

They provide a unique opportunity for volunteers to converse with a large number of their peers; they supplement book learning with the experience of live human beings who discuss current issues and first hand life experience; they facilitate a richer discussion than most instructors are able to initiate by themselves, more than either other single activity they serve as an outreach program to the campus community at large because presenters to go before peers and the public declaring who they are and where they can be found as a resource when needed; and each individual presentation, because it tells the story of a real life, imparts upon the audience a greater understanding and compassion about GLBT issues (Schroeder, 1998, pp. 16-17).

During the fall of 2003, reaction papers from the panels were gathered from a number of Elementary and Early Childhood Education classes on campus. There were 24 reaction papers altogether. Some common threads included that most students were from small towns; this was often their first exposure to anyone gay to the best of their knowledge; and they *changed their minds*. While there is probably some element of students writing what

they think their teachers want to hear, their papers do reflect some soul-searching. Empathy took them there, but it wasn't easy. One student wrote, "I also felt uneasy at times. I think I felt this way because I view things differently than then (sic) these people and still have a hard time fully understanding this topic and diversity group." One objected to queers' inability to "reproduce naturally." One student mentioned the experience of feeling uneasy and wrote "One thing I am trying to do now is to limit, and eventually eliminate, hurtful words." Interestingly, the language issue was a common theme in the response papers. Most students wrote something similar to this one, "I am going to try my hardest to not use words like: gay, fag, queer, lesbo, and dyke. I catch myself saying that's so gay, and I know that is wrong and hurtful." Another paper along these lines bemoaned their insensitivity. "Often, my friends say things like 'that's so gay,' or 'you're a faggot.' They do not mean anything harsh by saying these phrases; it is just the way they talk. After hearing this presentation, I realized that many gays and lesbians take offense to these types of phrases" (Clink, 2003). One student reported having been hit on several times by gay guys, so "My experience with homosexuals has never been good until the sexual orientation session in our class...I have changed my thinking on several aspects of sexual orientation. I used to be so against homosexuals for many reasons, one being my religious beliefs. My faith is deep and I still don't agree with their life style, but there is no reason that I can't be tolerant." (Clink, 2003). One student wrote "The presentation took a lot of my negative thoughts and feelings and turned them into positive thoughts and feelings" (Clink, 2003). "Now that I know more information about different sexual orientation, I know (sic) I can't judge anybody...I deeply admire people of a different sexual orientation

because they are a minority and they have to deal with being different every single day of their lives” (Clink, 2003).

The panels make a difference for the panelists, for students questioning their sexuality, and for the audience that hears the stories. The panelists become more comfortable with their story in the retelling of it. They reduce their own sense of isolation both by hearing other panelists’ stories and sharing their story with others. Questioning people benefit hugely, as they see modeled before them people comfortable with who they are. They are not alone and there is a resource for them on campus. The audience members see people before them who happen to be queer. They understand how human they are, how unremarkable they are, how *like* them they are.

#### *Service Learners*

Service Learning students are asked to rank their comfort with eight societal groups experiencing oppression in U.S. culture: age, ability, gender, having knowledge about the group, and/or being comfortable in their presence. Students place themselves in a community agency that serves that population. "Students consistently report that Service-Learning is one of the most effective ways in which they have addressed their own discrimination and oppression” (Bussler, 2004, p. 6). Most of the former directors had both positive and negative feelings about the service learning component. “There were many students, there were many classes that would say, students, go and find a community that you are not very comfortable with and go and volunteer for them. So we would have all of these kids coming in to the Center who were uncomfortable with gay and lesbian and transgender issues and want to volunteer for me. (laughter) So, I had to teach them, you know, this is what coming out means; this is the Gay 101 stuff. It was that educational role

that was crucial and I would totally not have changed that at all” (Harbaugh, 2004, p. 13).

