“It’s just my one little act of protest I’m still doing”: How LGBTQ+ undergraduates experienced losing their culture centers

by

Margaret R Borders

B.A., University of North Texas, 2010

M.A., Kansas State University, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Abstract

This phenomenological study explored how undergraduates who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or other sexual and gender identities (LGBTQ+) experienced the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. As legislation opposed to initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was passed at the state level, many public, four-year institutions of higher education chose to either close their center or merge it with other culture centers and create a general student belonging center. The LGBTQ+ undergraduates who had become accustomed to visiting these centers, conversing with their staff, and using their resources tailored to this population were left without the services and community they had relied upon. This study focused on understanding how these students experienced the losses. Six LGBTQ+ undergraduate students who had visited their LGBTQ+ culture center at least four times a semester before it closed were interviewed. I used phenomenological methods to conduct two interview sessions with each participant to understand their previous place attachment to the centers, their emotional responses to the loss, and their active responses to the losses. Findings demonstrated that the participants had developed a strong sense of place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers and they had a combination of emotional and active responses to its closure. Though participants expressed feelings of anxiety and worry about the past, present, and future in their institutions, they also explained the diverse ways in which they protested against the closure decisions. Understanding how this population experienced the loss of their relied-upon resource will help student affairs professionals better support LGBTQ+ undergraduates during times of anti-DEI legislation. Comprehending how the disruption of place attachment has affected these students academically and personally is necessary to help them persist and earn bachelor's degrees at their institutions.

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Major Professor
Dr. Lisa Rubin

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Dedication

Harvey Milk's "Hope Speech" resonated with me while I wrote this dissertation, especially the ending:

> And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a better place to come to if the pressures at home are too great. Hope that all will be all right...Without hope, the us's give up. I know that you cannot live on hope alone, but without it, life is not worth living. And you, and you, and you have got to give them hope.

Experiencing disruption of place attachment is traumatic and even more so when that is coupled with the loss of rights and protections. The institutions that complied with anti-DEI legislation and removed culture centers and related resources took away the hope so many students had that they belonged at their universities.

This dissertation is dedicated to those individuals who gave the us's hope. It is dedicated to the staff and faculty at these institutions who worked tirelessly, undercover, and sometimes off the record to maintain support and resources for their LGBTQ+ students while also maintaining positive and confident attitudes so no one would know their worries. It is dedicated to the students who fought their administrations and governments to reclaim what was wrongly taken from them, often with little to no success and at the cost of their grades and health.

Chapter 1: Introduction

When I conducted my first pilot study on students' decisions of where to spend free time on campus, one of my participants ("Dev") said, about his identities:

> . . . All of the identities you have, like, affect your viewpoint of the world. . . the things you choose to do that day, the things you choose not to do that day, how you prioritize things, how you manage your time,. . . and who you relate to.

Dev identified as a person from a historically marginalized ethnic/racial background, and this identity influenced how he acted on campus, whether in class or in extracurricular activities. He and other participants from similar backgrounds were always aware that they looked different from their White peers, and this understanding significantly affected his behavior in the college environment.

This view was reaffirmed by other studies, where minority-identified students reported feeling like they struggled to connect with majority-identified peers (Aguilar-Hernández et al., 2021; Andrade, 2018; Patton, 2006b; Saia, 2019). Many of these students have found a safe place in culture centers, also referred to as identity, cultural, and/or affinity centers, which have been a part of U.S. institutions of higher education since the 1960s (Dilley, 2002; Patton, 2006b, 2010a; J. M. Self, 2015). Effective culture centers provide a place for historically marginalized populations to find community with peers with similar identities, connect with staff who often share those identities, and a venue where they can be themselves without worrying about what majority-identified students might interpret or judge about their behavior. By providing a place where students can act authentically and celebrate their identities, universities increase the likelihood that these undergraduate students will succeed academically and earn their bachelor's degrees (Camputaro, 2018).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) undergraduate students are some of the many students who have benefited from institutionally supported culture centers, yet recent federal guidance and state legislation have significantly impacted the presence of these centers on college campuses (Bazarsky et al., 2023; Bondi, 2025; Boos, 2024; Bryant & Appleby,

2025; Cliburn, 2024; Goodman et al., 2025; Hanna & Lieb, 2024; Knox, 2023; Phan, 2025; Ramirez et al., 2026; A. Wood, 2026; S. Wood, 2025). Beginning in 2022, higher education researchers began tracking state legislation that many institutions would later interpret as a requirement to close culture centers and end other programming tailored for specific historically marginalized populations (Bryant & Appleby, 2025; Cliburn, 2024; Rupertus, 2025; Spitalniak, 2025; The LGBTQ+ Bar, 2026). The reelection of Donald Trump as President in 2025 came with executive orders condemning diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and transgender, genderqueer, and non-binary identities (The LGBTQ+ Bar, 2026). While these executive orders were not laws and were challenged in courts, their publications were used to continue efforts that hoped to end services tailored for LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. The closing of LGBTQ+ and other identity-based culture centers left LGBTQ+ undergraduate students without the communities, supports, and resources they had been accustomed to relying upon. These students now had to cope with significant changes at their universities, in their states, and in their country while also completing classes and pursuing bachelor's degrees. This situation led me to wonder how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students were responding to this disruption of place attachment, which helped me to determine my research question and focus for this dissertation.

A Brief Description of Culture Centers

The first culture centers were created due to the activism of Black students, who argued that they were not recognized and supported by their institutions, which were often Predominantly White Institutions, or PWIs (Patton, 2010a). Since their inception, students have used these culture centers for academic and personal support from peers and staff (Noble, 2022; Pittman, 1994; Princes, 1994; Richmond, 2012; Saia, 2019; J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015; Welch, 2009). As technology has become more accessible, students' needs have changed, and the spaces have followed suit. In the 1990s, it was recommended that culture centers have typewriters, copy machines, and computers with internet access (Princes, 1994). Now, as most of those items have become more commonplace, these spaces have evolved as well. Many have designated quiet or study spaces, while other areas are designed for more social activity (Noble, 2022; Patton, 2006b;

Richmond, 2012; Saia, 2019; Welch, 2009). While services and offerings might have changed, the effects on students have not. Research on minority-identified students demonstrates that these centers and students' connections to staff, peers, and programming help those students feel more confident about their presence on campuses and increase their sense of belonging to their institution (Cox, 2024; Duran, 2019; L. Jones et al., 2002; Lozano, 2010; Museus et al., 2018; Turner, 1994). Table 1.1 provides a brief timeline of the histories of culture centers and LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experiences at institutions of higher education.

Table 1.1

History of Culture Centers and LGBTQ+ History at Universities

Year	Event
1890s	The first Student Unions are built on university campuses (Vine, 2007). LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty are at risk of expulsion if discovered (Dilley, 2002).
1950s	LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty are viewed as mentally ill (not expelled) (Dilley, 2002).
1960s	Integration begins at public universities (Lavin & Hyllegard, 2007). Activists push for culture centers (Patton, 2010a).
1969	The first LGBTQ+ culture center is opened at Columbia University (Dilley, 2002; Sanlo, 2000).
1990s	Universities end surveillance of students, staff, and faculty suspected to have an LGBTQ+ identity (Dilley, 2002).
1998	Matthew Shepard is murdered, reinforcing the need for institutional support of LGBTQ+ students (Dilley, 2002; Fine, 2012; Sanlo et al., 2002; Schermele, 2023).
2015	At least 150 LGBTQ+ culture centers are operating at U.S. universities (J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015).
2016	The Pulse Nightclub shooting occurs, reinforcing the need for institutional support of LGBTQ+ students (Sandoval, 2016).
2021	At least 250 LGBTQ+ culture centers are operating at U.S. universities (Campen, 2021).
2023	Universities begin interpreting anti-DEI legislation to require the closure of LGBTQ+ culture centers (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2025).

Further discussion of the history of culture centers can be found in Chapter 2.

Statement of the Problem

As illustrated in Table 1.1, federal guidance and state legislation was interpreted by university administrators to require institutions of higher education to remove and restrict diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming on their campuses (Bazarsky et al., 2023; Bondi, 2025; Boos, 2024; Bryant & Appleby, 2025; Cliburn, 2024; Goodman et al., 2025; Hanna & Lieb, 2024; Knox, 2023; Phan, 2025; Ramirez et al., 2026; S. Wood, 2025). U.S. institutions of higher education saw their minority-identified student spaces at risk (Caudill, 2025; Cliburn, 2024; Goodman et al., 2025; McGee, 2023; Rupertus, 2025; S. Wood, 2025). Institutions' changes ranged from renaming spaces to closing doors to canceling programming to letting staff go (Bryant & Appleby, 2025; Campus Pride, 2023; Caudill, 2025; Goodman et al., 2025; Ramirez et al., 2026; Spitalniak, 2025). Table 1.2 provides brief explanations of actions that specific states and certain four-year institutions within those states took in response to anti-DEI pressure.

Table 1.2

States, their Institutions, and Responses to Anti-DEI Legislation, Specifically Culture Centers

State	Institution	Response
Florida	Florida Atlantic University	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (Rasura, 2024).
	University of North Florida	Closed all culture centers (Campus Pride, 2023; Lavietes, 2024).
Idaho	Idaho State University	Closed all culture centers (Calder, 2024).
	University of Idaho	Closed all culture centers (Alonso, 2025; Duggan, 2024).
Kansas	Emporia State University	Merged with other culture centers; new center has a new name (Ayala & Carr, 2025; Davis, 2025).
	Kansas State University	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (Lane, 2025; M. Self, 2025).
	University of Kansas	Merged with other culture centers; new center has new name (Boos, 2024; Maddox, 2024; Muzzy, 2024).
Nebraska	University of Nebraska Lincoln	Closed inclusion and belonging center (Wendling, 2024).

State	Institution	Response
	University of Nebraska Omaha	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (Hegarty, 2024; Redd, 2024).
Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center; offering services through new office (Leonard & Fathepure, 2025).
Texas	University of Texas Arlington	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (Salinas, 2024).
	University of Texas Austin	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (Goodman et al., 2025; Zeff, 2024).
	University of Houston	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (Gustin, 2023; Key, 2023; Ramirez et al., 2026).
Utah	University of Utah	Closed LGBTQ+ culture center (University of Utah, 2025).
	Utah State University	Closed inclusion and belonging center (Brewster, 2024; Thurgood, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

LGBTQ+ undergraduates at four-year public institutions relied on the academic, professional, and personal services provided by their respective LGBTQ+ culture centers. Due to anti-DEI legislation, many public, four-year universities forced LGBTQ+ culture centers to close or merge with other culture centers to create general student belonging offices. LGBTQ+ undergraduate students had become accustomed to institutionally supported LGBTQ+ culture centers, and I expected that they would have an emotional response to the erasure of identity in the forced closure of the center. I anticipated that these students would grieve the loss of the centers and their services while they attempted to move forward without the center and related resources that they were accustomed to accessing. The purpose of my study is to understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduates who relied on academic, professional, and personal services provided by their institutions' LGBTQ+ culture centers experienced the loss of those centers due to anti-DEI legislation. My participants relied upon the support of these centers and their staff, often finding them to be an institutionally supported third place. When those resources were removed, they reacted in various ways. They felt a range of emotions and performed multiple actions as they coped with this loss. Understanding how undergraduates used problem-based and

emotion-based coping methods as they experienced a traumatic event such as disruption of place attachment can help student affairs practitioners better serve this population, especially as anti-DEI legislation has continued to limit resources and centers tailored to meet the needs of historically marginalized undergraduates (Coley et al., 2025; Goodman et al., 2025; Weissman, 2025).

Research Question

How do LGBTQ+ undergraduates who regularly (at least four times a semester) visited an on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center experience losing the center due to anti-DEI state legislation?

Methods Overview

To answer this question, I conducted a qualtiative, phenomenological study using interviews to collect data from participants. I used Seidman's (2013) interviewing methods and applied Noble's (2022) modifications to those methods to build interview protocols for two phenomenological interviews with each participant. By conducting two interviews per participant, I hoped to collect phenomenological data on both their development of place attachment to their culture center and their varied responses to the closing of their culture center. Participants were recruited through emails to faculty and student organizations at four-year, public institutions in the U.S. Eleven individuals expressed interest in participating; six participants completed both interviews. These participants provided me with sufficient data to draw conclusions about their use of the office and their coping strategies. After cleaning transcripts and performing member checks, I used Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method to isolate data into three different spreadsheets for evidence of place attachment, emotional responses to the closing, and action responses to the closing. I then used a three stage coding map for each category and moved from preliminary, data-derived codes to reoccurring patterns to an overall theme.

I identify as a non-binary, queer individual who uses they/them pronouns, which was similar to many of my participants' identities. However, my undergraduate institution did not have an LGBTQ+ culture center; my only experiences with them were as a staff member at other

universities. I was always an outsider to these spaces and, when inside of them, acted as a representative of my office. This significant difference prevented potential bias in my analytical process and kept my coding maps focused on considering the participants' experiences.

Definition of Terms

Multiple terms are used throughout this proposal to describe the populations and centers being studied. Therefore, operational definitions are included in Table 1.1.

Table 1.3

Terms and Definitions

Terms	Definitions
DEI	An acronym that stands for diversity, equity, and inclusion.
LGBTQ+	An acronym used to describe people with any of the following identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The + character acknowledges additional identities that were not included in the initial five.
Place	The socially constructed area that exists within the physical space (Agnew, 2011; Cresswell, 2015; Wilhoit, 2015).
PWI	An acronym for Predominantly White Institution.
Space	The objective, measurable physical location that can house the constructed place (Agnew, 2011; Cresswell, 2015; Wilhoit, 2015).
Third place	An area where individuals spend time outside of their homes and workplaces, where standards and rules are set by the collective users (Oldenburg, 1989).

Limitations

This study only included participants from four-year public universities who were able to use their institutions' LGBTQ+ culture centers. Examining how LGBTQ+ undergraduates interact with culture spaces/places at junior/community colleges or private universities would likely provide intriguing findings. However, due to the differences in missions, populations, and legislation, they are not comparable to a four-year public institution. Including them would have required a participant pool too large to be feasible for this study.

This study also only examined the experience of LGBTQ+ undergraduate students who could participate in on-campus centers. Understanding how online-only LGBTQ+ undergraduate students interact with their virtual environment would provide fascinating insights into how this

population connects with spaces/places at their respective institutions. However, institutions used multiple tools to create online environments for these students, and though they may perform similar functions to in-person centers, the differences were considerable enough that a study examining both would be too large to be feasible.

Additionally, participants were required to have visited their LGBTQ+ culture center at least four times a semester. Undergraduates who identified as LGBTQ+ individuals and who visited fewer times or did not return after one visit were not included. As illustrated by McCoy (2018), there are numerous reasons that LGBTQ+ undergraduates might not find their LGBTQ+ culture center to be a welcoming or safe place. Research on those students' experiences is essential but is not part of this study's focus and purpose; therefore, those undergraduates were excluded.

Significance of Study

Despite these federal and state threats, minority-identified students continued to advocate for the creation and maintenance of spaces that will support their unique needs (Boos, 2024; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Rose-Mockry, 2024; Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). As one LGBTQ+ student mentioned to me in passing, they are not "going anywhere" even if their current campus space was renamed or removed. They created other safe places where they can congregate to create academic and personal support for themselves (Campen, 2021; Schachle-Gordon et al., 2025).

I had always planned to study how students make meaning in public campus spaces designed for minority-identified populations. However, the recent and institutionally sanctioned renaming and removal of such spaces demonstrated that understanding LGBTQ+ on-campus student spaces and how the students independently and collectively create meaning and purpose in these spaces was essential to supporting these students' successes. Students demonstrated a personal stake in the creation and maintenance of these spaces and their welcoming, safe, and inclusive places (Aguilar-Hernández et al., 2021; Patton, 2006b; Rozin, 2025; Saia, 2019). The first culture centers were created out of students' activism; they are likely to continue to grow from students' demands. Yet there is a difference between the centers of the past and future: these

new centers will be created with the past ones in mind. Documenting and understanding LGBTQ+ undergraduates' feelings and coping strategies as they grieve the changes to their centers was essential to preserving this chapter in the history of LGBTQ+ culture centers.

This research is significant to many, both within and outside of higher education. Student affairs professionals who assist in their institutions' mission to recruit undergraduate students and help them persist to earn their bachelor's degrees will be interested in this study as it provides them with an understanding of why this specific population may struggle to earn their degrees given the current political environment. These individuals may be employed as student belonging staff, academic advisors, librarians, counselors, and others who operate in student success offices. Faculty will also be interested, as they may see negative academic performance from LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in their classes as a result of the loss of their culture centers. Additionally, faculty in specific fields such as English, women's and gender studies, sociology, and American ethnic studies may see a significant impact in their majors' ability to persist as a result of their institution's decision to close LGBTQ+ culture centers, cancel LGBTQ+-related programming, and cut funding for LGBTQ+-related student organizations. Outside of higher education, policymakers and legislators will be interested in these conclusions, given they are the result of anti-DEI political action. These findings may be used as evidence to show why institutional support of LGBTQ+ culture centers, programming, and student organizations should be reinstated. Ultimately, this study's conclusions are likely to be of interest to many individuals who work to create supportive, welcoming environments for undergraduate students.

Summary

Within this chapter, I have provided a brief overview of my study's purpose and significance. I have showed that there is a need to understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation. This study's purpose was to use transcendental phenomenology as the theoretical framework and method to collect data on the participants' experiences with place attachment, third places, and disruption of that place attachment. In Chapter 2, I discuss these concepts in more depth. I expand on theories

of space and place, both generally and how undergraduates experience these within the university environment. Finally, I discuss the need of undergraduates to have an on-campus third place, especially those who belong to at least one historically marginalized population. Chapter 3 focuses on the study's methods, Chapter 4 examines my findings, and Chapter 5 discusses my results.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My proposed study relies on a foundation of research over public spaces and places, both off- and on-campus; person/environment interactions; the history of minority-identified student culture centers on campus; and how LGBTQ+ students have traditionally found a sense of belonging at PWIs. Within this literature review, I begin with a broader focus on public spaces and places to illustrate how scholars have determined the differences between the two concepts. I then examine how behavior is influenced by a person and their interaction with their environment. Finally, I focus on student usage of space on college campuses, which includes a discussion of the history of minority-identified student culture centers and how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students interact with their respective culture centers. By focusing on literature that examines how individuals interact with and experience their environments, I provide a clear connection between my proposed study and the use of phenomenology as a method.

Spaces, Places, and Place Attachment

Within this section, I explain how I conceptualized space and place. After clarifying those concepts, I discuss the differences between public and private spaces/places.

Conceptualization of Space and Place

To understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduates cope with their loss of centers, the concepts of space and place must be defined. Generally, most scholars agree that space is the physical, measurable area, whereas place is a feeling of attachment built through the people who use the area (Agnew, 2011; Cresswell, 2015; Low & Altman, 1992; Tuan, 1977; Wilhoit, 2015). Relph (1976) provided a different definition, arguing that, "Space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analyzed" (p. 8). Though Relph's (1976) research is essential to conceptualizing space, place, and place-making, his definition of space does not appear to be the one widely agreed upon by his field. Therefore, I will use the one that is more commonly accepted by others studying space/place.

Space cannot exist without place, and vice versa. Relph's (1976) scholarship agreed with his peers' findings in this aspect, as he said that humans define space by its connection to place.

This sentiment was echoed by Tuan (1977), who wrote, "The ideas of 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa" (p. 6). This explanation requires the use of methods like transcendental phenomenology, which prioritize the participants' reflection of their experiences. Relying solely on observations or artifacts could make it difficult to understand how the space has become place due to the researcher's need to interpret the data; transcendental phenomenology allows for the constructivist perspective required to consider space and place as such.

Space is the enclosed area created by the installation of floors, walls, and ceilings, or the "dimension within which matter is located or a grid within which substantive items are contained" (Agnew, 2011, p. 316). This location has the potential to perform a range of functions. The empty area is ready for individuals to come together to determine how it will be used by their population. For this study's purpose, space is defined as the room(s) that comprise the LGBTQ+ culture center.

A place is created by individuals who inhabit a space and feel a sense of ownership of it. It is the workplace where employees collaborate, the home where parents hang up their child's art, and the coffee shop where individuals congregate to find community (Cresswell, 2015; Oldenburg, 1989). Cresswell (2015) explained that place can be seen to understand individuals and their relationships, further illustrating how emotion and connection are a significant part of the conception of place. Spaces/places can be for individuals, as illustrated in Cresswell's (2015) residence hall room, and for larger groups, as demonstrated by Agnew's (2011) malls or churches. Place is where humans feel an attachment and have cultivated a space to address their needs and wants, which are typically based on their experiences, societies, and cultures (Agnew, 2011; Cresswell, 2015; Francis, 1989; Low & Altman, 1992; Relph, 1976). Relph (1976) argued that the place's foundation might be in the physical, concrete space and the artifact within it, but it becomes a place as individuals interact with it. LGBTQ+ culture centers can be seen as an example of the space/place designed for the larger population. The physical location serves as the

space, while the place is where the students come to build and find community and see their identities valued and celebrated.

Public and Private Spaces/Places

Generally, public spaces/places are distinct from private spaces/places through their purpose and what actors are in control of them (Francis, 1989; Franck & Paxson, 1989). With the residence hall example, the student's room is private; though others may enter it, they are required to be invited in. To walk in without first being welcomed would be a violation of control, which is essential to determining if a space is private or public (Franck & Paxson, 1989). This is not the case for spaces/places designed for the public's use. These public spaces/places are intended for anyone to enter without an explicit invitation. Public spaces were designed to facilitate connection between humans, sharing of knowledge and information, and reinforcement of one's social identities (Dikeç, 2011; Francis, 1989). Culture centers fit this definition of public space as participants have shared that they function as a place where students can socialize, study, and find their identity valued through the staff and artifacts present (Lozano, 2010; Patton, 2006b).

Place Attachment

An effectively designed place causes the users to feel a sense of place attachment, or "the bonding of people to places" (Low & Altman, 1992, p. 2). The feeling of place attachment causes users to feel an emotional connection to a location that causes them to return (Low & Altman, 1992; Mallon, 2015; Scannell et al., 2021). Scannell et al. (2021) provided further clarification that an individual is likely to develop a sense of place attachment with an area where they have an "intense experience" (p. 274). According to Low and Altman (1992) and Brown and Perkins (1992), there are several integral assumptions of place attachments. Place attachments are essential for the individual to define themselves, their communities, and their cultures; they allow the individual to be receptive to change due to a sense of security; and they influence the individual's thoughts and behaviors (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Low & Altman, 1992). Therefore, an individual's ability to form an attachment to a specific place can be argued to be essential to their overall well-being. Relph (1976) argued, "To be human is to live in a world that is filled

with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place" (p. 1). Conversely, as Rivlin (1987) briefly argued, the inability to find place attachment can have negative effects on a person's health. Therefore, creating place attachment is one way that individuals, including LGBTQ+ undergraduate students, find fulfillment.