Kristina Wolff was refreshingly blunt:

It was definitely a pain in the ass but, it was really effective: In the end, I found it really educational, for me... And for them. I really felt like, wow, you don't really get to meet with one homophobic person on an ongoing basis... There was sort of limit that I was supposed to adhere to. But after a term or two, I just realized that, you know, this is really effective. I want to get as many people in here as possible. One thing I did not do was that I, most of the time, would not have the service learning students volunteer in the Office... I would never really have them interact with queer folks because, besides me, because I didn't want to put the queer kids in that place. I felt like they were coming to me for support not to again, educate the homophobic populous But most of the time I sent them through, sort of, anti-homophobia boot camp. You know, I had them watch a series of different films. I had them read a bunch of coming out stories. I sent them to the video store to check out a queer film. (Wolff, 2004, p. 14)

Jess Crary donated some reaction papers to the archives. They are from Elementary and Early Childhood classes. Some of them seem a little patronizing. “I was willing to watch movies, read books, and try to better understand the queer community... I was gentle and careful when I talked to individuals who were queers” (Service Learning RAPs, n.d.). This same student wrote “As a teacher I will be expected to be inclusive of everyone, because of service-learning I now know how to be more inclusive with queers. I have learned, although I do not agree with a queer lifestyle, it is my job to still treat them with respect” (Service Learning RAP, n.d.). One student talked of being ‘scared’ and feeling pleased to know that they had taken ‘responsibility’ for understanding this group. The student talked about what a ‘huge shock’ it was to know that “gay people are out in society living regular lives, just like I am” (Service Learning RAP). One interesting paper was from a religious person. She talks about conversations shared with her husband about the topic and how she has a ‘feeling of confusion and discomfort,’ but since she believes ‘love



is from God,' that she needs to love them (queers) as God has loved her. It is a little frightening that these people, who spent up to 18 hours with this project, learned less, seemingly, than the students who just witnessed a panel. The service learning is worthy of a full scale research project to look at their effectiveness.

### *Impact on Directors*

For most of the former directors, the job has had a lasting impact on their lives. For Jeanne Burkhart, it was a huge learning experience, "I would not be who I am or be where I am today if I hadn't done that...and it was, I think, a lesson in both the humanity of most people and the inhumanity of some people. You know, I found out that there are really, really some basically evil people out there who are just mean... But that at some level, most people are you know, they want to understand, they want to, and they certainly don't want to hurt us" (Burkhart, 2004, p. 32). For Schroeder, "Really the high point of my life. In terms of an educational activity, a social involvement activity, and then I've spent the rest of my time since then, trying to recapture some of that spark and trying to maintain that same attitude of being open and meeting people one on one in life wherever I was at the time" (Schroeder, 2004, p. 9). Luedtke reported, "I think it was that every person is valuable, whoever they are, whatever they are like...Just that, people together can does like amazing things, like just coming together in a group, how powerful that is. And, just that sense of community, how empowering and satisfying that is. And also that you can do really hard work and have fun in the middle of it" (Luedtke, 2004, p. 17). Sidney Smith said, "I actually learned at that point, how much it means to truly love and accept yourself for who you are and when you do that, you can shine that onto other people and how that changes other people's lives as well." (Smith, 2004, pp. 17-18). Kaaren Williamsen

“learned that it was a profession. I didn't come into the job knowing that it was one. But I finished, thinking you know what? There are specific skills involved with this”

(Williamsen, 2004, p. 28). She went on to get a degree in College Student Personnel and is now doing the same job professionally at Carleton College.

It is heartening that the directors had life-affirming experiences. I think it was heady stuff to be head of the Queer Center on campus. I also know that these students sacrificed time from school, time from a social life, time from fitness pursuits, to do this job. Most experienced fear as a direct result of being in the position. There were unpublished phone numbers and cars keyed and people followed after panels. The former directors sacrificed their privacy. They sacrificed, on some levels, freedom of association, since being the director put some limitations on the people they could date. While it was a positive experience for them, and while there is no question that both queer students and the general student body benefited by having the Center open, it is unconscionable that the administration failed to support the Center better. Had the administration acted on any of the recommendations from internal studies and had a fulltime person in the Center, that person would have not only served the queer students with more continuity, more budget, and more authority, they perhaps could have directed the Center while still continuing to take care of themselves, in ways that an underpaid, overworked graduate assistant could not.