As one would expect, undergraduates form place attachment with sites at their institution. One example of this is Cresswell's (2015) explanation of a new resident coming into their student residence hall room for the first time: "A common strategy is to make the space say something about you. . . Thus space is turned into place. Your place" (p. 7). Through personalizing the residence hall room, the student takes ownership of it and begins building a place. If Relph's (1976) conclusion about place is applied to this example, forming a sense of ownership of their place is necessary for the undergraduate to mature. Yet students also form place attachments to locations outside of their residence halls. Culture centers are one on-campus area that undergraduate students describe a sense of place attachment to as demonstrated through decades of studies (Lozano, 2010; Patton, 2006b, 2010b; Sanlo et al., 2002; Soriano, 2022; Young, 1986).

Low and Altman (1992) explained that four processes are incorporated in the process of place attachment: biological, environmental, psychological, and sociocultural. For this study's focus, including psychological and sociocultural processes in the conception of place is necessary to understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students form place attachment to their culture center. Psychological processes include an individual's experience in a place, such as a student's interaction with a culture center, and sociocultural processes include the influence of a person's culture on their identity. The creation of place attachment in a public place like a culture center is not a solitary act; these places are built collectively. This conclusion is supported by Fullilove (2020), who argued that the process of place attachment is a "community practice" (p. 243). The effective culture center requires a collective approach for success. A center provides undergraduates with the ability to transform: the space becomes a place where they can be themselves without concern for how others interpret their cultural behavioral norms. Collecting undergraduates' experiences within the space/place are essential to understanding how they

establish and maintain place attachment; without that essential data, one cannot comprehend why they have such strong emotions towards that place.

The theory of place attachment can be connected to interpersonal attachment theory (Scannell et al., 2021). Scannell et al. (2021) argued that the claim that individuals create attachments with people they consider safe can be applied to places that they perceive to be safe. If users regularly return to the same places, they can gain a sense of place attachment that is akin to the sense of interpersonal attachment they feel to another person. Brown and Perkins (1992) expanded on this argument as they provided a definition arguing that a person's feeling of place attachment to their neighborhood was partially built from their social connections to their neighbors. Though a culture center is not a neighborhood, both places are areas where unrelated individuals congregate and regularly return to for individual and collective fulfillment. A person may be in their neighborhood to be alone; they may be there to connect with others with whom they share at least one identity. Relph (1976) also argued that community and place are conjoined concepts, as the individuals who use the place incorporate their community and cultural values into the physical location of their place. A culture center can perform similar functions as an undergraduate may come to spend time between classes or to connect with peers who belong to the same minority population.

Additionally, place attachment has an intriguing connection to S. Ahmed's (2010) argument about orientation and phenomenology. S. Ahmed (2010) claimed that orientation is both where the action of where the individual is and what they care about or are focused on. The orientation is the direction the individual faces and the objects' locations in comparison to each other and the person; it is also the influence of the objects and the place's purpose upon the individual's behavior. If a person successfully creates place attachment, then the person's orientation aligns with the place, and vice versa. Orientation also considers what the person has experienced previously, or their background, and how those experiences influence their actions within the place. A person's assessment if a place is comfortable and inclusive, as Patton's (2006b) participants described their Black culture center, then influences the experiences within

that place. Therefore, a discussion on place attachment requires consideration of phenomenology and S. Ahmed's (2010) orientation.

A notable distinction between LGBTQ+ undergraduate students and the individuals considered in place attachment is that the undergraduate students typically developed a sense of place attachment to smaller public spaces, as Campen (2021) learned when interviewing LGBTQ+ participants on how they determined safe and unsafe locations on a public university campus. The students reported a preference and attachment for spaces where there were others with similar identities who lived openly and proudly. They felt less safe and thus less attached to larger public spaces such as the student union (Campen, 2021). Secure, stable culture centers where these students can find connection with similarly-identified peers are essential for these individuals, perhaps more so than their more privileged peers, to create place attachment and grow as humans. It is also important, though, to comprehend that some undergraduate students may not experience place attachment to a center, even though they belong to the identity group the center was designed for. Therefore, understanding how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students describe creating a sense of place attachment to centers is necessary to understand why they have specific responses to the disruption of place attachment if their centers are lost.

Disruption of Place Attachment. Place attachment becomes more complicated when the user perceives their place to become endangered. If individuals build positive emotions toward the existence of a specific area, they can also feel strongly if that place is threatened with removal. Removal can range from a reimagining of the space for a different purpose and/or population to disasters to the purposeful demolition of the building housing the place. As Brown and Perkins (1992) explained in their discussion of disruptions in place attachment, "After the development of secure place attachments, the loss of normal attachments creates a stressful period of disruption followed by a postdisruption phase of coping with lost attachments and creating new ones" (p. 279). Disruption to place attachment can be and often is a normal part of maturing, as reported by Chow and Healey (2008), who studied the transition of high school seniors to first-year undergraduates. Even though Chow and Healey's (2008) participants were excited to move to

college, they shared that they felt emotions associated with the disruption of place attachment as they left their childhood home and moved into a new environment. They reported struggling with connecting to their new environment and peers and voiced wishes to return home, even though they knew that attending college was the correct course of action. If a chosen departure from a place where individuals felt attachment causes an emotional reaction, it is logical that a forced disruption is likely to have an even stronger emotional response in the users who are now bereft of the place they felt attached to. Collecting LGBTQ+ undergraduate students' experiences of their disruption of place attachment allows researchers to better understand their complicated feelings about this change.

Users who have found a place that they consider to be home, as many minority-identified students do with their culture centers, have a strong emotional response when their ability to access that place is disturbed. For many, Brown and Perkins (1992) found that disrupted access is either due to the place being burgled, the person moving away, or the place being destroyed by a natural disaster. The loss of culture centers due to political pressure does not quite fit any category. LGBTQ+ students may find a disruption in place attachment when institutions close their culture centers. Some could describe this as resembling a combination of burglary with their artifacts being removed and disaster with the situation being out of their control. Users who face disruption in place attachment shared that they struggled to form new attachments to other places as their trust in those bonds was violated (Brown & Perkins, 1992). For this study, it can be assumed that the LGBTQ+ undergraduate students who were regular returners to the sites will likely have similar negative responses to the disruption of their place attachments. Additionally, knowing that their institution of higher education allowed this disruption has reportedly caused LGBTQ+ undergraduates to think negatively of their university and to have lost trust in its administrators (Phan, 2025).

Participants have shared that encountering the space that once housed the place can continue to be a source of painful emotions. One term for this occurrence is Relph's (1976) "placelessness," or "a weakening of the identity of places where they not only look alike but feel

alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience" (p. 90). Users have reflected that observing placelessness has a significant emotional impact. Consider the outrage when a beloved family restaurant is replaced by a Starbucks; though it still could be a place for others, the previous diners may choose to go elsewhere given the changes to the space's environment, culture, and purpose. Another term is Oldenburg's (1989) "nonplace" (p. 205), which he used to describe places that served similar functions to the third place, but were generic enough that people were unable to feel place attachment. Oldenburg (1989) claimed that nonplaces were commercial entities that did not see individuals, both employees and patrons, as individuals; rather, all were deemed components necessary to make the corporate machine successful. The nonplace provided a service but did not give users the unique experience once provided by the previous place. Understandably, this result caused previous regulars to feel unhappiness when they encountered the space where their place was previously housed (Scannell et al., 2021). The same can be assumed for spaces that housed culture centers; should they be closed due to anti-DEI legislation, their replacements may not be as successful as the culture centers.

Understanding space, place, and space attachment is essential for understanding how LGBTQ+ culture centers function on campuses and comprehending how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students describe their experience of loss. As Agnew (2011) argued, "Given that both space and place are about the 'where' of things and their relative invocation has usually signaled different understandings of what 'where' means, it is best to examine them together. . . " (p. 317). A successful place is created when the users can cultivate a strong sense of place attachment. Therefore, the loss of a beloved culture center is likely to cause disruption of place attachment and evoke strong emotions of grief and anger in the students who once found community and connection there. Researching the students' responses to their disruptions of place as they face loss due to human-made disasters is essential to providing effective support for them during this time.

Person-Environment Studies

Person-environment studies became popular beginning in the 1960s (Walsh, 1975). In this field, the term environment describes any location someone is at that provides sensory data and incorporates purposeful components (furniture, decorations, nature) and individual additions (graffiti, flyers) (Banning, 1993; Mehrabian, 1976; Strange & Banning, 2015). Within the environment are four components: space, time, communication, and meaning (Rapoport, 1990). Space shares the same definition as provided above. Time is the understanding that individuals have a temporary existence in their lives and in a specific environment (Crang, 2011; Rapoport, 1990). Communication examines conversations between individuals, while meaning connects with place attachment and the individuals' associated emotions (Rapoport, 1990). All these components were found in LGBTQ+ culture centers, making person-environment studies a relevant field of study for this research.

The beginning of these studies was Lewin's (1936) theory about what influences behavior. Lewin (1936) initially proposed that behavior was due to a person's situation. Further research illustrated that the situation was due to the combination of the person's presence within their environment. Lewin (1936) concluded that behavior is the function of person and environment, $B = f(P, E)$. How much either aspect influenced behavior was unknown, hence the use of function (f) (Lewin, 1936). Others supported this conclusion, arguing that, ". . . there is a mutual interdependence among personal and environmental factors in behavior determination" (Banning & Bryner, 2001, p. 10). The relationship's validity has been well-supported in multiple settings (Banning, 1989, 1993; Banning & Bartels, 1997; Huebner & Lawson, 1990; Kaiser, 1975; Magnusson & Törestad, 1992; Mehrabian, 1971, 1976; Strange & Banning, 2015; Wilner et al., 1973). Multiple researchers applied person-environment interaction theory to different components of college campuses, illustrating the field's relevance to the study of LGBTQ+ undergraduate students and their interactions with their culture centers (Banning, 1989, 1993; Banning & Bartels, 1997; Huebner & Lawson, 1990; Kaiser, 1975; Strange & Banning, 2015; Wilner et al., 1973).

Visiting a public space can demonstrate to an observer how a person's environment influences their actions: individuals sit in chairs at tables, respond to the artifacts, and perform activities related to the purpose of the environment. As S. Ahmed (2010) argued, the person influences the place and its objects while the place and its objects influence the person. In some cases, communication with the employee is not even necessary for a successful experience, demonstrating that the environment can be the primary influence on the person's actions.

Historically, most person-environment psychology research did not consider minority-identified culture centers, likely due to both concepts emerging simultaneously (Patton, 2006a; Walsh, 1975). Scholars have studied how individuals use museums, libraries, coffee shops, bars, and residence halls to determine how furniture, resources, and other artifacts can be incorporated to ensure these spaces/places are successful at achieving their specific goals (Mehrabian, 1971, 1976; Oldenburg, 1989). Mehrabian (1976) specifically focused on the residence halls as they existed in the 1970s to illustrate how successful design of these spaces allowed students to feel connected to their peers and their institutions. Including person-environment interaction theory in this study is necessary to better comprehend the importance of both when analyzing undergraduates' experiences.

Based on these examples, it is understandable why scholars have used person-environment theory to examine how students' behavior is influenced by their environments. Should an environment help the student feel a sense of belonging, positive retention and graduation outcomes are more likely (Museus et al., 2018; Pryor, 2018; Strange & Banning, 2015). Therefore, consideration of this field of study is vital to understanding how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students become connected to their culture centers. Comprehending how they build the relationship with the center allows a researcher to understand why they are likely to feel loss when the place is removed and attachment disrupted.

Ecological Systems Theory. A subset of person-environment interaction research is ecological systems theory (EST). EST focuses on how a person's interaction with their environment impacts their ability to evolve. Using Lewin's (1936) equation, $B = f(P, E)$, EST

also illustrates that a person's environment consists of multiple systems, reflecting the complexity of human interactions with their surroundings. These systems were referred to (in order from smallest to largest): micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, and macro-system (Brim, 1975; Bronfenbrenner, 1976). Table 2.1 provides a brief overview of each system and its definition.

Table 2.1

Bronfenbrenner's (1976) Systems in Ecological Systems Theory

System	Definition
Micro-system	"...the immediate setting containing the learner..." (p. 163).
Meso-system	A combination of the individual's actions with both human and material actors, which combines all micro-systems in the immediate environment.
Exo-system	A combination of the previous systems and ". . . the concrete social structures, both formal and informal, that impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings containing the learner" (p. 163).
Macro-system	The three previous systems, as well as the cultural and societal norms and institutions of the civilization in which the individual resided.

To apply this example to an LGBTQ+ culture center, the micro-system is the social room within the center where LGBTQ+ undergraduates gather to converse with peers. The meso-system recognizes that the different students' micro-systems are influencing each other as they communicate; it would incorporate how they interact with the non-human objects as illustrated in Ozaki et al. (2020), Renn (2003), and Renn and Arnold (2003), all of whom applied EST to understanding students' behavior in on-campus centers and offices. The exo-system incorporates how the student responds to staff due to the established hierarchy. Finally, the macro-system incorporates norms about appropriate behavior. The four systems illustrate how a person's behavior is influenced by their current environment; their interactions with others in that environment, both human and material; and the often dominant culture's influences on all persons within that environment (Renn, 2003).

Person-environment research has been used to illustrate that the influences on a person's behavior are connected (Kitchen et al., 2019; Ozaki et al., 2020; Renn, 2003; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Spencer et al., 1997). Researchers have incorporated EST into their studies on students,

including those who identify with at least one historically marginalized identity. Renn (2003) incorporated EST to gain a better understanding of how mixed-race students self-identified; Ozaki et al. (2020) used EST to study persistence in community colleges and how it was influenced by different systems. Both found that a student's behavior is influenced by the teacher and peers, cultural beliefs about education, and what the student previously experienced. Considering systems and their influences is essential to comprehending how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students are describing the experience of loss of their centers.

Stress and Coping. Understanding the different ways individuals experience stress and perform coping strategies is essential to examining their responses to the loss of their culture centers. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1985), "Stress is defined as a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as relevant to his or her well-being and in which the person's resources are taxed or exceeded" (p. 152). When a person feels stress, they perform two simultaneous processes: primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal is when an individual assesses whether a situation is beneficial, harmful, or neither; secondary appraisal is when that individual considers the different coping strategies to address the assessment from the primary appraisal (Aldwin, 2007; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

Coping is the resulting behavior that comes from a problematic person-environment situation, where an individual attempts to reduce or eliminate harm through performing specific processes and actions (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Researchers determined there were two types of coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Hobfoll, 1988; Lazarus, 1996). Problem-focused coping works to address the problem itself, while emotion-focused coping works to address the emotions and stress that have arisen due to the problem (Lazarus, 1996). Lazarus (1996) discovered that individuals who found themselves in problems with unlikely positive outcomes were more likely to use emotion-focused coping strategies. Though Lazarus's (1996) research suggested that individuals used the strategies separately, Aldwin (2007) argued that more recent studies had demonstrated that both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies were used simultaneously to cope with a

stressor. Additionally, individuals were found to change coping strategies depending on the situation and type of stress involved (Aldwin, 2007; Mikulincer & Florian, 1996; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). When coping with trauma or loss, individuals would actively share their feelings with others; additionally, some used "faith and fatalism" to address their anxiety about the loss (McCrae, 1984, p. 927). Some strategies appeared more successful than others, though efficacy was not universal across participants (Mikulincer & Florian, 1996).

Connecting students' behaviors to specific coping strategies is difficult. The most recent Ways of Coping Checklist, which requires an individual to pay to access, includes 66 behaviors that individuals have used to address stressful situations (Folkman, 2020). Given the recency of this proposed study, most scholars have not examined undergraduate students' coping strategies when they encounter disruption of place attachment. Even research on coping with trauma or loss focuses on dying, surviving a war, or having a new disability rather than on loss of an important place (Mikulincer & Florian, 1996).

Most studies focused on this population examine general college stresses or stresses brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many focused on general college stresses discussed how undergraduate students performed helpful coping strategies such as carrying out faith/spiritual practices and sharing their emotions with others while unhelpful strategies included actively avoiding the issue (Ganesan et al., 2018; Scribner et al., 2021). Scribner et al.'s (2021) study included disordered eating practices and substance use as additional unhelpful behaviors. In their study on coping strategies used by undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic, Patias et al. (2021) demonstrated that the pandemic affected all participants' feelings of stress. However, they learned that students who identified as women, had high financial need, did not practice a religion, did not work, performed social distancing, and/or studied at a public university showed more signs of depression. Though these findings were based on undergraduate students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors argued that they should be used in creating plans to effectively address future crises at the university level. Since minoritized populations appeared to be more affected by the pandemic, it can be assumed that other

minoritized groups, such as LGBTQ+ undergraduate students, could have similar reactions to what their communities perceive as crises, such as the forced closure of their culture centers at universities.

Undergraduate Students' Use of Space/Place on College Campuses

Reviewing foundational literature on how undergraduate students use spaces/places on college campuses is essential to comprehending how LGBTQ+ undergraduates reflect on their loss of their centers. Within this section, I begin with a discussion of campus ecology and its evolution from person-environment studies. I follow with an examination of how Oldenburg's third places are applied in research on campus spaces/places. I move into a broad overview of public spaces and college students' sense of place on campuses. Finally, I discuss the culture centers' history and their potential as a third place.

Campus Ecology as Applied to College Spaces/Places

Campus ecology research modified person-environment studies to focus specifically on college environments. Lewin's (1936) formula, $B = f(P, E)$, was essential in understanding how students interact with their environments (Banning & Bryner, 2001). Kaiser (1975) used this foundation to argue that all environments ". . . [have] a design, even if the administration, faculty, and students have not planned it or are not consciously aware of it" (p. 36). As other researchers began to examine college environments, they incorporated what had been learned in person-environment studies with pre-existing research on sense of belonging in higher education to create campus ecology research (Banning & Bryner, 2001). Scholars recognized that when students have a positive connection to their spaces, they are more likely to persist (Hausmann et al., 2007; Patton, 2006b; Pedler et al., 2022; Welch, 2009).

Campus ecology considers three components: the college-affiliated individuals who are in the space/place, their surroundings, and their behavior (Banning & Kuk, 2005). Like Lewin's (1936) formula, it recognizes that these three parts influence each other; ideally, they function together to ensure that the students see positive growth academically, personally, and professionally (Banning, 1989). Students will react to their surroundings in both constructive and

destructive ways (Huebner & Lawson, 1990; Kaiser, 1975; Strange & Banning, 2015). Therefore, considering each part is essential when researching spaces and places on college campuses. Campus ecology can be used to study multiple aspects of the university system, including assessing design, understanding student development, examining campus programs, and considering campus issues (Banning & Bryner, 2001). Researchers determined that campus artifacts such as graffiti, bumper stickers, and art send messages to students about who belongs in the spaces. They have argued that the absence of artifacts depicting specific populations sends a message about who was not intended to attend an institution (Banning, 1993, 1997, 2000; Banning & Bartels, 1997; Banning et al., 2008; Colfer, 2021). Thus, it is important to consider what students are seeing and engaging with as they interact with offices on campus.

Campus ecology research focuses on the student body as a group and their collective interactions with the environment, rather than the individual and their unique response (Banning, 1989). Though it is important to consider individuals, spaces/places cannot be designed to fit one student's needs. Instead, they must incorporate both the concerns of the current student body and the incoming classes. One of these needs is the ability to connect to peers who are also from historically marginalized populations (Noble, 2022; Saia, 2019; Soriano, 2022; Welch, 2009). Therefore, spaces/places must comprehend this need when considering how to attract incoming students with shared identities.

One criticism of campus ecology was that it does not consider how individuals from historically marginalized populations might have different relationships to power than their peers from more privileged backgrounds (Cabrera et al., 2016). Cabrera et al. (2016) argued that campus ecology research prioritizes creating an environment that feels safe for all students. They believed campus ecology research argued that campus environments needed to ensure White students were comfortable at the expense of their non-White peers: "While social comfort may serve as a type of racial bliss, avoidance of racial agitation only serves to reinforce the normality of White space" (p. 128). If social comfort of the majority is the norm for campus offices, minoritized students receive a negative message about their behaviors and environment (Noble,

2022; Patton, 2006b; Pittman, 1994; Saia, 2019). Given my participants' identities, this concern will need to be considered when examining my results.

Third Places as Applied to College Spaces/Places

Oldenburg (1989) created the term third place when he argued that the U.S. had not paid enough attention to adults' non-work, non-home spaces. The third place was often a casual bar or coffee shop where they could come together as equals. Since there was no customer hierarchy, individuals described increased community and connection. The third place often had regular visitors who helped establish the space's purpose and create a home-like feeling (Oldenburg, 1989). Considering what the culture center provides to students, it can be argued to function as the academic version of a third place.

Oldenburg's (1989) third places fit a set of criteria. In Table 2.2, I provide brief descriptions of each one.

Table 2.2

Criteria for Third Places

Third Place Criterion	Definition
"On neutral ground" (pp. 22-23)	Third places are located in spaces where no one has a hierarchy over another.
"The third place is a leveler" (pp. 23-26)	All users in the third place are equal, allowing for increased socialization opportunities.
"Conversation is the main identity" (pp. 26-31)	Socializing is the primary purpose of the place, but one person does not dominate the conversation.
"Accessibility and accommodation" (pp. 32-33)	Users can visit the space whenever they would like, including after work hours.
"The regulars" (pp. 36-37)	Specific users repeatedly return to the place; these individuals set some of the unspoken norms and rules.
"A low profile" (pp. 36-37)	The place has a casual appearance that will not attract a significant number of strangers.
"The mood is playful" (pp. 37-38)	Users feel a sense of happiness when in the place.
"A home away from home" (pp. 38-41)	Users feel a sense of ownership over the place and report feeling revitalized after spending time in it.

Culture centers meet most of these criteria, though they often are inaccessible outside of

business hours. The application of Oldenburg's (1989) third places theory is common in research on student unions; it could easily be incorporated into research on culture centers.

Most student affairs and higher education researchers use the concept of the third place to argue that there is a lack of research on how the university environment, specifically the student union, influences students' behavior. A chronological examination of third place theory in student union research demonstrates the idea's increasing popularity. When Janisz (2014) compared student unions and their services, they argued that the experience a user can have in a third place can occur in the student union. Mallon (2015) argued that many spaces on university campuses "bear an uncanny resemblance to Oldenburg's examples of third places" (p. 36); Smyth (2016) made a similar argument a year later. Camputaro (2018) briefly incorporated the third place into their dissertation on how unions build community, arguing, as Janisz (2014), did that the union could function as such a place. Inman (2023) expanded on Janisz's (2014) and Camputaro's (2018) suppositions that the union could be a third place, averring instead that the student union is a third place. In Webber's (2024) case study on how the student union's environment influenced the creation of campus community, they noted that scholars had considered the influence of non-student union environments on student behavior. Such applications of Oldenburg's (1989) theory demonstrate that it should be incorporated into research on culture centers.

Student Unions: General Use Public Spaces and Their Influences on Students' Sense of Place on College Campuses

The college public space shares the determining criteria for the general public space as both have purpose and individually controlled access. Franck and Paxson (1989) argued that control was an essential component of Lewin's (1936) equation, though their focus was on the inclusion of women in the public urban environment rather than on college students. Yet the argument for control is still valid since student unions are intended for use by those affiliated with the university, such as students, staff, and faculty. Student unions also have more specific purposes than Franck and Paxson's (1989) general public space. However, unions allow students

to connect socially, grow as individuals, and support their academic and career pursuits, all of which are considered necessary components of public space (Dikeç, 2011; Francis, 1989; Kaiser, 1975; Mehrabian, 1976). Different spaces exist for different purposes. Student unions, libraries, recreational centers, and residence halls are among the most common, as illustrated by Huebner and Lawson (1990) in their study on assessing college environments.

Some spaces are more controlled than others. Residence halls and recreational centers have staff who supervise users; they may require a student to carry a device to unlock the door or access the amenities and guests may be required to sign in. Libraries and student unions have less control over who can access the building; an individual does not need to be a student or a student's guest to use a library or student union. Whether these spaces become places depends on the environment's design, which in turn is due to the purposeful decisions made by creators and staff. No matter what the space is or what its intended purpose is, the location most effectively becomes a place when those in charge carefully consider what design choices should be made (Huebner & Lawson, 1990; Mallon, 2015; Patton, 2006b; Pittman, 1994; Soriano, 2022; Strange & Banning, 2015). This argument is also supported by an examination of how student union professional staff have restructured their unions to fit students' changing needs after the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Recent History of Student Unions. Over the past 100 years, student unions have continued evolving to meet their users' needs. They strive to provide space for students to study and socialize, feel welcomed in a safe, comfortable environment, use services and resources, and develop academically, professionally, and personally (Smyth, 2016). According to Webber (2024), who studied how the physical space of the union contributed to community building, student unions are in their competition phase, which started in 2001. As enrollment has dropped, universities have implemented amenities to entice potential undergraduate students to attend their institution. For many students, the union achieves its goals; they described the positive experiences that occurred within that space/place (Clapp, 2020; Inman, 2023; Smyth, 2016; Webber, 2024). Given this and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to include recent

scholarship on student unions and how undergraduates interact with them.

Pre-COVID-19 scholars of student unions and student/environment interactions include Janisz (2014), Smyth (2016), and Camputaro (2018). All authors examined how students build a sense of community and belonging through interacting with their respective student unions. Their methodologies differed: Janisz (2014) and Smyth (2016) interviewed student union staff while Camputaro (2018) spoke with students. Camputaro (2018) worked with student union directors to select participants who met two criteria to ensure they could collect robust data: at least one year of attendance at the institution and a strong sense of community with the student union. All three concluded that student unions served an essential purpose of creating community on campus, which in turn helped with enrollment and retention.

While these conclusions are intriguing, it is worth noting that the individuals selected were already likely to share positive experiences within their student unions. One can assume that staff who have been in this specific area of student unions for multiple years, as Janisz's (2014) participants had, were more likely to speak positively about their site and how students interacted with it. Camputaro (2018) worked with students, but only those identified by the directors as having a strong sense of community, which excluded students unknown to staff and/or those dissatisfied with their visit to the student union. Undergraduate students who felt dissatisfaction could have a range of reasons for that sentiment, from overstimulation of the space to feeling like an outsider.

A potential weakness of the previous studies is the inability to consider the effects of COVID-19. As those three authors studied unions before the pandemic, they were unable to consider that variable. Since the use of public spaces was hampered due to COVID-19, it is important to consider research on students' experiences of the student unions from during and after that time as well. Inman (2023) and Webber (2024) researched how students built community using the student union. Similar to Camputaro (2018), Webber (2024) worked with staff to select students who would be good participants. Inman (2023), though, spent a week in their institution's student union to locate 340 participants who met their eligibility criteria. Yet

despite the probable effects of COVID-19 on how students socialize and interact with a public space, neither author included that as a potential variable. Webber (2024) conceded that the pandemic caused individuals to feel a need to build community, but this was their only mention of COVID-19. Though this study's proposed focus is not specifically on the influence of pandemic protocols on how students collectively build community, it is worth consideration when examining participant responses. Inman's (2023) findings suggested that the student union was beneficial but also noted the importance of further research on student unions and their impact on students' experiences. Webber's (2024) data indicated that student unions were effective in building and maintaining community. While the results from all studies were positive, they shared one weakness: most researchers' assessments of effective design on college campuses were based on how the majority-identified population experienced the student union.

This concern with participant selection is common in research on college spaces/places. Most researchers who examine undergraduate/college environment interactions focus on how the masses connect with spaces/places on campus. When Cuyjet (2010) examined inclusive practices for minority-identified students, they argued that most research considers the majority population's reflections of a place to determine its success. Therefore, minority-identified populations' experiences might not be considered. Similar majority-identified participant inclusion can be seen in other scholarship focusing on assessing effective design on college campuses. Wilner et al. (1973) discussed applying an ecosystem model to designing campus spaces, focusing on how most students interacted with classrooms and other campus areas. Minority-identified students and their possibly different experiences within spaces were not considered. Strange and Banning (2015) briefly considered minority-identified students in their chapter "Promoting Inclusion and Safety." By segregating these students to a chapter about how to include them, the authors potentially suggested an othering of these populations, which also illustrated their historical exclusion in higher education. The limitations of these sources demonstrate the flaw illustrated by Cuyjet (2010), that assessment is based primarily on the larger majority, who may not share the needs and wants of historically marginalized populations.

Student Unions as Third Places. Of these four spaces, the student union may be the most akin to the third place. Students, faculty, staff, and other individuals are all equal within the union (except for union employees); the environment is casual and meant to evoke socialization; some users can be considered to be regulars; and they offer food and drink (some even offer alcohol via a bar, which adds a tavern function) (Clapp, 2020; Inman, 2023; McDowell & Higbee, 2014; Oldenburg, 1989). The student union was created to support student societies through a physical location where they could collaborate. However, as institutions began to enroll more students, these institutionally supported spaces functioned as a way to build community for the students who did not belong to a club or society (Inman, 2023; McDowell & Higbee, 2014; Smyth, 2016; Webber, 2024).

Many spaces on college campuses fit almost all of these criteria (Banning et al., 2010; Mallon, 2015). Most attract strangers with welcoming appearances, and many have periods when they are closed. The other criteria are met by the student union, dining halls, residence halls, and/or culture centers (Banning et al., 2010; Mallon, 2015; Smyth, 2016; Stave, 2020). One would assume that these spaces are sufficient as third places; however, this is not always the case.

Findings are inconclusive regarding the success of on-campus public spaces (e.g., the student union, dining hall, residence hall, and library) becoming third places (Banning et al., 2010; Camputaro, 2018; Stave, 2020). Banning et al. (2010) reported that in their study, almost 80% of participants used off-campus third places. However, Stave (2020) and Webber (2024) argued that their participants said that while they went to off-campus third places, they preferred on-campus spaces. Stave (2020) speculated this was due to the differences in the sites, as Stave's (2020) site was a smaller, religious, private institution, while Banning et al.'s (2010) was not; however, Webber's (2024) site was more like Banning et al.'s (2010), which suggested that site type might not be the reason for the different finding. Other research showed that there may be additional variables that explained this potential contradiction. The COVID-19 epidemic occurred between the two papers' publications. Though Stave's (2020) paper was published early in the pandemic, the effects of mandatory lockdowns limited students' ability to access their third

places, which could have influenced their desire to leave their homes (Huggins, 2022). Additionally, Camputaro (2018) found that a student union helped undergraduate students find smaller "sub-communities" (p. 87) for socialization and connection. Therefore, the on-campus space was essential in some participants' experiences of building community, but others might have found other third places (possibly off-campus) where they felt more of a sense of belonging and community. Finally, Stave (2020) reported that the third place served as a space to maintain the institution's goal of community building through campus traditions. If a student finds these traditions to be inclusive, they are likely to experience the related spaces as welcoming. However, if an institution's traditions exclude specific populations, students who share that identity might perceive that they are not welcome in that space.

Culture Centers: Minority-Identified Public Spaces and Their Influences on Sense of Place on College Campus. Minority-identified students have traditionally wanted public spaces where their cultures and identities were celebrated. These students desired to build places for themselves that would feel like their family homes, have staff they could connect with, and be welcoming to individuals who shared that same background, as Turner (1994) learned when they examined sense of belonging in college students who identified as People of Color in the early 1990s. The LGBTQ+ culture center of today is a result of the creation of minority-identified student culture centers in the 1960s. Thus, it is important to understand how activists' historic efforts to create minority-identified student culture centers. Within this section, I examine the history of minority-identified culture centers and their potential as third places.

Culture centers arose from these needs and, despite arguments against them, have remained significant places for minority-identified students (Hefner, 2002; KU Libraries, n.d.-a; Patton, 2005, 2006a; Tatum, 2025). Patton (2005) explained that Black students in the 1960s demanded an institutionally supported space where they could find community, see their culture celebrated through décor, and meet with staff knowledgeable about their culture. As time passed, changes were made to ensure students continued to find the place useful, though some alterations were considered unnecessary (Hefner, 2002). To understand how LGBTQ+ culture centers were

formed, it is important first to understand the history of minority-identified student culture centers.

History of Culture Centers. From their creation, institutions of higher education provided a way for students to connect and network with their peers, building relationships that would support students while they were in college and beyond (Vine, 2007). Student unions first came into existence in the late 1890s and early 1900s (Inman, 2023). However, these institutions were designed for majority-identified students and were not integrated by minority-identified students until the 1960s (Lavin & Hyllegard, 2007). As more minority-identified students attended PWIs, concerns about their ability to feel a sense of belonging arose (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Noble, 2022; Soriano, 2022; Turner, 1994). No matter the decade, minority-identified students from all backgrounds voiced anxiety about being able to be themselves and celebrate their cultures without being judged by White, cis, straight, and able-bodied peers (Cheesman et al., 2008; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Noble, 2022; Patton, 2005; Saia, 2019; Stewart, 2005).

To address these concerns about belonging in PWIs and celebrating minority-identified students' cultures, activists pushed for safe spaces where students could learn about their cultures, receive support as they navigated a new environment, and connect with peers from similar backgrounds (Aguilar-Hernández et al., 2021; Goodman et al., 2025; Lozano, 2010; Patton, 2005, 2006b; Rose-Mockry, 2015; Saia, 2019; J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015). These spaces, often referred to as cultural, identity, and/or affinity centers, became commonplace on college campuses, though some considered their presence controversial (Aguilar-Hernández et al., 2021; Hefner, 2002).

Undergraduate students have found these spaces to be an effective way to connect to their peers and feel a sense of belonging. Students reported that centers provide ways for them to feel pride in their identity, find community, become leaders in their institutions, and see that they matter (Patton, 2006a; Saia, 2019). Students of many historically marginalized populations regularly described these spaces as having home-like qualities, which they struggled to locate in

other areas of campus (Patton, 2006b; Princes, 1994; Rose-Mockry, 2024; J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015; Turner, 1994; Welch, 2009). These students voiced their appreciation for media and visual signage relevant to their cultures and experiences (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco Reyes, 2020; Patton, 2006b; Princes, 1994; Welch, 2009). Art and color, used to illustrate history of students' cultures and the center, were mentioned repeatedly as a way that many minority-identified students found comfort in their places (Andrade, 2018; Lozano, 2010; Richmond, 2012; Young, 2005). These experiences are significant given that student unions are often decorated in a way to evoke past campus traditions (Inman, 2023; Janisz, 2014). These traditions, though, might not be viewed as inclusive to all students, especially those who belong to historically marginalized populations that were originally excluded from PWIs.

Culture centers also offer essential services and resources. These initially included computers and internet connections, typically inaccessible to most of the population using the space in the 1980s and 1990s, and have evolved to incorporate other services, such as expensive design software and connections to legal experts knowledgeable in immigration issues (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Lozano, 2010; Princes, 1994). Some remain the same, such as free printing.

Criticisms of these centers include concerns that participating students will avoid connecting to peers who do not share their identity, that students who do not have that identity cannot use the space, and that they only serve as a social venue (Hefner, 2002; Patton, 2006a). These might suggest that establishing small groups of users will have a negative effect on building community, yet Camputaro (2018) found the opposite: students experienced positive relationships when they were around a smaller number of their peers. This suggested that there is a need for spaces for smaller groups—such as historically marginalized populations—to use as their third places.

A concern of culture centers was how they addressed intersectionality. The original Black culture centers were designed to recognize and support students who had that specific minority identity and did not incorporate other identities (Patton, 2005; Princes, 1994). Many students experienced a lack of recognition of their other identities in these centers and thus did not feel

comfortable sharing their entire identity with others in the center (Cox, 2024; Harris & Patton, 2017; McCoy, 2018). This was especially true for students who identified as People of Color and LGBTQ+, as illustrated by McCoy (2018) and Cox (2024). Both researchers learned that students with both identities often faced racism in LGBTQ+ environments and homophobia/transphobia in Black environments. One option to address these concerns is through the creation of multicultural centers; however, historically, these have not solved concerns of intersectionality. Activists argued that those centers cannot meet the specific needs of students who belong to a specific minority identity; by attempting to appeal to all, they were unable to support the centers' users (Hefner, 2002; Patton, 2010b; Princes, 1994). Currently, culture center staff are encouraged to address these concerns about intersectionality by incorporating intersectionality practices to help their users feel welcomed and valued in the space, including collaborating with other culture centers to ensure students' various and diverse concerns are addressed (Cox, 2024; Harris & Patton, 2017; Jennrich & Kowalski-Braun, 2014; McCoy, 2018; McShay, 2017).

Despite this criticism, it is evident that minority-identified students find these centers valuable. Though students experienced frustrations about aspects of culture centers, they did not argue against their overall existence (Hefner, 2002; Patton, 2006a, 2010b; Saia, 2019). To the contrary, students regularly advocated for institutionally supported places that valued and celebrated their identity (Boos, 2024; Green, 2022; KU Libraries, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Patton, 2005, 2010b; Rose-Mockry, 2015; Young, 1986, 2005). Therefore, understanding why the students find these places to be so essential is key to comprehending why they must remain on college campuses.

Culture Centers as Third Places. Culture centers functioned as an academic third place where students, faculty, and staff came together as equals, instead of as professionals and students. The argument for culture centers as effective third places was supported by evidence from multiple studies: participants shared that they found community and connection, all of which are components of successful third places, in culture centers (Cheesman et al., 2008; Lucas et al., 2024; Patton, 2006b; Saia, 2019; Soriano, 2022; Welch, 2009). Students from across the

United States stated that they found the culture center to be a place where they felt attachment to the center, its staff, and their peers. They experienced ownership over the center and enjoyed using resources, studying, and socializing with peers. Students regularly used language related to family and home when describing their experiences in these spaces (Patton, 2006b; J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015; Welch, 2009). Though there was always room for improvement in centers, it is evident from the decades of research on culture centers that these facilities functioned as successful third places even as their users graduated and left the institutions. Students still find these spaces beneficial towards their growth as individuals, students, and professionals. Therefore, the centers are still worthy of examination to see how students make meaning and purpose within them.

LGBTQ+ Culture Centers. Until the 1960s, LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff—or those who were suspected of having that identity—were at risk of expulsion by their institutions (Dilley, 2002; Rose-Mockry, 2015). One of Dilley's (2002) participants, who attended college in the 1940s, reported seeing students, staff, and faculty who were perceived to be LGBTQ+ fired or expelled from his institution. From these experiences, this participant concluded that he needed to keep his sexual identity secret, or else he would also be expelled. This conclusion was shared by other students, faculty, and staff in higher education; as they connected socially and romantically, they labored to keep these relationships secret to maintain their academic statuses (S. Marine, 2011; Rankin et al., 2019). During the 1950s, institutional responses changed from punishment. Instead, medical professionals perceived nonheterosexuality as a mental health concern that required treatment. Institutions continued surveillance operations to identify LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff until the 1990s (Dilley, 2002). Despite this adversity, university staff worked to help LGBTQ+ undergraduate students find belonging at their institutions, including creating safe spaces where the students could be themselves, see their identities valued, and find community with peers who shared their identity (Coley et al., 2025; Sanlo, 2000; Sanlo et al., 2002).

The two earliest centers were founded at Columbia University in 1969 and the University

of Michigan in 1971 (Dilley, 2002; Jeffries & Boyd, 2021; Sanlo, 2000). A few more were established in the 1980s, but the majority were founded in the 1990s due a desire to protect students, staff, and faculty from increased incidents of reported homophobic and transphobic violence (S. Marine, 2011; Sanlo, 2000; Sanlo et al., 2002; J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015). Simultaneously, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force created a subgroup, the Campus Organizing Project, to assist higher education professionals and students as they worked to meet the needs of the LGBTQ+ population at their institutions. This smaller subgroup determined that LGBTQ+ culture center directors would benefit from becoming a collective unit. After many meetings, the National Consortium of Directors of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources in Higher Education was founded; it is now known as the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2024; Sanlo et al., 2002).

Many researchers in the late 1990s and early 2000s cited the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard as their reason to document the history of LGBTQ+ students and their attempts to make campuses more inclusive. Shepard was a student at the University of Wyoming who identified as gay. In 1998, he was murdered by two men he met at a bar. The men mentioned that his sexual orientation was a motive for killing him. Awareness of the hate crime spread across the US, alerting many to the dangers encountered by LGBTQ+ college students (Fine, 2012; Sanlo et al., 2002; Schermele, 2023). Sanlo et al. (2002) began their text *Our Place on Campus*—one of the first published works on LGBTQ+ culture centers—by discussing how Shepard's murder was yet another reminder of what their LGBTQ+ students had to live with. Dilley (2002) began and ended their history of institutional reactions to LGBTQ+ students with a discussion of Shepard's murder and how the University of Wyoming initially responded to the news. The university's first action was to remind others that the murder was committed by non-students and occurred off-campus:

> The fact that it happened at all, to one of its own students, was less important than removing violence and homosexuality itself from the university's province. It is

> important, I think, to remember and reflect upon that, along with the tragedy of Matthew Shepard, a student killed because of his sexuality. (Dilley, 2002, p. 429)

The murder and the University of Wyoming's response, as well as other local and national tragedies, have reinforced many higher education professionals' work to continue maintaining programs to support LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff (Sandoval, 2016). As Sanlo (2000), Feldman et al. (2026), and Lemerand and Duran (2024) have argued, colleges and universities needed to take care of the LGBTQ+ undergraduate population. Such institutional support was necessary as this population was more likely to face identity-based harassment and less likely to have familial support, leading to increased mental health problems (Yang & Stolzenberg, 2025). One way to do this was through supporting LGBTQ+ culture centers where students could find community and assistance from peers and staff.

By 2015, there were over 150 LGBTQ+ culture centers at universities and colleges in the United States (J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015); as of 2021, there were at least 250 (Campen, 2021). LGBTQ+ students found their needs met in their culture centers (Coley et al., 2025; Damschroder, 2013; Noble, 2022; Ritchie & Banning, 2001). Ritchie and Banning (2001) described the early LGBTQ+ culture centers as places where students could find support in a hostile climate, learn more about important figures, and discover safe resources and offices on- and off-campus. Similar to other culture centers, the services offered by LGBTQ+ centers grew as staff learned more and secured more institutional support. Noble (2022) found that notable components included the physical space, which-—similarly to Patton's (2006b) findings-—was described as a welcoming, comfortable home where users respected others' identities. Students who became regular users of their LGBTQ+ culture center shared experiences of connecting with peers and staff, building community, and making networking connections (Noble, 2022). Centers also provided a safe space where LGBTQ+ students reflected and responded to national tragedies, such as the Pulse nightclub shooting, under the care of trained and sympathetic staff (Sandoval, 2016).

As Damschroder (2013) demonstrated in their findings, LGBTQ+ students who regularly

participated in their LGBTQ+ culture centers grew academically, professionally, and personally. Damschroder's (2013) participants revealed that they were more resilient, had a stronger sense of social justice, and were more professional because of regular participation in their culture center. Noble's (2022) participants were more aware of how to self-advocate, how to locate academic, fiscal, and health resources, and how to effectively navigate academic, professional, and legal spheres. These students' experiences within their culture center had a positive impact on who they were as individuals, current students, and future professionals.

As anti-DEI legislation has passed throughout the US, LGBTQ+ culture centers have come under scrutiny (Coley et al., 2025; Goodman et al., 2025). A significant number were closed due to state and federal legislation, prompting the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals to create The Center Closures Project (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2025). Individuals affiliated with LGBTQ+ culture centers were asked to share specific centers that were in danger of closing or had already closed; results have not been made available as of the publication of this study. These closings have a significant impact on both the LGBTQ+ students who had used the centers and those who are new to the university. When Sandoval (2016) interviewed LGBTQ+ center staff after the 2016 Pulse shooting, one participant explained that without institutionally-supported offices, students became support and resource providers, roles that staff previously held. Interviewees shared that students sought out off-campus places to find the community that they once had on campus. Though these places had benefits, they were limited to those who could leave campus and, in some cases, were over 21 and felt comfortable in an environment that sold alcohol. Many institutions with closed LGBTQ+ culture centers had off-campus programming as seen in Table 2.3.

A significant fear held by many who work with LGBTQ+ undergraduate students was that the loss of on-campus culture centers is a first step to eliminating all LGBTQ+ inclusive services or language at public universities (Cliburn, 2024; Coley et al., 2025; Goodman et al., 2025). A University of Nebraska Omaha alumnx said, "I'm starting to think, what are the next steps? What are they going to cut next" (Hegarty, 2024, para. 14)? Others echoed this concern, adding that

the next cuts could be made to other culture centers and resources designed for those populations (Goodman et al., 2025; Rasura, 2024). Yet despite these warnings, many remained hopeful that they would see the return of culture centers, including LGBTQ+ culture centers (Hegarty, 2024; Key, 2023).

Possible Collaborations to Provide Safe and Welcoming Spaces for LGBTQ+ Undergraduate Students

As access to LGBTQ+ culture centers becomes increasingly more difficult, institutions of higher education will need to address concerns about how students experience this loss (Coley et al., 2025; Goodman et al., 2025). Students will still need services provided by these centers, which can include, but are not limited to, access to legal and medical knowledge regarding gender-affirming care; affordable clothing options; understanding of the housing accommodation process; staff knowledgeable about student rights in this specific context; and celebratory, community-building events such as seasonal potlucks and Lavender Graduations. Due to anti-DEI legislation, many universities have limited opportunities for collaboration on campus to support their LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. Given that concern, it is also imperative to consider potential off-campus collaborations.

On-Campus Collaborations. There are a few ways that recently closed LGBTQ+ culture centers can collaborate with other offices to support their students. Ultimately, the current situation with anti-DEI legislation means that campus collaborations are tricky to implement while remaining legally in compliance. One significant concern is that the older LGBTQ+ undergraduates will become a resource for younger peers, despite not being appropriately trained or compensated for their work (Sandoval, 2016). Therefore, administrators and staff need to look for ways to collaborate with others to provide the services needed by this population.

One option for collaboration is through shared interests with other offices on campus. As demonstrated by multiple researchers, collaborating with other on-campus programs has benefitted culture centers and their students (Cox, 2024; Jennrich & Kowalski-Braun, 2014; Noble, 2022; Saia, 2019). Noble (2022) argued that collaborations were most effective when both

offices could determine shared goals, providing the example of safe residence halls for LGBTQ+ students, staffed by professionals with training on supporting this population. Cox (2024), Saia (2019), and Jennrich and Kowalski-Braun (2014)—who all researched different minority populations on campus—illustrated that for any student with multiple minoritized identities, collaborations with other culture centers helped staff create inclusive, welcoming environments that were prepared for individuals with intersecting identities. Campus offices and programs that could be considered for collaboration include residence halls, academic resource centers, and clubs and centers for majors, interests, and careers. However, there are concerns regarding the longevity of such institutionally supported collaborations given federal and state anti-DEI legislation (Bryant & Appleby, 2025; S. Wood, 2025).