### *The Role of Religion*

It was interesting how frequently many of the former directors brought up the issue of religion, and much of the early programming that Chalgren arranged was around the issue of religion. Many students in their reactions to the panels or conversations with the Center

staff mentioned the role of religion. Luedtke (2004) said, “I think some of it was religion, you know? They would come out and the parents would hit them with religion, that’s against their religion and God thinks that’s bad” (p. 15). Williamsen thought that the church was responsible for a lot of angst for students:

That was a huge part of, of people struggles. Whether it was the service learning students trying to figure out how not to be homophobic when their community, their families, and their churches sort of mandated that they were, I remember that coming up a lot in the service learning pieces. How do I rectify what I have been taught all these years with what I am thinking might be okay now? And for the queer kids, I really, mostly saw, I think, most of the time people just left. And didn't look back. And so it was sort of one of those things that you give up when you come out, that's what I saw on a more regular basis. Hey you are queer then you are not religious, you have to be pagan or something. (Williamsen, 2005, p. 28)

Hartmann had experiences with religion in the panels: “the one thing that I remember being the most difficult was when people started quoting the Bible and that kind of thing. They obviously had really strong beliefs about that. I mean, we had literature and interesting quotes to rebut that” (Hartmann, 2004, p. 12). Wolff actually avoided talking about religion, “I would tell them that we want to avoid religious discussion too because of how that can be really personal for people and sometimes hurtful and that is not really what it is about” (Wolff, 2004, p. 18). An article published in 2003 found “Religious attendance and membership in certain Christian groups are also strongly associated with increased homophobic attitudes” (Finlay & Walther, 2003, p. 388). Religion, especially in Minnesota, where more than 60 percent are church-goers, is a big issue. Williamsen, whose family has many pastors in it, wrote:

A word on religion. The directors before me generally stated something like they would not talk about religion. I decided against this. First of all I think it tends to turn people off—and it also gives the impression that we are trying to hide from religion. I felt comfortable talking about it – from my

own experience. I would never ‘debate’ Bible verses etc...with people; there is never any winning there. I would talk about my own experience in the church, and my family – half of whom are pastors! No one can argue with your own story” (Williamsen, 1998, pp. 10-11).

All of the former directors understood the role of rejection based on religion as one of the harder stumbling blocks for queer students coming out. Clearly, as long as students are from religious families, the Center could usefully do programming around this topic.

### *Conclusion*

Robert E. Lee wrote, “The truth is this: The march of Providence is so slow and our desires so impatient; the work of progress so immense and our means of aiding it so feeble; the life of humanity is so long, that of the individual so brief, that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave and are thus discouraged. It is history that teaches us to hope” (Lee, 1870, p. 255). When I came out as a lesbian in college in 1977, I would never have anticipated that there would be a serious, if fractious, national discussion about gay marriage that is going on now. The times, they are a changing, and for the good. The last quarter century has meant huge changes for gays—from a time when there were virtually no media consciousness of queers to a time when queer issues are almost daily in the news. It is not long ago that queers would meet only in secret, when coming out meant almost certainly losing your job and family. In our consumer culture, the fact that queers are a market segment is as telling as anything else about how far we have come. As horrific are the hate crimes such as that perpetrated against Matt Shepard, they are a symptom of the relative freedom queers feel in being out. It is my contention that when all queers are out, homophobia will be reduced, because people will understand that queers are the teachers they respect, the pastors who help them worship, the cops who keep their streets safe, and

all the other people in the world who are part of the fabric of their lives. When I go to Pride in the Twin Cities and see all the church groups and school groups and police groups, I just want to celebrate! When I came out in 1978, very few of those people would have felt safe being out in that way. All of the former directors participated in facilitating the kinds of incremental changes that allowed students either to participate in or benefit from an ongoing gay rights movement. What Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) described as the queer person's struggle to create community, to learn their heritage, and to create means of resistance and survival have all been facilitated by the Center. The Center has acted as a place where people could find their heritage and strategize their activism, to create a world where they don't lose their innate communities of family of origin, church family, and peer group when they come out. It has been a place where they could overcome the self-loathing that can happen in the face of a culture that says 'you can't get married,' 'you're not a family,' 'you can't be a member of my church,' 'you can't be a member of this family.' The overworked, underpaid former directors facilitated the panels which at the very least hold up a mirror to students' homophobia so they can take a look at the image. They arranged for the programming that affirmed gay students. They allowed homophobic service learners into their Center and into their hearts. Mostly, though, they kept open the one place on campus where queer students could feel safe.