Off-Campus Collaborations. Off-campus collaborations are another option for supporting LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. As Sandoval (2016) reported, if students do not have culture centers on campus, they will find off-campus places to connect with their peers. Working with these places, programs, and community members benefits students and the centers. Sanlo et al. (2002) discussed concerns about "town and gown" conflicts, arguing that activists in both areas sometimes felt animosity towards their counterparts. However, they claimed that such a division lessens the support that everyone can offer LGBTQ+ students. Given that concern, considering "town" options for collaboration is necessary to support this population.

One way to collaborate is through Pride parades. In their section on making LGBTQ+ culture centers more visible, Sanlo et al. (2002) advocated for the center's participation in these community activities. By collaborating in community events, staff can introduce LGBTQ+ undergraduate students to older LGBTQ+ mentors and help them access community resources. Joining in Pride events allows the culture center staff to connect with "town" professionals who may offer services that could benefit their students, thereby ensuring that opportunities are not lost out of ignorance.

Cities often have off-campus organizations that can provide support for LGBTQ+ individuals, including college students. In Table 2.3, I provided a list of local support programs

and offices for the students at institutions mentioned in Table 1.1.

Table 2.3

Institutions and Local, Non-University Affiliated Support for LGBTQ+ Individuals

State	Institution	Local Support
Florida	Florida Atlantic University	PRISM is an online-only option providing resources and assistance for LGBTQ+ youth. The address of the non-profit is listed as Boca Raton, which is where Florida Atlantic University is located (PRISM, 2025).
	University of North Florida	JASMYN is a physical space that provides resources and education to support minors and young adults up to 29 years old (JASMYN, n.d.).
Idaho	Idaho State University	All Under One Roof LGBT Center provides resources and education to individuals (All Under One Roof LGBT Youth Center, n.d.).
	University of Idaho	Inland Oasis provides individuals with support and education tailored to the LGBTQ+ population. They are currently building a community center (Inland Oasis, n.d.).
Kansas	Emporia State University	Just As You Are Rainbow Sanctuary supports LGBTQ+ individuals by providing community and faith-based support. Individuals are not required to belong to a specific religion. The physical space is open for three hours a week (Rainbow Sanctuary, 2025; Trahoon, 2024).
	Kansas State University	True Colors provides support to individuals up to 24 years old. The physical location was closed in October 2025 (True Colors, 2025a, 2025b).
	University of Kansas	Lawrence PRIDE is an online-only organization that hosts social, educational, and community building events tailored for LGBTQ+ individuals (Lawrence PRIDE, 2023).

State	Institution	Local Support
Nebraska	University of Nebraska Lincoln	Different offices in and near Lincoln provide a range of services and programming for LGBTQ+ individuals, including Nebraska AIDS Project and Winslow's Wardrobe (University of Nebraska Lincoln, 2025).
	University of Nebraska Omaha	Omaha ForUs has a physical space open for a few hours on six days of the week. It provides support, education, and community building events designed for LGBTQ+ individuals (Omaha ForUs, 2025).
Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma	Norman Pride is an online-only organization that facilitates events to help education and support LGBTQ+ individuals, including the yearly Pride parade (Norman Pride, 2023).
Texas	University of Texas Arlington	Arlington, TX, does not have an LGBTQ+ community center.
	University of Texas Austin	QWELL Community Foundation supports LGBTQ+ individuals by connecting them with welfare, legal, and medical resources and support. They are building a physical space (QWELL Community Foundation, 2021).
	University of Houston	Four religious organizations partnered to provide support for LGBTQ+ students (Key, 2023).
Utah	University of Utah	Utah Pride Center has a physical office that is open on weekday evenings. It provides programming to support and educate LGBTQ+ individuals (Utah Pride Center, n.d.).
	Utah State University	Bear River Region LGBTQ+ Community Coalition supports the LGBTQ+ community by providing education and support. They host events but do not appear to have a permanent physical space (Bear River Region LGBTQ+ Community Coalition, n.d.).

Ideally, an LGBTQ+ culture center would be able to collaborate with off-campus partners like those in Table 2.3 to serve more individuals. Though off-campus organizations are a better

alternative compared to untrained undergraduate students, they cannot serve as a substitute for institutionally supported LGBTQ+ culture centers. As illustrated in Table 2.3, many do not have physical spaces; if they do, their hours may be limited due to staff or location constraints. Additionally, though they often offer programming tailored to the age range of traditional undergraduates, they also serve young adults who are not in college. Using them as a substitute for on-campus LGBTQ+ culture centers would add to the off-campus staff's caseloads without increasing their operating budgets. There is also the transportation issue to consider. If an off-campus organization has a physical space that is inaccessible without a car or public transportation, LGBTQ+ undergraduate students will be less likely to visit and receive services. Consequently, maintaining both on-campus offices and off-campus organizations and partnerships between the two are ideal to serve these populations equitably and effectively.

Summary

Within this chapter, I have provided a literature review that discusses topics related to place attachment and the creation of place from what was once simply space. I discussed the history of person-environment studies and campus ecology research, incorporating explanations of stress and coping. I included information about on-campus third places such as student unions and culture centers. I discussed the history of LGBTQ+ culture centers and the unique social, legal, and medical resources they provide students. In the next chapter, I will provide my study's methods, explaining my theoretical framework and positionality to show how they support my use of transcendental phenomenology. I will discuss how I collected and analyzed data to answer my research question of how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I explain how my methods will help me answer the research question. I begin by discussing my epistemological and ontological views, and positionality statement to illustrate my perspective of how individuals experience events. I then explain how I used qualitative, phenomenological methodology to conduct my study. I provide an explanation of how participants were recruited and selected, followed by discussions of my data collection and analysis processes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduates who relied on academic, professional, and personal services provided by their institutions' LGBTQ+ culture centers experienced the loss of those centers due to anti-DEI legislation. My participants had become accustomed to the support of these centers and their staff, often finding them to be an institutionally supported third place. When their LGBTQ+ culture centers were lost, I assumed they would have a range of responses to this event that disrupted their senses of place attachment. In my study, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how they experienced the loss of their centers.

Research Question

How do LGBTQ+ undergraduates who regularly (at least four times a semester) visited an on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center experience losing the center due to anti-DEI state legislation?

Epistemological and Ontological Views

I believe in a constructivist paradigm, which argues that each person constructs their reality based on what they have observed and experienced and that these realities are valid (Bazeley, 2021). My past as a creative nonfiction writer helped me determine that one's past has a significant influence on how they perceive reality. There is no objective reality; even one event can be recalled differently by the participants based on what they have experienced in the past and their different identities. Those identities are comprised of both innate (what we are born with) and acquired (what we determine later in life) perspectives. For example, when a person enters a

space, they bring both the shared knowledge and their perspective to the area (which allows them to begin to feel a sense of place attachment, thus turning the space into a place). Therefore, LGBTQ+ undergraduate students can determine a culture center to be a student-focused space and place for socializing, studying, and learning due to their past experiences with such spaces, as well as what they have observed from others (both in life and via other media such as films or books).

When a student enters a culture center, they recognize it as that type of institutionally supported space through the name, the objects within the space (e.g., comfortable furniture, art that resembles their culture[s], resources), the objects absent from the space (e.g., classroom desks), and the activities performed within it by other students, faculty, and staff (S. B. Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Patton, 2006b; Welch, 2009). A student's first impression of this space and place influences if they choose to return to use the space, connect with others, and contribute to the meaning-making occurring within (Patton, 2006b; Richmond, 2012; Toya, 2011; Turner, 1994; Welch, 2009). A space can be designed for use as a third place; however, if the students do not find it appealing and congregate in a different third place, it will only remain a space. Therefore, while a space might be called a culture or affinity center and might have the items within to define it as such, students' experiences could demonstrate that it does not serve that purpose for the population. Thus, both the lived experience and the person's memory and language used in the retelling of that memory are significant to understand the individual's reality.

Positionality

Positionality in this context refers to how the individual's perspectives (from their context and prior experiences) and their opinions influence their research process (Foote & Gau Bartell, 2011; Holmes, 2020). I identify as a financially secure, White, queer, non-binary person with an invisible disability. My historically marginalized identities are overlooked at times, though I do not pass as straight and cis as much as I did 10 years ago. Part of my ability to fit in more privileged circles stems from my parents, who earned bachelor's degrees before my birth. Due to

their educational backgrounds, I was able to easily access resources and tools that allowed me to succeed in high school and college.

While I shared some identities with my participants, my role as a full-time staff member allowed me to be an outsider in this research. Though I had participated in different events held by various cultural centers, I did so as a professional staff member with the understanding that while I was welcome in the centers, their primary purposes were to support students. I also entered with my identity as a staff member in mind, always remembering that I also represented my employer. Both of these understandings influenced the way I behaved in the place and interacted with others. Undergraduate students do not have to keep their professional identity in mind when they enter public university spaces designed primarily for their use. Therefore, while I was familiar with both centers, my actions differed significantly from my participants' experiences in those environments. These differences helped as I attempted to remain impartial as I conducted my study.

After five years as an adjunct English instructor, I transitioned to working with historically marginalized populations in student affairs in 2017. My students openly identified as being first-generation, having high financial need, having a disability, and/or belonging to a historically marginalized racial/ethnic population. To build trust with students and colleagues, I was open about my identities and the ways they influenced how I viewed the world. My work led me to become a champion of programs that support less-privileged undergraduates, as I personally witnessed individual student successes due to these programs' efforts. Though I have not worked directly for LGBTQ+ culture centers, I often saw students improving personally, academically, and professionally due to participating in the centers' activities and opportunities. This influenced my belief that these specific spaces could be extremely effective when staffed by welcoming professionals and supported by their institutions.

It is also important to acknowledge that my work was conducted at public research PWIs. One of these was a land-grant university, which has unique issues with the oppression of Indigenous peoples (R. Lee & Ahtone, 2020). Even though I supported initiatives that assist

minority-identified undergraduates, my presence at these universities helped maintain practices that have historically discriminated against these populations (Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019). I believe it is important to have individuals working within the system as well as outside of it; however, I was also able to conduct this study due to my full-time university position and its benefits, including but not limited to tuition assistance.

Methodology

In this section, I explain why I chose to conduct a qualitative, phenomenological study. Using qualitative methods was the appropriate choice for achieving my study's purpose. In their introductory text on qualitative research, Rossman and Rallis (1998) clarified that the purpose of qualitative research is to "lear[n] about some facet of the social world" (p. 6). This is supported by Leavy (2017), who wrote that conducting qualitative research helps scholars better comprehend "the meanings people ascribe to their lives—to activities, situations, circumstances, people, and objects" (p. 124). In their text on conducting effective qualitative research, Braun and Clark (2013) expanded on this explanation by providing a list of characteristics unique to qualitative research; these qualities aligned with my research study. By seeking to understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduates cope with the loss of their centers, I showed that my purpose meets several of these characteristics: I used words as data, demonstrated comprehension that the participants' context is significant, and incorporated a small number of participants who will generate significant amounts of data through their interviews (Braun & Clark, 2013). Given these explanations, a qualitative method was best to help me answer my study's research question.

Phenomenology

For this study, I used Moustakas' (1994) guide to conducting transcendental phenomenological research. Moustakas (1994) clarified that transcendental phenomenology differed from phenomenology because the former only included the object or event, while the latter incorporated the participant's reflection on that object or event. Transcendental phenomenology requires a researcher to collect data on individuals' interactions with others in the place, as well as the non-human objects housed in the location (S. Ahmed, 2006, 2010).

Generally, phenomenological researchers "seek to understand the deep meaning of individual's [*sic*] experiences and how he or she articulates [*sic*] these experiences" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 72).

Experiences, though, cannot be understood without consideration of how the individual has interacted with the place and its objects, which can refer to the physical non-human furniture and the place's mission and beliefs (S. Ahmed, 2010). S. Ahmed (2010) argued that what "we 'do do' affects what we 'can do'" (p. 252), demonstrating that experience is directly tied to the place where a person exists. If a person's place is forcibly made non-existent, they lose an influence on their experiences. If the person does not know that this place previously existed, they may not have the same emotional response as the person who grew used to the place and then experienced its loss. To fully understand the impact of disruption of place attachment, a researcher needs to consider how the place has facilitated experiences that influenced the individual's physical and mental states (Brown & Perkins, 1992). With the loss of the LGBTQ+ culture center, the undergraduate has lost a place that prioritizes, through non-human objects and objectives, community building, inclusivity, and cultural pride. Given my study's purpose and connection to place attachment, phenomenology was an apt genre of qualitative research.

Transcendental phenomenology was the logical method to use, given my epistemological and ontological views. In addition to a theoretical framework, it was also considered a method (Peoples, 2021; van Manen, 2023). Conducting phenomenological scholarship requires the researcher to observe the experience as if they were encountering it for the first time, without preconceived beliefs to influence their perspective of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2023). It is a way to gain understanding of an event before the individual reflects on it, which thus allows the researcher more opportunity to understand the phenomenon as it was experienced (van Manen, 2023). Yet while this was optimal, it was not necessarily realistic. People reflect on a phenomenon very soon after experiencing it, and researchers are not always able to remove their preconceptions from the phenomenon. These concerns are why many who use phenomenology as a research method prioritize the participants' reflections as well as the

objective phenomenon (van Manen, 2023). I took multiple steps in my study to address these concerns, which are included below in the relevant sections.

When using phenomenology as a method, the researcher needs to be able to perform Epoche, Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. During Epoche, the researcher must ". . . set aside our prejudgements [*sic*], biases, and preconceived ideas about things" to consider the data objectively (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The next step is to conduct Phenomenological Reduction, during which a researcher considers all content from the participant to be equal (Horizontaling) before determining what is related to the focus (Bracketing), determining what themes are present (Clustering the Horizons into Themes), and drafting the description (Organizing the Horizons and Themes into a Coherent Textural Description). Once the textual description has been determined, the researcher moves to Imaginative Variation (the process of determining meanings) (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2023). In the Data Analysis section, I provided a more specific explanation of how this study's data were analyzed using these steps. But before I could analyze the data, I needed to recruit and select participants, which I describe in the following section.

Participant Selection

My participants were undergraduate students at public four-year PWIs who went to their LGBTQ+ culture center at least four times a semester until anti-DEI legislation forced the centers' closures. Due to this eligibility requirement, participants were required to have accessed their university campus; therefore, online-only students were unable to participate. I used both direct emails and social media messaging to recruit participants.

In my recruitment email, which is located in Appendix A, I disclosed my identities to demonstrate my desire for transparency and to begin building trust with the potential participants. I was transparent about my background to ensure that everyone involved was aware of my potential implicit biases and values. By being explicit, I addressed concerns about accidentally furthering oppressive views on my participants (Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019).

I initially contacted faculty, staff, and leaders of student organizations to ask if they would

share my information with potential participants. Due to the sensitivity of my topic and vulnerability of the population, I had to demonstrate that I was trustworthy to those individuals who serve as informal gatekeepers to potential participants. According to Seidman (2013), informal gatekeepers are individuals in a population who are respected by others within that group. Seidman (2013) wrote, "If that person participates in a project, then it must be okay; if he or she doesn't, then the group feels there must be a good reason for not doing so" (p. 39). Gaining the trust of informal gatekeepers was essential to connecting with potential participants.

Given the current anti-DEI climate, approval from informal gatekeepers was even more important, as they were likely to be protective of their students and suspicious of outsiders' motivations. I chose to provide participants access to my LinkedIn page so they could see my previous work history and understand my perspectives. Sharing my positionality with the participants helped ensure that our relationship as researcher/participant remained ethical and also helped to build trust between us (Yip, 2024). Interested potential participants were provided with a survey to complete if they met the eligibility criteria and were interested in participating. Additionally, as I interviewed participants, I asked them to share my information with other individuals who might be interested in participating in this study.

Since the study's purpose was to gain an understanding of how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experienced the loss of their culture centers, purposeful sampling was the appropriate option. I intended to comprehend how they perform meaning-making; therefore, maximal variation sampling was the best choice (Creswell, 2012). Participants were required to self-identify as LGBTQ+ undergraduates who regularly spent time in their LGBTQ+ culture centers prior to their closings. While Oldenburg (1989) did not clarify how many visits to a third place were required to make one a regular, I chose to define it as someone who has at least four visits a semester. This number suggested that, on average, a participant would have visited the center at least once a month.

My initial goal was to interview 12 participants to ensure data saturation. By including multiple participants, I proposed that I would be able to gain a better understanding of how

LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of their culture centers. As illustrated in van Manen's (2023) dice and Ahmed's (2006) table, one individual cannot see all sides of the object at one time; therefore, one participant's experience was not representative of how all LGBTQ+ undergraduates experienced the space. Collecting data from multiple participants would provide me with a stronger understanding of how they experienced the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers.

However, I was unable to conduct interviews with 12 participants. Eleven individuals responded to the email. Of those 11, six were eligible and chose to participate, two chose not to participate due to mental health concerns, one did not respond, and two had not visited their institution's LGBTQ+ culture centers prior to the closings. This sample size fits within multiple researchers' arguments of what number of participants was appropriate for a phenomenological research study. Moustakas (1994) argued for five to 25 participants. In their mixed methods review of phenomenological research quality and sample sizes, Bartholomew et al. (2021) found that phenomenological studies with five to 10 participants were of higher quality than those with fewer than five or more than 10. Daniel (2012) argued that phenomenological research typically included six to 10 participants. Therefore, six participants were sufficient to provide rich evidence of the phenomenon.

Direct Email

I used the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professional's 2025 LGBT Map to locate four-year public institutions that had an LGBTQ+ culture center as of the site's last update. I searched for and contacted LGBTQ+ undergraduate student organizations and individual faculty and staff members who were aligned with LGBTQ+ interests through their research and/or service at their institution. I sent emails to faculty and staff at four-year public institutions and asked them to forward my information to students. I also sent emails to student groups associated with LGBTQ+ identities. The recruitment email can be found in Appendix A.

Social Media

I also used social media to contact student, staff, and faculty affiliated with institutions. The recruitment message and graphic can be found in Appendix A. I posted the social media

message and graphic on my personal LinkedIn page and LinkedIn groups such as LGBTQ+ Professionals in Higher Education, LGBT Professionals, and the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals; I also used my personal Facebook to post information and an interest study in Facebook groups associated with LGBTQ+ undergraduate students.

Data Collection

I used phenomenological interviewing methods to collect data. According to Seidman (2013), interviewing is a way to gain an understanding of others' experiences in education and with social issues. By collecting what Seidman (2013) referred to as "in-depth, phenomenological" (p. 14) interviews from participants, I was able to comprehend how they felt about their LGBTQ+ culture centers and how they responded to the losses. This method of using open-ended questions that sought to gain understanding of the person's lived experience aligned with my epistemological and ontological views. It ensured that the participants' knowledge of their experiences was considered credible data and incorporated the participants as fellow researchers in my study.

It can be difficult for participants to participate in the phenomenological interview process as it required them to share their experience separately from their reflection (van Manen, 2023). To address this concern, I followed a modified version of Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interview method, which allowed me to gain a close understanding of each participant's experience with their culture center and how they responded to the loss. Seidman (2013) advocated that the first interview focus on the participant's identity and history; the second on the specific experiences; and the third on how they made meaning of these experiences. One concern with Seidman's (2013) three interview method was the amount of time required by participants; Noble (2022) addressed this by combining the second and third meetings into one and having interviews last approximately 60 minutes as opposed to Seidman's (2013) recommended 90 minutes. Given the success of Noble's (2022) alterations, I followed a similar plan. However, I moved content about the participants' experiences in the LGBTQ+ cultural centers to the first interview. Participants naturally spoke about this topic after discussing how they had been

introduced to the center, and it allowed for more time in the second interview for them to discuss how they experienced the loss of their center.

I scheduled Zoom interviews with eligible and interested participants. Ideally, phenomenological interviews would be conducted in person, in a comfortable space for both interviewer and participant (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 2023). However, in person interviews would have required travel and prevented some individuals from participating. By conducting interviews on Zoom, I ensured that more eligible students were able to contribute.

Another important aspect of the phenomenological interview was the researcher's approachability and connection to the interviewees. Because I focused on emotional moments, I needed to build trust with participants so they were comfortable sharing their experiences (van Manen, 2023). To do this, I took multiple steps to demonstrate that my interest was sincere. Given my privileges and membership in various majority populations, I disclosed my demographic information to my participants. Doing this also assisted me in being self-reflexive about my study and participants. I was transparent about my methods. Each interview began with an overview of the already-signed informed consent form to ensure that my participants fully understood what they had agreed to and allowed them to easily quit the study if they chose.

I provided sample interview questions in Tables 3.1 and 3.2; full interview protocols are in Appendix B. As recommended by Yin (1994), these interview questions were open-ended and designed to be friendly and naïve to gain the participants' trust and collect more detailed data. The questions focused on asking how, rather than why, as how-based questions can elicit more descriptive information and prevent the participant from becoming defensive (Seidman, 2013; Yin, 1994). The questions were also influenced by Noble's (2022) dissertation, given the similarity in topics between our two studies. In the second column in Table 3.1, I have demonstrated how the questions relate to my research question, phenomenology (individual's retelling of experience), and emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies to demonstrate the experience of place attachment and individuals' responses to the disruption of place attachment.

Table 3.1

Sample Questions: Interview One (Focused Life History)

Question	Related frameworks/concepts
How do you describe yourself?	Participant identity
Which identities do you feel are most important in your life? How do they appear in your day-to-day?	Participant identity
Why did you choose to attend [site]? Where do you feel like you belong at [site]?	Place attachment
How did you learn about [LGBTQ+ Culture Center]? Tell me about your first experience with it.	Place attachment; phenomenology
Tell me about your favorite event or activity hosted at the [LGBTQ+ Culture Center]. Why is that your favorite?	Place attachment; phenomenology
How would you describe [LGBTQ+ Culture Center] to a new student?	Place attachment

After conducting the first interview, I scheduled a second to discuss the participants' experiences with their LGBTQ+ culture centers' closings and how they experienced these losses. Table 3.2 includes both sample questions and the related frameworks and concepts.

Table 3.2

Sample Questions: Interview Two (Experiences and Reflections)

Question	Related frameworks/concepts
How do/did you feel when you entered [LGBTQ+ Culture Center] before the closing?	Disruption of place attachment
Who did you connect with at the [LGBTQ+ Culture Center]? Tell me about your experiences with those individuals.	Place attachment
How did you find out about the closing of [LGBTQ+ Culture Center]? What were your first thoughts upon hearing this news?	Disruption of place attachment; emotion-focused coping strategy
How did you respond to the closing of [LGBTQ+ Culture Center]?	Disruption of place attachment; emotion-focused/problem-focused coping strategies

Question	Related frameworks/concepts
How has the closing affected your daily life? How you plan for the future?	Emotion-focused/problem-focused coping strategies

By having two distinct interviews for each participant, I hoped to understand how they had developed senses of place attachment with their LGBTQ+ culture centers and how they coped with the loss of the centers that they once knew.

I recorded these interviews' audio to capture the participants' language and diction choices accurately. Though recording might have caused the participants to self-censor, I believed it was more important to capture their ways of speaking about the place and describing it verbatim than to summarize it via notetaking (Collier & Collier, 1986). As a researcher, my summaries would (purposefully or not) reflect what I deemed to be the important recollections and condense what I perceived to be less important, which would violate my constructivist paradigm. Additionally, maintaining their specific language choices provided another way of understanding their meaning-making process. After cleaning the transcript (removing verbal fillers such as "um" and correcting spelling), I sent the transcript to the participant so they could make additional edits or corrections. Once they had approved their transcript, I began analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

My analysis process consisted of a three-level code map to move from initial coding to shared patterns within interviews and images to final themes (Anfara et al., 2002). I used complete coding and examined the entire transcript of each interview for content related to the research question's topics of experiences of belonging and loss. Experience, according to Polkinghorne's (1989) discussion of phenomenological research methods, encompassed both the individual's perception of the occurring phenomenon and the physical actions happening during it; my initial analysis looked for descriptive content that incorporated both how the individual mentally experienced the events as well as how they physically encountered them. This type of

coding reduced the amount of data, making analysis easier (Braun & Clark, 2013).

To focus my complete coding, I followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method. During the first iteration, I created a second copy of the transcript, where I performed epoche, or bracketing to indicate data relevant to the research purpose and questions (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Creating a second copy ensured that the original transcript was accessible, thus allowing for coding to be altered as additional interviews were conducted (Bazeley, 2021). The first codes were data-derived, or summaries of significant components without researcher interpretations (Braun & Clark, 2013). Using data-derived codes allowed me to maintain my theoretical framework of transcendental phenomenology in the analysis, as that method focused solely on the participants' experiences without interpretation by either the participant or researcher.

Next, I performed horizontaling on my bracketed transcripts to remove content unrelated to my purpose or questions (Moustakas, 1994). After performing horizontaling, I compared the data-derived codes from each transcript to ascertain potential relationships between codes and reveal pattern variables (Anfara et al., 2002; Bazeley, 2021). Through this comparison, I moved from data-derived to researcher-derived codes, which combined the codes and incorporated my perspective (determined through researcher reflections, which are discussed later in this section) (Bazeley, 2021; Braun & Clark, 2013). This second stage required me to summarize and interpret the first stage's data-derived codes, which resulted in me putting the participants' responses into my own words (though I attempted to maintain their diction when possible). Though potentially losing their language in the second stage was a risk, it was necessary to determine how the participants created meaning and purpose in the spaces/places. In the third iteration, I progressed my analysis from researcher-derived codes to potential answers to my research questions. Using the potential answers and my continued researcher reflections, I developed a textural description of the phenomenon.

Participants were included in each step of data collection and analysis, from receiving copies of their transcripts (to check and correct for accuracy) to reviewing drafts of the analyzed

data for their input and perspective. By including my participants in the data collection and analysis processes, I hoped to strengthen my study's credibility.

As I conducted interviews, I also completed researcher reflections. Researcher reflections in general are found to assist with connecting the bracketed items to themes and building the textural description (Moustakas, 1994). Reflections were written immediately following each interview (before correcting transcripts) to ensure that my impressions and questions from the interview were retained. Writing researcher reflections also allowed me to perform generative writing throughout the study. Generative writing has the following benefits: it documents the researcher's current thoughts, provokes innovative ideas, and helps develop existing notions (Sayre, 2023). These reflections helped me examine and compare my evolving codes, themes, and textural descriptions. Additionally, noting new and recurring themes was necessary to determine data saturation, which I was able to document in my researcher reflections (S. K. Ahmed, 2025).

Data saturation occurs when interviews do not produce new information and merely reinforce the existing themes (S. K. Ahmed, 2025). There is no universally agreed upon number of interviews necessary to reach data saturation in qualitative research (S. K. Ahmed, 2025; Bartholomew et al., 2021; Englander, 2012); however, S. K. Ahmed (2025) argued that heterogenous participants might require a larger sample size than homogenous participants. Hennick et al. (2017) determined that data saturation required code saturation and meaning saturation. Code saturation refers to the time when no additional codes are necessary to categorize the data, meaning saturation occurs after the themes are determined and when the researcher can fully grasp the participants' experiences (S. K. Ahmed, 2025). I reached data saturation after interviewing six participants.

Ultimately, my coding methods and researcher reflections helped me determine when I reached data saturation. I aimed to achieve data saturation when my interviews did not collect further information on the interview question categories of phenomenology (individual's retelling of experience), emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies to demonstrate the

experiences of becoming attached to a place and then finding that attachment disrupted.

Summary

Within this chapter, I have provided an explanation of my epistemological and ontological views to illustrate why I chose transcendental phenomenology as my method for this study. Because of my belief in constructivism, using phenomenological interview methods to collect data was the best choice, ensuring that I captured my participants' experiences with using the LGBTQ+ culture centers and then losing them. I discussed how I recruited participants through direct emails and social media posts. Finally, I showed how I planned to analyze my data. In the next chapter, I will illustrate how I used the data analysis methods to determine my results. I will explain the different themes I located, using select excerpts from interview to help demonstrate how I established these results.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my study examining how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of their on-campus LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation. This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews and then analyzed using phenomenological reduction. After horizontalizing the transcripts and removing content unrelated to the research purpose, I input data-derived codes into the first level of a three-level code map. I created the second level through locating patterns between the initial data-driven codes. I used the third stage to determine the final theme of the map. These results help demonstrate how this population felt place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers and then how the disruption of that place attachment affected them.

Presentation of Findings

The following results answer the following research question: How do LGBTQ+ undergraduates who regularly (at least four times a semester) visited an on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center experience losing the center due to anti-DEI state legislation? Analysis of the participants' responses revealed three themes that consistently occurred in their data: the participants felt significant place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture center; the participants had emotional responses to the removal of their LGBTQ+ culture centers; and the participants performed different actions in response to the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers.

Six undergraduates who identified as LGBTQ+ and who had visited their LGBTQ+ culture center at least four times prior to its closing participated in two interviews. To maintain confidentiality, Table 4.1 only includes their pseudonym and pronouns. If a participant used two pronouns, the first has been used in Chapters 4 and 5 as applicable. Participants' identities are described using their language.

Table 4.1

Participants, Pronouns, and Sexual/Gender Identities

Participants	Pronouns	Sexual/Gender Identities
J	he/they	Transgender; Non-Binary; Queer
Jordan	they/she	Aromantic/Asexual
Jota	they/them	Genderqueer; Polyamorous; Pansexual
Phlox	he/they	Transmasculine; Gay; Neurodivergent
Ryan	he/him	Bisexual Trans Man
Zeke	they/them	Non-Binary; Genderqueer; Gay

Theme 1: Participants' Place Attachment to their LGBTQ+ Culture Centers

Participants' place attachment needed to be established to then understand why the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center had such an impact on their emotions and actions. In this section, I provide my code map and then discuss how accessible staff, appealing visuals, safety, and purpose of visits helped participants to develop place attachment. Figure 4.1 demonstrates how the three-level code map was used to determine the first theme:

Figure 4.1: Three-Level Code Map for Theme 1

Cycle 1: Preliminary Codes	Cycle 1 Code Frequency	Cycle 2: Patterns	Cycle 3: Theme
Leveler (Oldenburg, 1986) (everyone is equal, references to staff being approachable)	20	Staff are approachable and available to support, ask questions to, seek help from.	The LGBTQ+ Center was a comfortable, safe place for participants to be themselves, ask questions of staff, engage in social activities with peers, and study.
Staff available	16		
Use of space: asking for help	26		
Good LGBTQ+ resource	28		
I feel safe	5	The LGBTQ+ Culture Center is a safe place and participants feel safe about being open about their LGBTQ+ identities there.	
Safe environment	16		
Safe to be out	2		
LGBT friendly	11		
Art of LGBTQ+ people	7		
Pride flags	4		
Imagery/messaging	2		
Conversation is the main identity	20	Participants go to the LGBTQ+ Culture Center to socialize.	
Use of space: social	54		
Audio/Visual	3		
Club support	8		
Comfortable	6	Participants find the LGBTQ+ Culture Center to be a comfortable place to spend time in.	
Seating	6		
Alive item	2		
Table	2		
Color	2		
Consumables	6		
Use of space: study	9	Participants go to the LGBTQ+ Culture Center to study.	

Accessible Staff. Overall, participants felt that their LGBTQ+ culture center was a comfortable, safe place for participants to be themselves, ask questions of staff, engage in social activities with peers, and study. All of the participants regularly mentioned how staff were always ready to engage in conversation with visitors. Ryan said, "I think [staff] walked out of the office and saw me, and was, like, what are you doing there? Come on in, or something. And so then, instead of, like, awkwardly sitting outside of it, I would go inside instead." Ryan's experience was echoed by other participants, who recalled welcoming staff who asked visitors if they needed help locating a resource or offered them snacks or beverages. Jota said,

> I walked in and just started asking, like, what kind of resources I have access to. What can I get here? That kind of thing. [Muffled] who I talk to. But I'm pretty sure each time, when the center was still open, and I would walk in asking about stuff, there would be, like, a volunteer or a staff member that would grab some pamphlets, some flyers, and kind of just do a quick rundown.

This welcoming behavior by staff continued each time that students returned to their LGBTQ+ culture center. Phlox explained that he found staff to be "...the sort of person who feels like a real adult without being unapproachable, if that makes sense." Zeke had a similar experience, noting how staff had decorations on their doors, including their pronouns. The staff's flexibility to assist students who came by without an appointment was another reason that participants became regulars in the culture center; Phlox noted that other offices did not have the ability to offer drop in support. Phlox shared that,

> If I ever needed something, a resource, or a, you know, listening ear, or a, maybe even a hug, like, I could go there and be like, hey, here's what's up, can you connect me to someone who can help, maybe? And, like, you know, I didn't end up doing that very often, but the fact that I could I think was a stress reducer in general.

Staff availability and accessibility was one of the unique offerings of the LGBTQ+ culture center that appealed to participants and made them want to return. Participants shared that the LGBTQ+ culture center was a good way to connect with students with similar gender and sexual identities,

and that staff intentionally helped facilitate conversations and friendships as well. Zeke said,

> I even know of a couple of people, where, like, they come into the [center] and go to a staff member and are, like, I'm new to campus, I need to make friends, where do I make friends? And so, sometimes a staff member will just be, like, okay, let's go into the lobby of our office. And then they do, and they're just, like, you two are both French majors, for example, and I'm just showing this person around the office, what do you like to do, or can you tell them what they like to do on campus, or like, that kind of stuff?

Even though staff were welcoming, participants also shared that if a student needed a quiet space, staff were happy to oblige. Zeke shared that they felt when they needed to "lock in," staff would say, "I'll stop distracting you, but I'll also, like, come out and check on you, make sure that you're staying on track." This aligned with other participants' experiences of being able to successfully complete homework in their LGBTQ+ culture center. Overall, participants reported positive experiences with staff members, which was one of the reasons they chose to regularly return to the LGBTQ+ culture center.

Appealing Visuals. Participants also agreed that the LGBTQ+ culture centers were visually appealing and had distinctly different décor and furniture than other places on campus. Jota noted that their center had a lot of "...positive messaging by people who understand and are queer themselves, or at least supportive..." Participants noted messaging included LGBTQ+ pride flags and art depicting LGBTQ+ individuals that was created by staff or other students. J said,

> There was some art that you could tell had been done by, like, previous students at [institution], just based on, like, I think a couple of them had, like, students' names next to them. A lot of the artwork, I think, was even done by the director of the [LGBTQ+ culture center], like, there was some [artwork] that I later found out was theirs. Overall, it just seemed like it was a space, like the art was, like it just took queerness as something that was for granted. Or not for granted, but just, like, normal. It wasn't even the sort of art that was, like, queer people deserve to exist.

> There might have been some like that, but it was just sort of, here is art of queer people.

Students generally also had the freedom to alter the LGBTQ+ culture center's appearance in small ways. For example, Phlox's center had once hosted an event where students could paint canvases, and the staff had offered to hang up art if students wished to have it on display. Phlox also shared that there were whiteboards, and others had drawn "little doodles and messages and stuff" on those whiteboards. All agreed that the culture center provided accessible information on events and resources. Ryan explained that his culture center had pamphlets at the front of the office, near the door, so visitors could get what they needed and not have to ask a staff member. Jota said that their center had

> like a corkboard of information, resources, and once the current Trump administration was elected and started doing some scary shit, they had something posted on the board that was, like, basically, a mental health reminder. Like different people had written on it nice things. And the idea was, if you're scared about this administration, look at this, this'll at least be, like, a mild pick-me-up.

Several also explained that they enjoyed the art on display in their centers, which included but were not limited to humorous graphics about safe sexual practices and a portrait of Marsha P. Johnson. Generally, the center's appearance was comfortable and distinct from an academic classroom, and participants enjoyed the visual differences compared to the other rooms and buildings on campuses.

Safety. Participants reiterated that they found their LGBTQ+ culture center to be a safe place. Phlox explained, "You know, entering a space like that, it often physically feels like a weight is lifted, because I don't have to wonder anymore if I'm safe, and if the people around me, like, care about my well-being." Jota's experience was similar: "It's a space where you are safe and are not immediately judged." The words safe and sanctuary were regularly used by participants to describe their centers, often in contrast with how they felt about being in other places on campus. They shared that they were comfortable talking about "gay topics" without

self-censoring or worrying about other students' reactions, especially if they were in undergraduate academic programs that they perceived as less LGBTQ+-friendly. Jordan said,

> It was a safe place just to hang out with friends, and just have conversations, and it was safe in that way to just, like, exist and talk about issues that we were facing, which is stuff we liked, stuff you were interested in, and there wasn't this judgment that I feel there is a lot of outside of the community. And it was just, it felt like a very safe place to be social.

Ryan noted that he felt the most safe doing his homework in the LGBTQ+ culture center. He said, "It was a really chill place, and not a lot of people, there wasn't, it wasn't ever really crowded, you know? It was very peaceful." Overall, responses indicated that the participants felt as if they could be open about their identit(ies) in the center and could focus on their chosen task, which often was socializing, relaxing, or completing homework.

Purpose of Visits. Participants came to the LGBTQ+ culture center for various reasons. Jota returned to their center for multiple purposes:

> Sometimes I just went there to ask questions, get information. And occasionally, I would go to, like, just hang out. It was a comfortable space, and sometimes other queer people on campus would be there. I'd just chat with them, kind of have the camaraderie and the social interaction of it.

This was echoed by J, who said, "...they had a really good lounge space where you could connect with other people. Or, if it was a quieter day, just throw on some headphones and... have a nice, comfy area to be in." Phlox agreed, saying, "It just felt good to have a place that I could dependably go for, like, you know, friendly conversation and a little coffee drink." Zeke explained that the LGBTQ+ culture center was especially beneficial for new students who wanted to socialize but did not know where to go:

> You know, if you're, like, a new student, and you're, wanting to know where to make friends that maybe have a lot of similarities to you. And then you, you know, you go to that orientation, and you don't see any offices on campus that provides a space like

that. That explicitly provides a space like that.

Most centers were located in the middle of campus and participants shared that they were easy to access between classes. In addition to impromptu socialization opportunities, centers sponsored and held events such as potting plants, playing games, making art, or creating buttons to give away; they sponsored student organizations related to sexual and/or gender identities and would host organization-specific programming. Phlox enjoyed the terrarium-making event: "Like, you make a little jar with a tropical plant in it. And then you can put, like, decorations in there, and get to pick which plant you want, and it was just really cool." J said,

> Some of the events that were had, again, were very light and social but were also very intentional about, there's a specific time that you can come in here, mingle with some people, maybe have some snacks that we have out here.

The centers often had music playing and some would have televisions and video game consoles, though participants reported they had not seen individuals playing video games. Though quiet study was not the main use of the LGBTQ+ culture center, one participant repeatedly shared they found the center to be a good place to work on homework. Ryan said, "Like, the library wasn't bad, but I felt a lot more, like, at home, and it was just a really friendly, like, location to get work done while I was on campus and in between classes." All participants shared they were able to achieve the academic or social goals they set each time they visited their LGBTQ+ culture center.

Theme 1 Summary. Participants' shared experiences with their LGBTQ+ culture center demonstrated that they had established strong senses of place attachment to this office and found it to be an effective third place. They used their LGBTQ+ culture center as a place to connect with others, participate in events, and complete individual work. They relied on its presence on their campus for various resources and support; when the center was removed, they felt strong emotions in response.

Theme 2: Participants' Emotions in Response to the Loss

Participants felt a range of emotions when they learned their LGBTQ+ culture center was being removed from campus. Even though not all institutions physically closed their centers,

participants' responses illustrated that they felt disruption of place attachment. Participants felt anger, frustration, and sadness when they noted their institutions' removal of staff and resources, even if the center had only been merged with other culture centers. In this section, I provide my code map to demonstrate how I determined this theme. Then, I discuss how participants reported feeling fear, worry, and scared emotions; anger and sadness emotions; and positive emotions. Figure 4.2 illustrates the range of emotions reported by participants as they lost their centers, experienced the changes to campus, and planned for the future.

Figure 4.2: Three-Level Code Map for Theme 2

Cycle 1: Preliminary Codes	Cycle 1 Code Frequency	Cycle 2: Patterns	Cycle 3: Theme
Fear/worry/scary: self past	10	Participants reflected on previously feeling fear/worry/fright for self, others, and the collective.	Participants felt and still feel a range of emotions; worry, fear, anger, and sadness are the most prevalent, though positive feelings were expressed. Participants expressed negative emotions about their institutions' administrations for complying with anti-DEI legislation.
Fear/worry/scary: others past	13		
Fear/worry/scary: collective past (use of "we")	17		
Fear/worry/scary: self current	22	Participants are currently feeling fear/worry/fright for self and collective.	
Fear/worry/scary: collective current (use of "we")	15		
Fear/worry/scary: self future	7	Participants are currently feeling fear/worry/fright for the future of self, others, and collective.	
Fear/worry/scary: others future	6		
Fear/worry/scary: collective future (use of "we")	7		
Joy/positivity: community	9	Participants feel positively about remaining resources and community.	
Joy/positivity: gratitude	6		
Joy/positivity: overall	2		
Joy/positivity: motivation	4	Participants feel past events have motivated them to resist.	
Anger	18	Participants feel a range of other emotions, though anger and sadness are most common.	
Upset	3		
Resignation	5		
Sad	22		
Disappointment in institution's administration	3	Participants feel that their institution's administration could have acted differently and do not trust the administration.	
Distrust of institution's administration	12		

Fear, Worry, and Scared Emotions. Participants overwhelmingly felt a combination of fear, worry, and scared emotions when they reflected on the past, present, and future for themselves, others, and their communities. Participants described concerns for both others and their community; I coded the latter when a participant would use the pronoun "we" to describe the emotion rather than "they." Jordan asked, "How much [w]ould we lose? I have no idea. None of us had any idea. And we didn't have any idea for at least, like, a couple weeks. It was still kind of uncertain, like, what is gonna happen? We don't know." In this excerpt, Jordan's use of "we" demonstrated that they saw themselves as part of a community. Zeke also worried about the future: "I was really, like, just really nervous and anxious about, like, how far it might end up going in the future." Other participants had similar experiences. Phlox said he felt as if the closing was a "harbinger or omen. It felt like there would be more to come, and that it would get worse progressively from that point." At the time of the interviews, participants also shared that they felt these emotions about their current situation as well as about potential futures. Jota reported that they were currently, "trying to survive and, trying not to, like, have a mental breakdown for this stuff." Others reported having panic attacks and migraines as direct emotional responses to losing their centers and the resources maintained by those centers. Zeke said

> There was a while, especially before we started doing a lot of our really big events, that I just started having, like, really bad migraines that would take me out for, like, a full 24 hours at a time. And so I just, like, I almost considered that my way of processing it, because I didn't even have time to process it. I was in, like, too much pain to even think or anything.

Overall, participants shared that the immediate fear and worry they felt upon learning of the closings and mergers had an immediate impact on their mental and, often, physical health.

Participants also reflected on their concerns about the future at their institutions and how future LGBTQ+ undergraduates would find community and access legal, medical, and gender-affirming care resources. Jordan shared concerns about maintaining the university's LGBTQ+ undergraduate community: "So I really, really worry about... what's gonna happen

after I leave, and after the people, like, the year after me leave?" Jordan had learned about their LGBTQ+ culture center prior to enrolling at their institution due to the center's website, which had been taken down when the center was closed. They worried about how new students would learn about the center or its resources. Jordan said,

> That's the main thing that I'm worried about, is people don't have a place to go and ask those questions, so they never find out unless they happen to get lucky and find someone who just is like, oh, what about this resource? They're just probably never gonna find out about it.

Jordan then wondered if new students' lack of knowledge would lead to less use of these resources, which in turn could cause their institution's administration to assume there was no longer a need for programming and support tailored to LGBTQ+ students. They feared that this assumption would result in the removal of these resources, which would negatively impact future students who were part of the LGBTQ+ community. Zeke, Jota, and Ryan also expressed concern for future students in addition to their worries about their individual futures.

Anger and Sadness. Anger and sadness were the predominant emotions participants reported feeling. Jota said, "It's a mix of frightening and a mix of, like, infuriating, especially because I've worked very hard to even get to this point." Participants expressed frustration with their institutions for removing their LGBTQ+ culture centers. Several reported feeling betrayal and anger directed to the administrators, who they felt had misled the participants about what was actually going to happen once the anti-DEI legislation was in place. Phlox said, "They framed it as a simple, like, rearrangement of administrative stuff. But it felt like they used it to, like, eliminate and lessen the support for the queer community in particular, but others also." Jota felt that their community had expressed fears that had been minimized by their institution's administration: "The university will kind of do the gaslighting stuff of, we want to be transparent, we want to communicate with our students, we want to meet their needs, and then they will do the literal opposite of being transparent." Others shared frustration with their institution's administration. Jordan expressed that they felt that the administration had lied to them by

originally claiming that nothing was going to change:

> I felt very blindsighted by it, because I came to this school with the promise that this resource was going to be there to help me. And then, it was just an oh, never mind, and it wasn't, and then they just straight up lied to our faces and be like, oh, but nothing's going to change and then slowly but surely, they started shutting down programs.

Participants were explicit, though, that they did not blame the center staff for the closings. When those individuals were mentioned, participants expressed concern for the staff member's job security or sadness that the staff member had left their university. Jordan said, "[The staff] didn't know if they were getting fired, they didn't know if, like, if they would have a completely different job." Fortunately, Jordan's center's staff were reassigned to other offices, but some ultimately chose to leave their institution.

Additionally, participants grieved and mourned the closings of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. They regularly used the word loss to describe how they felt about the removal of the centers and related resources. J explained that he had visited the center regularly and benefited from its resources and programming:" I feel like I'm one of the people that knows a lot about what the space was like, and has utilized it a lot, so the loss of it means it has quite a big effect on me." Ryan was not on campus when he heard of the closing, and shared that he was "alone in my room, kind of, I don't know, I guess, for lack of better words, mourning the loss that there isn't that kind of space anymore." These responses illustrated how much the closings and mergers of the LGBTQ+ culture centers impacted the participants, demonstrating that this was not just a space to them, but rather a place that they had become attached to.