## CHAPTER VI

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research about queer students and queer centers is relatively new. Some of the areas that would prove useful, perhaps, would include any of the projects described below.

Locally, Chalgren's life would prove interesting territory as it encompasses and embodies the gay rights struggle. Studying the needs of students on this campus could include looking into their experiences with some of the Student Affairs offices on campus. Does the Counseling Center have anyone trained in coming out issues? Does the Health Services do queer safe-sex educational sessions? It would be interesting to see how many queer students see their lives reflected in their courses. Do the family sociology classes have positive images of queer families? Do the history courses cover queer civil rights? Do marketing classes talk about this targetable segment? Graduate students could delve into these issues for a long time without exhausting them.

I wish I had done a literature review on story telling in addition to the literature about student affairs. Scott Schroeder talked about the power of telling the stories, and that aspect would be a rich source of exploration. Story telling throughout time has helped give people a community, a heritage, and a means of resistance and survival. I think that studying the panels by talking to the panelists about the meaning-making that happens in telling one's stories again and again would be hugely fruitful.

The role of the AIDS epidemic in terms of galvanizing queer activism and campus responses to queer students during the beginning, particularly, of the epidemic would prove fascinating. I was living in the Twin Cities when the epidemic started. There was a presentation at Northrop Auditorium, which is divided into three sections. The speaker

asked one section to stand up. “This many of you will be dead within 5 years,” the speaker said. The speaker asked the middle section to stand up. “This many will be dead within 10 years.” There was serious fear of concentration camps for AIDS victims. The national response was not prompt or enthusiastic because, in the minds of many, the folks dying were queer. Who cared? The AIDS epidemic thrust a lot of gays and lesbians into activist roles that they otherwise would not have envisioned for themselves.

The role of religion is interesting. How do church communities react when one of their parishioners come out? How do queer students cope when they potentially lose their church community? How does religion impact students’ reactions to queer college students? The Pride parade in Minneapolis always has dozens of churches participating. I don’t understand how people who have church affiliations negotiate an institutional stance and a personal community. I am fascinated by this and this will be my next endeavor. With Kaaren Williamsen, I will be talking to students at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota and students at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota about their experiences and then triangulate that data with interviews with pastors in their hometowns and the official stances of their churches on the issue of homosexuality. The students at the two colleges are largely Lutheran and from small towns.

The refugee question is interesting. Do Somali/Sudanese/Hmong/ refugees coming to Minnesota find out its ‘okay’ to be queer in this culture and come out? If so, how does their culture-of-origin cope with that? It would be very interesting to survey the Queer Center directors around the country and see what research they are working on and why. What issues are they confronting? How much support do they get from their fellow Student Affairs professionals? How much of their positions are spent combating homophobia and

how much is spent supporting their queer students? That was an issue that most of the former directors discussed.

The position of LGBT director is new, and it will be exciting to see how the position evolves and how it fits with other Student Affairs professionals. Gender matters. Will the trend become having a gay man and a lesbian in each office, since the issues they deal with are different? How do these offices evolve most successfully? Should students agitate for them? Or is it more effective, overall, to have faculty or other staff on campus lobby for a Center? Who has the most clout? What about religious schools? Should queer students just not go to them? If they go, is the school with a religious prohibition against gays obligated to provide services to them? What is the role of the LGBT director in lobbying for inclusion of the issues in the classroom? What is the most effective way of accomplishing this?

Understanding the queer student is a moving target. There really is no 'queer student' Everyone is an individual, yet queer kids have in common the homophobia they experience because of that one characteristic about themselves. Students coming out now are different than those coming out 10 years ago, or 20 years ago. Centers for queer students will have to continue to explore what students need to succeed in college despite the additional burdens posed on them by a homophobic culture. For those numerically minded, it would be useful for someone to try to get a realistic handle on homophobia, through measuring attitudes at an institution, perhaps, through the years. Most of the former directors talked about their sense that homophobia is morphing, not dissipating. Someone with some deep sociological understanding should attempt to define and measure homophobia, both in order that it can be more deeply comprehended and so that measures can be taken to lessen the sting.



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