Often, both anger and sadness were present in their responses, demonstrating the myriad of emotions the participants were processing. When I attempted to apologize for an institution's actions during an interview, Jordan said, "There's many people that I want an apology from, and then also many people that I want to fix this. You're not one of those people, so don't apologize." This combination of emotions in responses was understandable, as J explained

> I feel like, as I've gone through just a lot of my educational journey as I've been in therapy, and many different things, just sort of knowing that just because something feels kind of contradictory doesn't necessarily mean that it fully is.

Given the importance of these centers to the participants, it was understandable that they felt a range of emotions and would sometimes change from anger to sadness quickly in their interviews.

Positive Emotions. Participants also felt positive emotions, though these were reported to be less frequent than sadness, anger, and fear. Zeke reflected upon one of their professors who had just completed a project on what Zeke referred to as "queer joy:"

> It's really, it's definitely really hard in these times to, like, try to find those kinds of things, but at the end of the day, those are also just what gives us the hope to kind of keep moving forward, despite it all.

Overall, participants expressed gratitude for their LGBTQ+ community coming together and for what resources and student organizations were able to remain on their campus. Jota said, "Even if the situation is bad, the solidarity of the community is good. Like, silver lining." J had a similar experience: "Honestly, just having a lot of other people around me that have shared that experience, and just talking with them, and realizing that we both feel the same way has been reassuring." Though participants would have preferred their centers to have stayed open, they expressed appreciation for being able to share their worries, grief, and anger with others. Participants also recognized that other individuals, including but not limited to staff, were pushing back against the closing of the centers and loss of resources, and were grateful that those people and organizations were providing support. Zeke said, "I am very grateful that there are a lot of people in power that have been arguing to have us go undercover, rather than just completely close everything down, abolish everything." Being able to find support on- and off-campus helped participants feel more connected to each other after they lost the places that they would have previously visited to make and maintain social connections.

Theme 2 Summary. Overall, participants felt a range of emotions as they learned about the closing of their LGBTQ+ culture centers and the removal of the resources once maintained by

those centers. They expressed fear, worry, and concern about what had happened to them and their communities as well as what could happen to their institution's LGBTQ+ community in the future. They expressed distrust of their universities and states and reported feeling betrayed. However, participants were also able to experience positive emotions as they recalled the individuals and organizations that provided open support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Theme 3: Participants' Actions in Response to the Loss

Participants performed a variety of actions as they learned about the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers and related resources. However, these actions, as well as the emotions they were feeling, often meant that other tasks, such as coursework, were neglected. In this section, I provide a code map to illustrate how I determined this theme. I then explain the different action responses participants took in response to the loss of their culture centers: general behavior changes; maintenance of community; official and unofficial club participation; creation of new third places; poor academic performance; and protests. Figure 4.3 illustrates what participants did—both individually and as collectives—in response to the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center.

Figure 4.3: Three-Level Code Map for Theme 3

Cycle 1: Preliminary Codes	Cycle 1 Code Frequency	Cycle 2: Patterns	Cycle 3: Theme
Behavior change (negative)	2	Participants noted that their behaviors changed, though mostly in positive ways.	Participants performed a range of actions in response to their center's closure. All participated in group and individual protests; many with LGBTQ+-related clubs. However, participants reported poor performance in academic and social spheres.
Behavior change (positive)	8		
Community (location not specified)	10	Participants found community both online and in person, though the latter occurred more frequently. However, they struggled to maintain their previous social lives.	
Community (in person)	43		
Community (online)	7		
Social life (harder)	20		
Education (negative)	19	Participants noticed that the closing of their LGBTQ+ center had a negative impact on some aspects of their education. Witnessing implementation of anti-DEI legislation changed their future career and academic plans.	
Education (neutral)	14		
Future plan change	6		
Location: Off-campus	17	Participants chose to spend time in other campus buildings and off-campus, though they noted that off-campus locations were more difficult to access.	
Off-campus location is harder to access	7		
Location: Other campus buildings	19		
Protest type: Individual formal	22	Participants performed acts of protest both individually and within groups. These acts were both planned (formal) and spontaneous (informal).	
Protest type: Individual informal	20		
Protest type: Group formal	44		
Protest type: Group informal	9		
Club participation	47	Participants valued their clubs and worked to rebuild or maintain those whose existence was tied to the closed LGBTQ+ culture center.	
Club (re)creation from either closed club or loss of resources	30		
Unofficial club participation	8		
Club leadership	9		

General Behavior Changes. Participants noted changes in their behavior as a result of losing their centers. Some of these changes were positive; participants reflected that they felt more comfortable asserting themselves as they responded to the anti-DEI legislation and related changes to their LGBTQ+ culture centers and campus environments. J said, in reference to his increased confidence in his public speaking and leadership skills, "It's...helped me realize that if you don't assert yourself in a lot of different situations, or take the initiative to put yourself

in different rooms, you won't get there." Others explained that they tried to be open about their identities on campus in order to encourage other students to do so. Ryan said, "I try to be the kind of person that's out there for people on campus so that they can feel a little less alone." Jota took similar actions. They said,

> I kind of like to be open about the kind of person I am, my interests, my identities, etc, because, in part, I feel like a lot of these are stigmatized, and I at least have, like, developed some, like, devil may care kind of attitude, I think, is a good phrase for it, of, like, I'm not gonna hide myself, for the people that are afraid and do feel like they have to hide themselves.

Participants proudly shared how they changed their behaviors to make their campuses more inclusive to current and incoming students, especially once the centers were closed and LGBTQ+-related signage removed.

Maintaining Community. Participants attempted to maintain their communities in both in person and online venues; as Jordan said, "We've kind of been getting community, like, gathering community while we still can and staying together as much as possible." In person locations were more popular than online, though several participants discussed using Discord servers to communicate with others on campus, in student organizations, or within their city. Communication on Discord servers ranged from protest planning to sharing dark humor related to the loss of the LGBTQ+ culture centers. Jota, who regularly participated in online forums, said, "There's been stuff like that where, like, we'll be in, like, Discord, sharing absolutely unhinged or weirdly tone-deaf things that are happening around." Phlox preferred to be a "lurker:"

> Every now and then, I'll, there's a channel for people to ask the community for advice, and I'll weigh in on something. Or, like, you know, there's a mutual aid channel, and if I have something that is useful but not useful for me, I'll post it there.

Though participants preferred the in person options that had been available through their LGBTQ+ culture centers, they found use in online options such as Discord servers.

If they wanted to see each other in person, participants either went to certain locations to see each other or at least knew of their options. However, all participants explained that they had difficulty maintaining their previous social lives. The LGBTQ+ culture centers had provided a third place where they could socialize, complete homework, or relax. Phlox explained, "It felt like that was sort of a point of connection between a few different groups and circles I was involved with, and it became more difficult to, like, see all the people I wanted to." Meeting new people was also difficult, as Ryan reflected, "It's, I'm not as able to, like, find [LGBTQ+ people/allies] as easy." Though participants still tried to meet and connect with others in person, they reported having difficulty making plans and/or finding safe and accessible venues to achieve that purpose. Zeke shared that they were unable to leave campus because they did not have a car or reliable public transit. Zeke said, "It's just logistically a little hard until I get myself some transportation." Ryan was an exception to those who were limited to campus options. He regularly attended events at a local bar that he described as a gay bar: "I have drinks, I dance, and I meet new people." All participants' interviews demonstrated that growing and maintaining community was more difficult without the LGBTQ+ culture centers to serve as third places.

Official and Unofficial Club Participation. Participants' responses showed that membership in student organizations was one way that they had built and maintained their LGBTQ+ community. Most participants were involved in a student organization related to sexuality and gender identity, though some had chosen other clubs to join that focused on political interests or majors. Two participants held leadership positions in their sexuality and gender identity organizations at one time during their college career; a few others claimed current or former membership in those organizations. All of the sexuality and gender identity-related organizations had been supported by the institutions' LGBTQ+ culture centers and anti-DEI legislation disrupted their ability to function as planned.

Some organizations lost their funding, as the new legislation was interpreted by administrators to mean that the university could not financially support organizations related to sexuality and gender identity, though they were allowed to remain official student organizations.

Zeke, whose organization had just put on an LGBTQ+-related activity, was struggling to get reimbursed for their financial contribution. They said,

> I was like, we just, like, we still have, like, $900 out of my pocket sucks for me, but we still have, like, $7,000 left of things that we need to pay for, and what do you mean it wasn't gonna go through? And it's like, yeah, that already happened, it's not like we can go back in time and cancel it.

Though Zeke was able to receive their reimbursement, they shared that this stress had caused them to suffer from panic attacks and migraines. Two organization members, J and Jota, were part of efforts to clean out the LGBTQ+ culture centers' offices at their institutions. J said,

> We received, basically, a less than 48-hour warning that it had to be out, because it just happened to be, like, on a Wednesday that that day was, and that Friday at 5 pm was the last chance people had to get stuff.

J felt that he had to assist with removing items from the office, as he was one of the few people who knew what items belonged to the LGBTQ+-related student organization. At Jota's institution, Jota and others stored the items in their homes before moving them back on campus. Jota said, "Eventually, down the line, we got, like a locker that [was] in a space that student orgs in the general, like, cultural departments also have access to." Despite describing the experience as "jarring," Jota shared that they did appreciate cleaning out the office with their peers. As of the second interview, Zeke, J, and Jota's LGBTQ+-related student organizations were still recognized as official by their institutions.

At other institutions, LGBTQ+-related student organizations were closed immediately. Jordan reported that they found out about their organization's loss of official status right before a meeting where they were planning to make crafts. Jordan's institution immediately froze the organization's funding, preventing them from purchasing the art supplies necessary for this activity. Jordan had since been working with other club members to try and reinstate the organization's official status: "We have been trying to get one started up, and it's been very, very difficult to do so." Jordan's unofficial organization had not yet been approved by the time of our

interview, and their institution had not provided an explanation for the lack of a decision. Ultimately, regardless of whether or not an organization was allowed to continue, participants were impacted by the changes and their focus shifted from their classes to facilitating club meetings and pushing for reinstatement of funding and organizations. These negative changes required participants to focus more on attempting to rebuild or maintain the organizations than they had originally planned, which partly impacted their academic pursuits (discussed more in Poor Academic Performance below).

New Third Places. Due to the loss of these centers, participants were required to find new locations to spend time. Many chose to relocate to on-campus buildings that housed their majors, though campus libraries were also popular. Jordan's institution kept the previous LGBTQ+ culture center's location open for students to use, though they were unsure of how long that would last. Jordan said,

> There's no one really looking after the center, so it's just kind of an empty room with some tables now. But they didn't, like, turn it into something else, so it's still a public space. So that's where we go.

Jordan explained that they had developed plans in case the space that once hosted their LGBTQ+ culture center was repurposed for another office. Jordan had attended a few off-campus events, but reported that it was difficult to relate to the non-students who attended them. They shared that,

> That's harder with the communities outside of, outside of, [institution], because it's just, not to say, like, like, it's bad that there's more diversity in those parts of the community, like, there's a lot of value to that, but it can sometimes be a little bit harder to make that initial connection.

Difficulty in connecting with others off-campus was not the only reason participants chose not to visit potential off-campus third place options. Several participants did not venture off-campus due to a lack of reliable transportation, though they were open to the idea of community organizations or locations once they had a vehicle. Zeke said," It's hard for me right now because I don't have a

car or anything, and I live on campus, so, a lot of what I am able to do has to be confined to our, our block." The participants who could leave campus knew of a variety of locations they could visit. Ryan regularly attended a reoccurring pride event at his town's LGBTQ+-friendly bar and reported enjoying meeting new LGBTQ+ people and allies while he danced. Several, though, explained that if they were going to leave campus, they were more likely to go to their off-campus home or to a friend's apartment than one of the LGBTQ+-friendly community businesses or non-profit organizations.

Poor Academic Performance. A majority of participants reported concerns about grades dropping and poor academic performance. After Jota was contacted by a student affairs professional about missing coursework, they responded with a letter:

> I am in so much stress and suffering, and one of the things I put on it was basically, I don't even necessarily want to try sometimes, because it feels for, like, all my efforts, my reward was immediately being, like, viciously attacked and pushed out the space I wanted to be in.

Zeke's had been hoping that they could perform better this semester after having failed a class previously but now were unsure if that would be possible. Zeke said,

> It's just a lot to deal with, and the advisors have started to kind of notice that, too, and so they've been telling me to take a step back and, kind of work on, work on those assignments and everything, but it's just been really difficult.

Jordan reported that the loss of their "social safety net" was directly related to their difficulty completing coursework. They said, "That lingering anxiety there, it definitely has had some effect on my ability to do my schoolwork, and do my schoolwork well." J did not discuss his grades; however, he explained that he had to step down from his student organization leadership position so he could focus on completing his coursework. Ryan also did not mention his grades, but the closing of his LGBTQ+ culture center meant that he had to find other places on campus to complete his homework. Ultimately, all participants had their academic pursuits impacted in some way by the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center, though some reported more stress about

their grades than others did.

Protest Actions. All participants protested against the closings of their LGBTQ+ culture centers and losing their related resources. The ways that they performed protests were so diverse that they required different codes to accurately reflect their actions. I separated types of protest into individual, which were only performed by the participant, and group, which were performed by one or more student organizations. Additionally, I differentiated between formal protests, which were planned and organized, and informal protests, which appeared to be more spontaneous. As participants performed different types of protests, I felt it important to illustrate the individuals' ranges. Participants and their types of protests are listed in Table 4.2. Pseudonyms have been excluded from several explanations to help maintain participants' anonymity and prevent potential retaliation or consequences.

Table 4.2

Participants and Protest Types Identified through Coding Process

Participants	Individual formal	Individual informal	Group formal	Group informal
J	4	7	19	3
Jordan	1	2	8	6
Jota	16	5	14	0
Phlox	0	0	2	0
Ryan	0	3	1	0
Zeke	1	3	0	0

Participants reported fewer group informal protests, which was understandable given their previously shared difficulties with scheduling meetings after losing their centers. Institutions had protests organized by multiple student organizations; in these situations, participants had belonged to at least one of those student organizations. J explained that his group formal protest involved a satirical funeral, where the community created a coffin to represent their LGBTQ+ culture center and marched across the university with it. J said,

> Well, we wanted to do something visible... The point of it was to make sure we got the attention of, well, the students, since they didn't send it out to students, the new

> students that were coming, and also to, as we bring those people's view[s] in, to show administration that they can't hide what they did.

Other participants also joined in group formal protests in various ways. Jota was unable to go to the protest event but helped facilitate it: "I did participate a lot more in the lead-up, though, so I, like, I made promotional materials, posts for organizations, stuff like that." Jordan attended theirs, which involved individuals holding signs and speaking in front of a heavily trafficked area on campus. Jordan said that they knew it was unlikely to persuade the administration to reopen their LGBTQ+ culture center. However, Jordan felt that attending was important:

> [The protest] was really more of a show of, like, for me, going to those protests was more of a show of, like, showing other people that were in those communities, like, hey, even though these centers are gone, like, there's still people that are here for you, there's still people that are going to support you and your communities.

The participants who were able to attend group formal protests reported positive emotions being at the events.

Participants also performed individual formal and informal protests. Some performed individual formal protests by contacting university administrators to explain how their center's closing had impacted their academic performance and mental health. Several students were at institutions where they were required by law to remove their pronouns from their email signatures when sending messages from their student hourly positions. One removed the pronouns and added a line with information about the new law. Another selectively deleted their pronouns depending on who they were contacting. Jordan and Jota explained that participating in this dissertation research was another way they conducted an individual formal protest. Jordan said,

> I just felt like that doing a study like this is a very important thing that can be done to really show that shift and that impact that me, and I know a lot of other people, are experiencing this change.

Jota said, "It feels like an important way I can kind of contribute to making sure somebody does something about it." Participants performed fewer individual formal protests than other actions,

but their descriptions illustrated that these were still significant actions to pushing back against the anti-DEI legislation.

There were a diverse range of individual informal protests reported. Some shared information on accessing gender-affirming care resources to other students when the latter appeared interested. Jordan said,

> Whenever I meet someone that seems like they would be interested in those sort of things, I, like, tell them what resources they do have available, because it's really hard to find out for yourself, so, basically, if anyone, like, is like, oh, I've been thinking about getting a binder, and I'm like, oh, there's a resource for that.

As previously discussed, Jordan was afraid that a lack of knowledge of resources would result in their institution choosing not to support them; Jordan's decision to share information about such resources was a way they could try to prevent the removal of binders and other gender-affirming care items. Another lived in a state where identification cards were invalidated if they did not show an individual's assigned sex at birth; since their identification card with their accurate gender was still valid, they refused to return it to the state: "Until it's invalid, I'm just gonna stick it out, because I literally just got my gender change to get on my license." One participant had a key to their closed LGBTQ+ culture center and refused to return it until they graduated, in case the university withheld their diploma due to the missing key. They said, "I'm leaving that on my keys. I have no reason to go break in, but, like, I'm gonna hold on to it. I think it's just my one little act of protest I'm still doing." By performing individual informal protests, participants were able to push back against their states' anti-DEI legislation.

Theme 3 Summary. Participants responded in various ways when they learned about the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. They reported that their general behavior changed as they gained more confidence in speaking up and presenting themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ community. They worked to maintain existing communities and student organizations, though some of the latter were dissolved by their university, which then required the participants to perform labor to rebuild those student organizations. Because participants were focused on

community and club maintenance, they reported that their academic performance declined. Many saw grades dropping below what they would have been previously; others did not share this development but explained they had to change their academic practices. Finally, all participants were involved in various group and individual protests in response to the anti-DEI legislation that removed their LGBTQ+ culture centers and related resources from their universities.

Summary

Within this chapter, I have provided the results of my phenomenological study on how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. After examining the interview transcripts, I determined three themes related to place attachment, emotional responses, and action responses. Participants' responses demonstrated that they had established place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers. The disruption of place attachment caused them emotional distress and influenced their behaviors and actions. In the next chapter, I will provide a discussion of these results and the implications of my research. I will also discuss the limitations of the study and explain potential future research in this field. Finally, I will provide a conclusion to this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the results of my study examining how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of their on-campus LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation. Analysis of participants' responses showed that there were three prevalent themes: participants felt a strong sense of place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers; they had significant emotional responses when those centers were closed or combined with other culture centers; and they performed a range of actions in response to the centers' closings or mergings.

Overview of Study

As federal guidance and state legislation forced four-year universities to close or combine their on-campus culture centers, LGBTQ+ undergraduate students were left without the third place, resources, and staff that they had become accustomed to easily accessing (Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Rupertus, 2025; Schermele, 2023; Spitalniak, 2025). These places and their staff had successfully provided accessible communities to this population, ensuring that students had a place where they could openly identify as LGBTQ+ and meet others with similar identities (Coley et al., 2025; Sanlo, 2000; Sanlo et al., 2002). Therefore, when I learned of the closings and mergings of LGBTQ+ culture centers across the United States due to anti-DEI legislation, I wondered how LGBTQ+ undergraduate students were experiencing these changes. That led me to my research question: How do LGBTQ+ undergraduates who regularly (at least four times a semester) visited an on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center experience losing the center due to anti-DEI state legislation?

To answer this question, I conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study asking eligible and interested individuals if they would participate in two interviews to share how they developed place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers and then how they experienced the disruption of that place attachment. Phenomenology was the logical choice since I wanted to document participants' experiences as they lived them. I also believe in a constructivist paradigm, where individuals' reality is based on their experiences. Using phenomenological interviewing methods ensured that while participants experienced the same phenomenon—the loss of a beloved third

place—their experience-informed realities were reflected in their interview responses.

Most existing research on culture centers focused on the creation and maintenance of these offices rather than their closings. This focus was understandable as the anti-DEI legislation that specifically targeted these spaces had become law within the past few years. Table 1.1 shows that the earliest closings were reported in 2023 in Florida and Texas. Because this was such a unique situation in the history of culture centers, I felt it was important to record participants' experiences as they coped with this form of disruption of place attachment. Brown and Perkins (1992) demonstrated that disruption of place attachment due to natural disasters and gentrification often resulted in negative emotions felt by the former regulars of those places as they attempted to recreate their communities. Given those findings, understanding how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experienced the loss of their third places was necessary as institutions and individuals attempted to rebuild resources and communities under the new anti-DEI laws.

Based on existing literature examining place attachment and coping strategies, I performed transcendental phenomenological analysis methods (Moustakas, 1994) and determined the following three themes that were prevalent in all of the participants' responses: participants developed a strong sense of place attachment to their on-campus LGBTQ+ culture centers; participants felt strong emotions towards the closing and/or merging of their centers; and participants responded as both individuals and part of groups to the loss of their centers.

Discussion of Results

Within this section, I discuss the results and how they support and/or complicate existing literature and theory on place attachment, disruption of place attachment, and persistence and retention of LGBTQ+ undergraduates at public, four-year universities. First, I explain how my study adds to existing literature on senses of place attachment and campus ecology.

Theme 1: Participants' Place Attachment to their LGBTQ+ Culture Centers

Participants' data illustrated that they had developed and maintained strong senses of place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers. Their responses demonstrated that these centers had been extremely important to their well-being and mental health. In this section, I

discuss how my findings relate to existing literature focused on culture centers as third places; the importance of welcoming, accessible staff; the importance of normalizing and celebrating LGBTQ+ identities; and feelings of safety and home.

Culture Centers as Third Places. My results supported Lewin's (1936) formula $B = f(P, E)$. This equation argued that behavior was a function of the person and their environment. The use of the word function indicated that Lewin (1936) was confident both the person and their surroundings contributed to their actions; however, it was unknown how much of either contributed. Therefore, Lewin (1936) argued that both should be considered when examining behavior. My results aligned with this argument: students' behavior was influenced by their choice to become regulars of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. Participants were able to find an on-campus, public space designed for their population where they could exhibit positive behaviors, such as socializing and completing coursework, which in turn would help them gain a sense of belonging at their institutions (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Noble, 2022; Soriano, 2022; Turner, 1994). These centers therefore functioned as effective third places (Oldenburg, 1989), which also aligned with research on successful student support offices (Banning et al., 2010; Camputaro, 2018; Janisz, 2014; Waxman et al., 2007).

My participants shared similar emotions to other students who were regulars at historically-marginalized culture centers. They greatly appreciated the centers' appearances and design choices, which they felt sent a message normalizing the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals. This aligned with Banning's (2000) argument that individuals received messaging about who was welcome and who was allowed to be a student through campus décor and artifacts. Seeing art and graphics created by other students and staff helped the participants feel more comfortable in the centers. Their responses illustrated that these were places where individuals built place attachment, rather than spaces as defined by Agnew (2011), Cresswell (2015), Low and Altman (1992), Tuan (1977), and Wilhoit (2015). The centers were an informal atmosphere where any one who entered would be seen as an equal, adding to the centers' classification as third places (Oldenburg, 1989).

The Importance of Staff. Students who visited culture centers regularly reported that the staff is a significant reason for why they return to those places (Noble, 2022; Patton, 2006b; Richmond, 2012; Saia, 2019; Salcedo, 2020; Toya, 2011). The participants in my study voiced similar opinions. They shared that they found the LGBTQ+ culture centers' professional staff to be approachable, knowledgeable individuals who could help them navigate campus or answer questions. Staff actively welcomed students to their centers; Ryan recalled entering his institution's center after the director saw him studying outside of it and encouraged him to come inside. Phlox described staff as having "...a really welcoming attitude and...actively approaching people to see if they need something, or something would make them more comfortable, and that was really cool." These findings reinforced other studies' results about accessible, welcoming staff being a reason for students to return to their culture centers (Campen, 2021; Catano, 2014; Hartman, 2014; Hypolite, 2020).

Additionally, participants perceived the staff as having a similar gender and/or sexual identities, which helped them feel a connection, though they did share that they did not know for certain if the staff identified as LGBTQ+. This result aligned with other findings on culture centers, where students felt positively about their relationships with staff who shared their identities (Patton, 2006b; Richmond, 2012; Saia, 2019; Salcedo, 2020). Being able to drop in to find answers to questions or reassurance for concerns differentiates a culture center from other on-campus offices, and participants in my study and others have cited this as a major reason for why they become regulars (Gustafson, 2001; Jeffries & Boyd, 2021; Patton, 2006b; Richmond, 2012; Salcedo, 2020; Welch, 2009). The participants' responses demonstrated that they greatly trusted the advice and experience of the professional staff who worked in their LGBTQ+ culture centers.

The Importance of Normalizing/Celebrating Identities. Participants' responses also illustrated that they appreciated the centers' attempts to normalize and celebrate LGBTQ+ identities. They noted both explicit and implicit messaging in the center that recognized the diverse identities in the LGBTQ+ community. Jota said, "The [LGBTQ+ Center] had a lot of

queer imagery, queer messaging, queer resources." Décor included art (made by students, staff, or purchased from outside parties), bulletin boards, flyers, pamphlets, buttons, and pride flags. Previous literature demonstrated such messaging conveys acceptance of identities and shows who is welcome in specific places, especially those that are open to the public (Banning, 1993, 2000; Banning & Bartels, 1997; Brown & Perkins, 1992; Cresswell, 2015; Francis, 1989; Low & Altman, 1992; Mehrabian, 1971, 1976). For students who identify with at least one historically marginalized population, this was key to helping them persist as they pursued their bachelor's degrees (Damschroder, 2013; Hartman, 2014; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Lucas et al., 2024; Patton, 2006a, 2006b; Saia, 2019; Welch, 2009). My study's participants also explained that their centers were sometimes the only places they saw décor and artifacts that celebrated their LGBTQ+ identities. This increased their sense of place attachment to their LGBTQ+ culture centers, which was a finding also demonstrated in other studies about what made identity-based culture centers effective for students who possessed those identities (Hartman, 2014; Lucas et al., 2024; Soriano, 2022; Stuber et al., 2026; Young, 2002).

Feelings of Home and Safety. In many studies focused on on-campus culture centers for historically-marginalized individuals, participants described their center as feeling like a home away from home (Hartman, 2014; Patton, 2006b; Richmond, 2012; Saia, 2019; Soriano, 2022; Welch, 2009). The participants in my study, however, did not share this view. Only Phlox used the word home when discussing his experiences with his institution's LGBTQ+ culture center: "But I do know that that's [the LGBTQ+ culture center] something that helped me especially initially feel at home and welcome on campus." This finding differs from what Hartman (2014) found as their participants regularly referred to their LGBTQ+ culture centers as being a home or having a "homey" feeling in addition to describing it as safe (pp.198-199).

There were a few reasons why my participants might have chosen to use words besides home to discuss their experience in their LGBTQ+ culture centers. The LGBTQ+ culture centers' décor may have been unlike what they were used to seeing at home. Participants did not share if their parents or guardians had art and visuals of LGBTQ+ people, which they reported seeing

in their LGBTQ+ culture centers. In Patton's (2006b), the culture center was located in what was once a family house, which perhaps contributed to the sense that the center was similar to a home. If the LGBTQ+ culture center was not located in a house, participants might not have associated it with that concept. J's description of his institution's LGBTQ+ culture center could be seen as aligning with this conclusion; he explained that the center was

> a very small space, definitely looked like a more dated place on campus, but it did look cozy. It looked pretty welcoming. There were soft furniture around, like couches and chairs for you to sit on. It didn't feel super academic, which was nice on campus, just having a space where you can, honestly, for anyone, it's nice to have a space on campus where you can just take a break.

Though this description sounds similar to what participants shared in other studies, J's explanation of the center not seeming "super academic" demonstrated that he associated his LGBTQ+ culture center more with on-campus buildings than off-campus homes.

Another reason participants might not have used the word home is that, for many LGBTQ+ students, biological family homes are not necessarily safe for them (Stuber et al., 2026). My participants did not mention feeling unsafe at their family homes. If families were discussed, they were mentioned when I asked participants why they chose their institutions. Participants described parents who performed helpful actions: Zeke's mother drove them to on-campus job interviews and Ryan had openly transitioned prior to enrolling at his institution, suggesting his parent(s) knew of and were supportive of his transgender identity. However, other participants did not mention their parents/guardians or their relationships. This omission could have been related to my research focus, which did not ask questions prompting responses about familial relationships, or they might not have wanted to discuss this aspect of their lives. However, a related theme—safety—arose multiple times, which demonstrated that being and feeling safe was important to all of my participants.

Participants in my study mentioned multiple times in different interviews that being in their LGBTQ+ culture centers made them feel safe. Their centers were regularly described as

safe spaces where they could be themselves without fear that someone would harm them or where they could go if someone had caused them distress. Jordan explained that, "It was a safe place just to hang out with friends, and just have conversations, and it was... It was safe in that way to just, like, exist, and talk about issues we were facing." Ryan shared that when he was in his LGBTQ+ culture center, he would be around others who knew that not everyone was able to be open about their gender and/or sexual identities. Ryan felt that this understanding meant that his conversations would remain confidential: "People kind of have that same kind of baseline understanding of we know we can't be super out to everyone."The importance of a safe space was echoed in other literature on LGBTQ+ culture centers, which showed that students were more likely to return to their centers and develop place attachment if they felt safe (Catano, 2014; Hartman, 2014; J. M. Self & Hudson, 2015). This finding also agrees with Scannell et al. (2021), who claimed that individuals built attachment to places they felt are safe.

Concerns about safety were logical given the increased danger to students who openly identified as LGBTQ+ (Bazarsky et al., 2023; Johnston, 2016; B. Lee & Paliliunas, 2024; Marx et al., 2024; Pryor, 2015; Rankin et al., 2019; Stuber et al., 2026; Vaccaro, 2012; Yang & Stolzenberg, 2025). Participants in my study did not report having experienced violence on their campuses, though they did share anxiety about such actions occurring. They felt that their LGBTQ+ culture centers were safe places to be, which made them more likely to return and develop place attachment to those offices.

Theme 1: Discussion Summary. Overall, participants' interviews reported similar findings to past studies on how undergraduate students felt about their culture centers. They illustrated how the participants and other students developed a sense of place attachment to the center and how staff, messaging, and other resources helped them persist at their institutions. One difference was that my participants did not describe their centers as a home or home-like, which was not a result I saw in other studies about these on-campus places and their regulars. In the next section, I discuss how my findings on participants' emotional responses connects with existing research on coping strategies and concerns for themselves, their communities, and the

future.

Theme 2: Participants' Emotions in Response to the Loss

Participants felt a range of emotions in response to the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers, professional staff, and related programming and resources. In this section, I discuss how my findings relate to existing literature focused on multiple emotions and coping strategies; concern for others; concern for LGBTQ+-related organizations and programming; concern for the future; consideration of moving away; and distrust of institutional administration.

Multiple Emotions and Coping Strategies. The most prevalent emotions expressed were fear, anxiety, and fright about what had happened to them, what was currently occurring, and what might occur in the future. Experiencing disruption of place attachment has been documented to lead to poor health outcomes for the individuals who were once attached to a place, which was echoed in my data (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Rivlin, 1987). Participants shared that they responded with multiple emotions when they found out that their LGBTQ+ culture center was going to be closed or merged with other centers. This immediate response supports existing research on how place attachment overall improves individuals' health (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Low & Altman, 1992; Rivlin, 1987). Given that finding, a threat to the place a person is attached to is likely to cause a significant emotional reaction.

Participants shared that they were caught off-guard by the announcements. Phlox said, "It feels like a lot of the things that have happened. It's scary, and it feels sort of random and nonsensical." Jordan explained that they did not know if their center had been immediately closed when the announcement was released, which added to their fear. Because the first closings are documented to have occurred in 2023 (see Table 1.1), there was not much prior literature on how undergraduates experience this specific phenomenon. What did exist focused on a general impact of anti-DEI legislation, which could include but was not limited to LGBTQ+ culture centers (Damschroder, 2013; Goodman et al., 2025; Phan, 2025; Stuber et al., 2026; Yang & Stolzenberg, 2025). Therefore, research on place attachment and coping methods must be considered in this discussion. Participants' disclosure of multiple emotions was common in

research on disruption of place attachment (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Chow & Healey, 2008; Fullilove, 1996, 2016, 2020; Gustafson, 2001). Additionally, scholars who studied coping determined that individuals' responses will vary and are unique depending on the person and situation, suggesting that these participants' range of expressed emotions was common in individuals who were processing a traumatic event (Aldwin, 2007; Folkman, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Hobfoll, 1988; Lazarus, 1996; McCrae, 1984; Mikulincer & Florian, 1996; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Scribner et al., 2021; Terry, 1994; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). Overall, participants' unawareness of the centers' closings caused them to feel primarily feel emotions of fear, anxiety, and worry.

Concern for Others. In addition to these feelings for themselves, they also expressed anxiety for others in their community, including peers and the staff that had once worked in the centers. Zeke reflected that their center's staff member tried to mask her concerns: "I later heard that she [staff member] had more conversations behind the scenes where she was definitely a lot more worried, but she didn't want to come off that way in front of the new president..." Jordan said that staff in their center expressed anxiety about if positions would be terminated along with the center. This aligns with previous research that demonstrated that culture center staff are an important component of the place attachment process (Catano, 2014; Hartman, 2014; Hypolite, 2020; Jeffries & Boyd, 2021; Lucas et al., 2024; Patton, 2006a, 2006b; Salcedo, 2020; Soriano, 2022; Toya, 2011; Vaccaro, 2012; Welch, 2009). Because these closings were so recent, though, prior literature did not discuss participants' concerns about what would happen to staff if their centers closed. Recently, some staff who worked in DEI offices at institutions have been laid off (Ayala & Carr, 2025; Xia & Dey, 2024). Given the strong connections that participants—both in this study and in others—have reported making with professional staff and the participants' reported awareness of what occurred at other institutions, it was likely that this concern was shared by other undergraduates whose culture centers were in danger of closing or being merged with other centers.

Concern for LGBTQ+-Related Organizations and Programming. As time passed, participants' concerns and anxieties about their situations continued. They worried that these anti-DEI laws would be interpreted to mean that their student organizations, events, and other resources would be removed from the universities. Jordan said, "There's just a lot of anxiety, just about how do we protect these communities? How do we protect these groups? And we don't know the answer." Participants felt that their LGBTQ+ culture centers had facilitated and supported these resources and events; they were unsure of if upcoming programming would be allowed by their universities. Given that literature on effective culture centers illustrated that successful culture centers facilitated programming tailored to their population, this concern was reasonable (Hartman, 2014; Jeffries & Boyd, 2021; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Lucas et al., 2024; S. Marine, 2011; Noble, 2022; Patton, 2006a, 2006b; Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Soriano, 2022; Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Welch, 2009; Woodford et al., 2018). Some scholars discussed the risk of having one office maintain these resources, wondering if programming would stop should these offices close; however, these authors' purpose in their speculation is to encourage existing centers to share responsibility for events and resources with off-campus organizations (Dirks, 2016; Howle, 2022; Richmond, 2012). Though research on the actual impacts of events and resources that were once hosted by closed culture centers is yet to be published, literature on the impact of anti-DEI legislation on LGBTQ+ undergraduates suggests that this finding is in alignment with conclusions detemined by Goodman et al. (2025) and Stuber et al. (2026).

Concern for the Future. Participants also expressed worry and fear about the future. As the closings had felt random, they were unsure about what to expect next. This anxiety about the unknown was supported in previous research about coping (Billings & Moos, 1981; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Zeke said, "...it's just this constant back-to-forth and, like, the teetering on the edge." Participants who were majoring in women's, gender, and sexuality studies shared that they were worried they would not be able to graduate with those degrees. As shown by Damschroder (2013) and Goodman et al. (2025), LGBTQ+ undergraduates' majors were often a significant part of their identities; therefore, it is understandable that they would be anxious about potentially

losing those academic programs. This situation has already occurred at least two public, four-year institutions, which have eliminated those majors their efforts to comply with anti-DEI legislation (Priest, 2026; Whitford, 2026). Participants were also anxious about what would happen to their communities after everyone had graduated or left the university. They had learned about the LGBTQ+ culture centers and resources through websites which were removed when the culture centers were closed. Jordan explained, "I'm sure there will be communities, but are they gonna be accessible? Are they going to be known? Because it doesn't matter as much if you have a community if no one knows that it's there." Due the recency of anti-DEI legislation, few studies had examined students' concerns about what would be lost (Goldberg et al., 2020; Goodman et al., 2025). However, other literature explicitly demonstrated that these offices and their institutional support helped students learn about and access communities of individuals from similar backgrounds (Campen, 2021; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Damschroder, 2013; Lucas et al., 2024; Stuber et al., 2026). This research supports Jordan's concern that a lack of institutional support will make it harder for new students to learn about these resources.

Consideration of Moving Away. Finally, some participants shared that they were considering leaving their current state when they graduated and hoped to relocate to a state that had more LGBTQ+-affirming laws. This finding echoed what Howle (2022) discovered in their study: some participants had decided they were leaving, some were unsure, and others chose to remain in their states. All of my participants' experiences of losing their LGBTQ+ culture centers had caused them to have significant concerns and fears about what their future would entail should anti-DEI legislation continue to be implemented in their institutions and states. However, not everyone had committed to leaving their states upon graduation, which was also echoed in existing literature. Research often focused on how anti-DEI legislation influenced students' immediate decisions to persist at their institution rather than on their long-term decision to remain in their state (Liss et al., 2024; Rankin et al., 2019; Stuber et al., 2026). Participants' academic responses are examined further in the discussion in the next section on Theme 3.

Distrust of Institutional Administration. Distrust of institutional administration was also a significant emotional response. This was a common response from students who belong to historically marginalized populations (Cho, 2020; Garvey et al., 2018; Howle, 2022; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Noble, 2022; Phan, 2025; Pittman, 1994; Rankin et al., 2019; Stuber et al., 2026; Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). Participants explicitly clarified that they did not blame the culture center's staff; those individuals were also seen as victims of the anti-DEI legislation. They shared that they felt as though they had been led to believe that nothing would change as a result of the closings. When the centers were merged and/or closed, participants saw those decisions as the administration purposefully lying to them. This perceived betrayal caused further hurt since several of the participants had chosen their institution in part due to the centers' presences and resources. Jordan said,

> I came to this school with the promise that this resource was going to be there for me, that this resource was going to be there to help me. And then it was just an, oh, never mind, and it wasn't, and then they just straight up lied to our faces, and be, like, oh, but nothing's going to change and then slowly but surely, they started shutting down programs.

Jota expressed similar feelings, saying,

> Oh, yeah, I definitely felt betrayed about it. It was, like a slap in the face, especially because I associated the college with being, like, a place that was safe for people like me. And then, very quickly, all of that stuff started getting cut.

Even participants who had more positive associations with their administrators reported disappointment that those individuals did not push back against the legislation more. This result corresponds with existing research on student/administration relationships, where students perceived most adminstrators' actions as suspect. They considered inaction by administrators as a lack of support for those in historically marginalized communities (Cho, 2020; Phan, 2025; Stuber et al., 2026). These emotions of disappointment and distrust caused participants to become suspicious of their administration's motives. Even when participants communicated

directly with administrators, they were not reassured by those individuals' responses. Unfortunately, as illustrated by Rankin et al. (2019), this distrust may not be misplaced as most universities "...continue to fall short on their promise to accept and nuture queer- and trans-spectrum students" (p. 448).

Theme 2: Discussion Summary. Overall, participants expressed multiple emotional responses to learning that their on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center was going to be closed or merged with other campus culture centers. My participants felt fear and anxiety about what had occurred, what was currently happening, and what might transpire for themselves, their community, and their center's staff. Participants additionally felt an increased distrust in their institutions' administrations, believing that they did not push back enough against the anti-DEI legislation that closed their centers. They felt that administrators' public and personal messaging demonstrated at best a lack of consideration for their community and at worst a decision to remove all support tailored to LGBTQ+ individuals. In the next section, I discuss how my findings on participants' action responses connects with existing literature on historically marginalized undergraduates' actions when they pursue degrees in environments that are not supportive of their minoritized identities.

Theme 3: Participants' Actions in Response to the Loss

Participants performed multiple actions in response to their centers closing or merging with other centers. For a myriad of reasons related to the anti-DEI legislation and loss of centers, participants found it difficult to complete their classes as effectively as they had previously. They sought to maintain their communities and student organizations. Finally, they participated in multiple protests in attempts to raise awareness of the impact of their states' anti-DEI legislation and their institutions' choices to comply with that legislation. In this section, I discuss how my findings relate to existing literature focused on poor academic performance; the importance of community; the importance of LGBTQ+-related student organizations; and participation in multiple forms of protest.

Poor Academic Performance. Most participants reported that they were having difficulty completing their homework and maintaining or improving their cumulative GPA while also processing their emotional responses, maintaining communities, and participating in protests. Jordan said, "The schoolwork itself, I don't think it's had too much of an impact, but my focus has been kind of split a little bit, as much as I've tried to prioritize my schoolwork." Research on coping methods suggests that ineffective responses to trauma are common for individuals experiencing such events (Billings & Moos, 1981; Fullilove, 1996; Scribner et al., 2021). Billings and Moos (1981) explained, "Evidence indicates that undesirable events (such as death of a family member or a job loss) are more likely to be associated with impaired functioning than are desired events such as job promotion or marriage" (p. 140). My participants' discussion of their academics indicated that prior to losing their centers, they were more successful academically. This data thus suggested that the changes in academic performance was a response to how institutions chose to implement anti-DEI legislation.

Scribner et al. (2021) argued that academic stress was prevalent among undergraduates regardless of their identities. Others have shown that undergraduates from historically marginalized populations typically have lower grades than their peers (De Leon, 2023; B. Lee & Paliliunas, 2024; Lerma et al., 2020; Young, 1986). LGBTQ+ undergraduates in particular are at risk of poor academic performance or dropping out due to environments they perceive as unsafe (Liss et al., 2024; Noble, 2022; Phan, 2025; Pryor, 2015; Rankin et al., 2019; Woodford et al., 2019). One way to retain undergraduates from these backgrounds was to have institutionally supported culture centers and related resources, which were found to generally increase their academic success and persistence (Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Liss et al., 2024; Soriano, 2022; Stuber et al., 2026; Tapia-Fuselier, 2020; Turner, 1994). Given that conclusion, the removal of evidence-based successful interventions such as LGBTQ+ culture centers and their resources were likely to have a negative impact on LGBTQ+ undergraduates' grades and their decisions to remain in school. This assumption was supported by my participants and their academic performance after losing their centers.

Importance of Community. My study supported findings on the importance of community for historically marginalized undergraduates. Participants had found friends and increased senses of belonging through their LGBTQ+ culture centers, which had been demonstrated by earlier literature on culture centers for historically marginalized populations (Hartman, 2014; Jeffries & Boyd, 2021; Lucas et al., 2024; Mclane & Kozinets, 2019; Patton, 2006a, 2006b; Saia, 2019; Soriano, 2022; Welch, 2009; Young, 1986). When these centers were closed, participants lost that third place where they had created and maintained friendships. Before the closings, they had locations where they knew they could connect with like-minded peers, which, according to Gustafson (2001), would have helped them build a sense of place attachment to that location.

After the closing, if they wanted to see each other, they had to discuss and agree upon a location and/or activity. Phlox said, "It felt like [the LGBTQ+ culture center] was sort of a point of connection between a few different groups and circles I was involved with, and it became more difficult to, like, see all the people I wanted to." Being able to build and maintain communities was especially significant for this population, who were more likely to have come from biological families that do not accept their LGBTQ+ children (Gonzales et al., 2020). My participants did not disclose their relationships with their biological families. However, their discussions on their friendships made through their LGBTQ+ culture centers showed that these relationships were important to improved mental health outcomes. The argument that accessible community helps students retain positive mental health outcomes was supported by Camputaro (2018), who explained that students were more able to connect with their institution if they could create what Camputaro (2018) referred to as "sub-communities" (p. 92). Camputaro (2018) explained, "Meeting other students with common classes and personal interests allows students to create a small circle of friends who they see on a regular basis. In turn, this offers organized social opportunities, creating a feeling of comfort at a large institution" (p. 92). Therefore, it can be assumed that losing the office that facilitated these sub-communities was likely to have a negative effect on those communities and thus on the individuals who were part of them.

Importance of LGBTQ+ Student Organizations. Research on historically marginalized populations demonstrated the importance of student organizations that are focused on issues important to those populations (Duran, 2019; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Mallory, 1998; Stuber et al., 2026; Welch, 2009; Woodford et al., 2018). My participants' feedback aligned with these findings: they all found LGBTQ+ student organizations to be beneficial. These organizations provided them with resources and community, and generally were sponsored by their culture centers, which was a conclusion also supported by prior research (Hartman, 2014; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Patton, 2006a, 2006b; Pryor, 2015; Welch, 2009). Losing these centers resulted the loss of these organizations, either directly or indirectly. Some institutions allowed the organizations to continue but without the faculty or financial support that made them officially sanctioned by the institution, which ultimately either shut down the organization or put it at risk for elimination.

Participants responded to these closures by focusing on ways they could maintain their organizations' existences or restart them. Jordan, whose LGBTQ+-related club lost its funding and was shut down, was struggling to maintain their organization without institutional tools such as the ability to be included in the online organization directory: "We just want to be officially recognized as a club, so we can get the privileges that being an official club will give us." Institutionally-recognized student organizations have long been a demand of student activists (Chessman & Wayt, 2016; Dilley, 2002; Goldberg et al., 2020; Rose-Mockry, 2015). My participants' demands for official recognition of their LGBTQ+ student organizations were echoed in reflections from LGBTQ+ student activists at the University of Kansas in the late 1960s and early 1970s, who fought for recognition from their university so they would be able to have a reserved meeting place and funding (Dilley, 2002; Rose-Mockry, 2015). This case from the University of Kansas demonstrated that LGBTQ+ undergraduates have always needed organizations that receive institutional support, which typically also include an on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center.

Due to the recency of this legislation, most research did not examine how students have

reacted when they lost institutional support for their LGBTQ+ organizations, which often resulted in the clubs themselves shutting down. Though the recency of this legislation means there was limited research on the impact of losing institutional support for LGBTQ+ organizations, research does exist that showed the potential ramifications of such administrative decisions. Participants in Stuber et al. (2026) reported that if their LGBTQ+ student organization lost their funding, they would in turn lose the ability to facilitate successful events such as Queer Prom and Lavender Graduation. Student organizations typically have not had the budget that institutionally-supported offices do, which has resulted in cancellation of their events due to lack of funding (Rupertus, 2025; Salinas, 2024; Zeff, 2024); this was a concern that Zeke faced when trying to maintain their organization's upcoming events. Zeke's institution interpreted its state's anti-DEI legislation to mean that funding for LGBTQ+ organizations needed to be revoked, which then meant that Zeke's organization and LGBTQ+ culture center were unsure if they could continue financially supporting already planned programming. This uncertainty added to Zeke's stress, which impacted their ability to perform at the same level academically as they had before the legislation was implemented. Therefore, though research on the impact of this phenomenon had not yet been conducted, assumptions about the negative effects on LGBTQ+ undergraduates were most likely accurate (Goodman et al., 2025).

Participation in Multiple Forms of Protests. My data also aligned with other findings regarding undergraduates' participation in protests. Historically, LGBTQ+ individuals regularly performed multiple types of protests at their institutions in order to have their identities recognized and celebrated (Dilley, 2002; Goldberg et al., 2020; Lange et al., 2026; S. Marine, 2011; Rose-Mockry, 2015; Woodford et al., 2019). J mentioned that his LGBTQ+ student organization had considered previous means of protest by LGBTQ+ individuals to determine what specific action they wished to take before deciding on a coffin to suggest that closing their LGBTQ+ center was a symbolic death. Using a coffin in this way was used at least once before by students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Aguilar-Hernández et al., 2021). J explained that his organization performed a week of mourning activities that ended with their

center's funeral for multiple reasons: "We were just trying to come up with a way that we could bring a lot of attention, have some fun with it as well." Aguilar-Hernández et al. (2021) found that their participants had similar motivation when deciding to use a coffin to represent what they called the "death of diversity" (p. 41). Other student activists may have used a similar strategy to bring awareness to their concerns, though I did not see this exact tactic used in prior literature. The use of formal group protests were not limited to LGBTQ+ students. Students from other historically marginalized backgrounds also used these to create changes at their university, which have included but were not limited to advocating for the creation of culture centers (Aguilar-Hernández et al., 2021; Chessman & Wayt, 2016; Cho, 2020; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Hypolite, 2020; Ndemanu, 2017; Richmond, 2012; Salcedo, 2020).

The use of direct communication with administrators was also a form of protest applied by students in earlier research (Cho, 2020; De Leon, 2023; Lerma et al., 2020). Jota wrote a letter to administrators to explain the impact of the LGBTQ+ culture center's closing; they were told that the resources still existed but were in different offices. Jota said, "That felt kind of, like, insulting, almost gaslighting, pretty much. I feel like a lot of the, my school's responses to pretty much anything students are mad about has been that kind of, like, dismissive, not remotely helpful." Students' perception of administrative communication as minimizing was also demonstrated by Cho (2020). Cho's (2020) participants perceived administrative responses to be a form of "buffering" (p. 178), even if administrators did not intend for that result. Students from historically marginalized backgrounds have often felt that administrators are hostile towards their communities' interests (Cho, 2020; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; Phan, 2025; Stuber et al., 2026; Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). Given this belief, it was understandable why my participants felt that administrators' responses to their direct communication discounted their struggles in adapting to university life without their LGBTQ+ culture centers.

Theme 3: Discussion Summary. My participants performed a variety of actions in response to losing their LGBTQ+ culture centers, which aligned with findings from previous research. They strove to maintain their communities and student organizations, though they had

difficulty doing this as the centers had been significant facilitators of both. Without the institutions' financial and location supports, participants found this work to be challenging. They also reported decreases in their abilities to complete their homework and classes, which was often a direct result of their changed focus on rebuilding their communities and organizations. Finally, they participated in formal and informal protests, both as individuals and with groups of other students and concerned individuals. These responses aligned with literature on the actions of other students who belong to historically marginalized populations.

Implications

The findings of this study had multiple implications regarding what faculty and staff understand about mental health in vulnerable populations; the impacts on students and staff who remain and are attempting to support these undergraduates without formal institutional backing or funding; and what institutions consider to be acceptable on a four-year, public university's campus. Interested staff can include, but are not limited to, student affairs practitioners, academic advisors, and student success professionals.

LGBTQ+ undergraduate students are historically more likely to struggle with mental health concerns, including but not limited to anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide (Bazarsky et al., 2023; Gonzales et al., 2020; Howle, 2022; B. Lee & Paliliunas, 2024; Marx et al., 2024; Rankin et al., 2019; Yang & Stolzenberg, 2025). One effective way to support these students through their mental health concerns is by providing institutionally-supported and funded LGBTQ+ programming, such as LGBTQ+ culture centers and tailored resources (Bazarsky et al., 2023; Woodford et al., 2018). Disruptions in place attachment are also known to have negative impacts on individuals' health (Fullilove, 1996). My participants' data reflected that several of them had struggled with their mental health prior to the implementation of anti-DEI legislation. Existing mental health issues were then worsened as they abruptly lost their LGBTQ+ culture centers and related programming and resources. Should these bans on DEI-affiliated programming and places continue, staff and faculty will likely encounter more LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in distress who suddenly have fewer LGBTQ+-tailored

resources to provide support. Staff and faculty who did not receive formal education on this population from their institutions' culture centers may inadvertently worsen their students' psyches due to misguided assumptions about this community. Microaggressions about sexuality and gender have a documented negative impact on LGBTQ+ individuals (Damschroder, 2013; Woodford et al., 2019). Well-meaning faculty and staff may accidentally cause further harm to this population as they attempt to provide support to their students. Without LGBTQ+ culture centers and evidence-supported, inclusive programming, this population is likely to face increased mental health struggles that impact their ability to persist at their institutions and earn their bachelor's degrees Johnston (2016) and Wall et al. (2026). Staff and faculty will need to be aware of this upcoming need for mental health support so they can be prepared to support this already vulnerable population.

Former LGBTQ+ culture centers' staff are also likely to be struggling professionally and personally after losing their centers. Even when institutional environments were more supportive of LGBTQ+ students, staff reported "being overextended, under-resourced, and unsupported" (Oliveria et al., 2025, p. 121). Staff were often anxious that they would lose their center and felt required to prove that their labor was legitimate to their institution's administrators (Cortez, 2026; Oliveria et al., 2025). These emotions and stressors are likely to have worsened with new legislation that has taken away institutional support and funding (Goodman et al., 2025). Additionally, staff often identify as part of their culture center's targeted population (Lucas et al., 2024). Being part of this community means that the anti-DEI legislation on campuses can have a negative impact on their mental health as well (Goodman et al., 2025). Because these staff have developed personal relationships with the students who regularly visited the centers, they may experience emotions of sadness and anxiety similar to what the participants reported. Additionally, cutting the institutional support of these centers may mean that staff are laid off. This situation has already started happening at some institutions as they implemented anti-DEI legislation, though administrators often noted that the staff would either be reassigned to different offices or would be able to apply for other positions at the universities (Ayala & Carr, 2025;

Rupertus, 2025; University of Utah Communications, 2024; Villarreal, 2024; Wendling, 2024; Xia & Dey, 2024). The emotional and financial impacts of closing LGBTQ+ culture centers are likely to also affect staff members. If the staff are laid off rather than reassigned, accessing mental health support may be difficult due to the loss of income and canceled health insurance.

After losing their culture center staff, LGBTQ+ undergraduate students will look to replace the emotional support once provided by that staff. They will likely reach out for assistance from remaining professional staff, faculty, and administrators. Often, faculty and staff with historically marginalized identities are tasked with performing additional, unpaid emotional labor as they try to support students from similar minoritized backgrounds (Berhide et al., 2022; S. M. Jones & Kee, 2021; Picciuca, 2025). This invisible, emotional labor has been reported to have negative effects on faculty and professional staff members' mental health (Picciuca, 2025). Should such labor continue to remain unseen, the remaining faculty and staff will likely also experience harmful stress outcomes from handling an increased amount of invisible emotional labor.

The removal of culture centers for historically marginalized populations sends a message about who is and is not welcome on campus. As Oliveria et al. (2025) noted, the institution's ability to determine what offices are supported and which are not suggested that some populations were worthy of inclusion and others were not. Campus ecology and person-environment research has demonstrated that what artifacts are displayed in public spaces showed students who the university perceived as belonging to that institution (Banning, 1993; Banning & Bartels, 1997; Banning et al., 2008; Cuyjet, 2010; Mehrabian, 1971). Therefore, what has been forcibly removed conveys who is not expected to be pursuing an education at that university or who is expected to remain closeted about their identities if they wish to earn their bachelor's degrees. LGBTQ+ undergraduate students are at more risk than their heterosexual and cisgender peers for dropping out of higher education without a degree (Liss et al., 2024; Noble, 2022; Phan, 2025; Pryor, 2015; Rankin et al., 2019; Woodford et al., 2019). If students—especially those from historically marginalized populations—feel they are not welcomed at an institution and do not

have a sense of belonging, they are unlikely to continue matriculating there (Duran, 2019; Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Lucas et al., 2024; S. Marine, 2011; Pedler et al., 2022; Pryor, 2018; Soriano, 2022). According to Rankin et al. (2019), "[Only] 75% of queer-spectrum students and 65% of trans-spectrum students report feeling a sense of belonging on campus" (p. 448). Rankin et al. (2019) wrote their article in 2019, before implementation of anti-DEI legislation. It is likely, then, that even lower percentages of LGBTQ+ students report having a sense of belonging on their campuses now that their centers and resources have been removed, which will make them less likely to earn bachelor's degrees. This study's findings could be used to illustrate the impacts of anti-DEI legislation upon vulnerable populations, which could include failure to earn a bachelor's degree. The potential decrease in persistence and completion will also be of interest to higher education policymakers and institutional administrators who strive to maintain and, ideally, exceed current enrollment numbers.

Overall, this study has notable implications for student affairs professionals, institutional administrators, faculty, and policymakers. Based on existing research on place attachment and documented concerns about LGBTQ+ undergraduates, anti-DEI legislation is likely to have negative impacts on this population's mental health and sense of belonging on their campus. LGBTQ+ undergraduate students already struggled with mental health concerns and persistence in higher education before anti-DEI legislation was implemented on their campuses. They will likely face increased strife, made worse with the loss of LGBTQ+ culture centers and related resources. Staff may also struggle personally and professionally with the loss of the centers; even if they do not lose their positions and livelihoods, the impact on the LGBTQ+ community is likely to affect them as well. Faculty, other professional staff, and institutional administrators will be impacted, as they may then have to perform their former colleagues' emotional labor as they assist LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. Additionally, those outside of higher education, such as policymakers, are likely to find these conclusions of interest, given that they demonstrate some of the effects of anti-DEI legislation upon vulnerable populations.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. To ensure that the study could feasibly be conducted, participants were required to have accessed their campus's center at least four times a semester and had to have attended a four-year public university. Participants were therefore restricted to those who could physically access their on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center, which unfortunately meant that online-only students were ineligible. Additionally, participants were required to have attended a four-year public university; undergraduates attending private institutions or two-year community/junior colleges were not able to share their experiences. This eligibility requirement was included because of the differences in environments between four-year public institutions, four-year private institutions, and two-year junior/community colleges. Undergraduates who were online-only or attended an institution that was not four-year and/or public likely have unique experiences with their institutions' implementation of anti-DEI legislation, which should be explored further.

To recruit participants, I sent emails to faculty, staff, LGBTQ+ culture center offices, and LGBTQ+-focused student organizations at institutions where there had been an LGBTQ+ culture center, according to the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (2025). Recipients of these emails were asked to forward them to potentially eligible undergraduate students who might be interested. Because I was relying on third parties to connect me with participants, there are individuals who might have been interested but who were not made aware of this study. Some faculty and staff chose not to forward on emails due to concerns about maintaining participants' anonymity given the current political climate; others did not send the emails because they wished to avoid re-inflicting the trauma of losing their LGBTQ+ culture centers on a vulnerable population. Additionally, not all of the email addresses for centers and organizations were still functional. Some centers had been closed due to their state's anti-DEI legislation, but the emails had not yet been removed from websites. Some organizations were not functioning either due to anti-DEI legislation or a loss of interest in the club's topic. Finally, participants were required to have been regulars in their LGBTQ+ culture centers and have been

present at their institutions when those centers were closed or combined into general student belonging and engagement centers. This limited the study to a smaller population of eligible students as many had to have been juniors and seniors to have experienced both events. These difficulties meant that I had a smaller pool of potential participants to recruit.

Not all students who identify as LGBTQ+ feel welcome at their LGBTQ+ culture centers. Students who identified as People of Color reported that they struggled to develop place attachment to both LGBTQ+ culture centers and culture centers tailored to their racial and/or ethnic identities (Balsam et al., 2011; Catano, 2014; Cox, 2024; Duran, 2019; Lemerand & Duran, 2024; McCoy, 2018; Pryor, 2018; Stuber et al., 2026). McCoy's (2018) participants felt that their institution's LGBTQ+ culture center "was experienced as a culturally white space imbued with white culture and this dictated how students approached the space and how they chose to engage in the space" (p. 86). My research question focused on how participants experienced the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center, and the interview questions did not inquire about participants' racial and ethnic identities or how that affected how they acted in their centers. If LGBTQ+ undergraduate students entered their center once and did not feel welcomed, they likely responded very differently to the implementation of anti-DEI legislation than those who had developed a sense of place attachment to their center. This could also apply to other identities, such as socio-economic status, which one participant mentioned as a reason why they went to an off-campus location for a free lunch. Yang and Stolzenberg (2025) determined, "Interestingly, discrimination based on race/ethnicity was similar across both groups [cisgender and transgender students] (17.7% vs. 18.0%), suggesting that other identity factors may play a more significant role in shaping discrimination experiences for transgender students" (p. 42). Given Yang and Stolzenberg's (2025) quantitative data, participants with intersecting identities who were asked to consider how those identities influenced their behavior likely would have had unique experiences with their culture center and anti-DEI legislation.

Finally, when researchers examining coping styles create smaller categories for their participants, they often separate them into men and women, without clarifying if individuals

identify as cisgender, agender, and/or transgender (Billings & Moos, 1981; Ganesan et al., 2018; Lazarus, 1996; McCrae, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Terry, 1994). Some of this was likely due to when these studies were published. As illustrated previously, coming out with an identity that was not cisgender was a risky move that could cost individuals socially and professionally (Dilley, 2002; Rose-Mockry, 2015). Without this data, it is unclear how multiple genders beyond the binary might affect coping strategies in individuals.

Future Research

Further research on the LGBTQ+ undergraduate population and their experiences with anti-DEI legislation is essential to helping faculty, staff, and administrators more effectively serve this group. Areas of future research include additional studies on loss with larger sample sizes; LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experiences with anti-DEI legislation in private universities and community colleges; the experiences of LGBTQ+ undergraduate students who attended universities in states without anti-DEI legislation; the impact of online communities on facilitating and maintaining communities and student organizations; and the experiences of staff and faculty who were initially employed by these now-closed offices.

My sample size of six individuals provided intriguing results, and collecting more data on LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experiences losing their LGBTQ+ culture centers will help practitioners better serve this unique and vulnerable population. I was able to determine findings that aligned with existing literature; however, the size was too small to discern trends in individuals with specific gender identities and sexual orientations. Rankin et al. (2019) demonstrated that students in both queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum communities reported differing amounts of belonging on college campuses. Therefore, it can be assumed that these populations would have unique experiences of loss based on those identities. A student whose sexual orientation is queer but whose gender identity is cisgender would have a different experience with anti-DEI legislation than a student whose sexual orientation is heterosexual but whose gender identity is transgender. Incorporating identities in further studies of how these communities experience the loss of their culture centers can provide more data on how to

effectively support more LGBTQ+ undergraduate students with tailored programming for their specific identities.

This study focused on undergraduate students who attended four-year, public institutions of higher education. However, there are undergraduate students at four-year, private institutions and two-year institutions that are in states with anti-DEI legislation. The impact of state anti-DEI legislation may be different for these institutions that follow different policies than their four-year, public counterparts. Additionally, private universities and colleges may have unique behavior codes dependent on the beliefs of the institutions sponsoring those institutions. The combination of a unique code of conduct and anti-DEI legislation may have a different impact on LGBTQ+ undergraduate students at these institutions. Understanding how they experience their time at private institutions would help practitioners in those universities better serve those students.

LGBTQ+ undergraduate students at states without anti-DEI legislation may also have been affected by these laws. If they know undergraduate students at other institutions with anti-DEI legislation, they may have felt emotions of anxiety and fear for their peers. They may also have felt concerned about the likelihood of their state passing similar legislation that could impact their LGBTQ+ culture centers and related programming. Students in states without this legislation might have also been affected by national offices' statements on gender identity and sexual orientation. Executive Orders by the Trump administration have likely impacted all LGBTQ+ individuals, regardless of the state they live in (The LGBTQ+ Bar, 2026). Collecting more data on these LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experiences on national attitudes about LGBTQ+ identities would also provide more comprehension of how to support this population.

Several participants in my study discussed using online platforms such as Discord to connect with their communities and student organizations. One formal group protest was planned completely on Discord, since it took place over summer and not all interested students lived in the same area. Online communities also allow online-only students to find communities of like-minded people at their institution. Because my research question required the ability to access the campus, I was not able to collect data on the use of online platforms by students.

However, it was evident from their responses that these ways of connecting are likely to continue. Therefore, conducting research on how students encounter and use these online platforms would help professional staff better understand and provide updated, accurate assistance to those students.

Finally, faculty and staff who were previously employed by now-closed LGBTQ+ culture centers likely have unique responses to this change. Many of these individuals also likely identify as LGBTQ+, and they may be feeling a myriad of responses due to the anti-DEI legislation and how their institutions chose to implement it. Some professionals were reassigned to different offices in their institutions, while others were simply laid off (Ayala & Carr, 2025; Rupertus, 2025; University of Utah Communications, 2024; Villarreal, 2024; Wendling, 2024; Xia & Dey, 2024). Faculty and staff will likely have performed different actions and felt diverse emotions to this change. However, their professional affiliation with their institution may have an affect on how they publicly respond. They may also choose to react differently out of concern for future employment opportunities. Understanding how staff and faculty reacted and then coped with the changes would help administrators and senior leadership as they attempt to support these individuals. It would also help human resources professionals and others involved with retention of staff and faculty given those offices' involvement with ending and beginning employment at institutions of higher education.

Conclusion

As I finished each interview, I asked every participant if there was something they wanted to be sure I knew about their LGBTQ+ culture centers and the loss of those centers. Jordan discussed the group formal protest they attended at their institution, explaining that they felt it was important to document every attempt to change administrators' decisions to show that the students did not passively accept the new anti-DEI legislation. Jordan said, "Like, we didn't just take it sitting down. We did try to organize, we did try to do what we could." Through this study, I have attempted to honor Jordan's sentiment by recording participants' memories of their LGBTQ+ culture center as well as their emotional and action responses to its loss. Though

participants felt negative effects of the closing, their data suggested that they wanted others to know that they were fighting back in any and every way that they could while still pursuing their bachelor's degrees and maintaining their mental health. I considered using Jordan's quote as the title for this dissertation, but opted to quote another student, who said, "It's just my one little act of protest I'm still doing." That student's use of present tense better reflected the overall attitude of my participants at the time of the interviews: they had not given up when their centers were closed, and they were going to continue fighting back against anti-DEI legislation.

My findings illustrated how these LGBTQ+ undergraduate students had found and then helped maintain third places at their institution. The interviews showed that their LGBTQ+ culture centers served as places, rather than spaces, based on pre-existing, agreed-upon definitions of space as a physical location and place as a feeling of attachment (Agnew, 2011; Cresswell, 2015; Low & Altman, 1992; Tuan, 1977; Wilhoit, 2015). Their descriptions of how they interacted with the centers showed that they fit Oldenburg's (1989) definition of a third place, where everyone was considered an equal, conversation was a significant reason for returning, happiness was a common emotion, and regulars felt a sense of ownership of the office. Participants had created a sense of place attachment at their LGBTQ+ culture centers.

When these centers were lost, participants then experienced the disruption of place attachment. They demonstrated different ways of responding to their loss, from emotions such as grief and anger to actions such as poor academic performance and protests. Their responses aligned with previous literature on the disruption of place attachment, where individuals who were forcibly removed from their places experienced significant trauma (Brown & Perkins, 1992). This population had already been demonstrated to be at a higher risk of having mental health concerns and performing poorly academically (Liss et al., 2024; Noble, 2022; Phan, 2025; Pryor, 2015; Rankin et al., 2019; Woodford et al., 2019). The additional stressors from this disruption of place attachment exacerbated existing mental health issues and academic struggles as my participants sought to maintain their LGBTQ+ communities, student organizations, and pre-planned programming in addition to their regular responsibilities and activities. Their

responses supported Lewin's (1936) equation of $B = f(P, E)$. Students' identities did not change, but their environments did, and their behavior was influenced as a result of the changed environments.

After the identity-based culture centers at my place of employment were merged into a student belonging center to comply with state anti-DEI legislation, one of my students told me that they weren't going anywhere. "We'll just find another place," they said as they discussed how one office on campus was hanging up pride flags to signal when the previously-planned queer programming was happening. Much has been lost as a result of such legislation; as of writing this conclusion, my undergraduate institution, the University of North Texas, removed its online LGBTQ+ history archives due to one state representative's outcry against its existence (A. Wood, 2026). Years ago, Nazis planned and implemented the organized destruction of the Institute for Sexual Science (ISS), which had been a third place where scientists conducted research on gender-affirming care and LGBTQ+ individuals worked, lived, and celebrated their gender and sexual identities (Tracey, 2023). Despite the burning of decades of labor and research, Nazis did not eradicate LGBTQ+ people. Tracey (2023) said, "There's perhaps only one lesson to be learned from the destruction of the ISS: despite the Nazi destruction of a community's history, the suppression of 'forbidden' knowledge, imprisonment, torture, and murder, the peoples they sought to eliminate did not cease to exist" (para. 9). Though state and federal governments can attempt to remove LGBTQ+ culture centers and the resources and organizations they once supported, the students are not going to go away. Student affairs professionals can alleviate their burdens by better understanding how they are experiencing these losses and tailoring advice and support to meet these unique needs.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Emails and Messaging

The following emails were sent to faculty/staff and students.

Faculty/Staff Email

Subject: Doctoral research on LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experience of loss of LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation

Dear Colleague:

As anti-DEI legislation continues to be passed in U.S. states, LGBTQ+ culture centers are being forcibly closed and their services paused, canceled, or assigned to other departments. We are researching how LGBTQ+ undergraduates are experiencing the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. Participants need to be current undergraduates or have attended the institution as an undergraduate within the past two years.

If you know of current or former students who might be interested in participating, I would be happy to share more information about the study with them. You can forward my site (https://linktr.ee/maggieborders) or my contact details to the students, or you can provide me with their email and I can reach out with that information. The site includes an interest form/informed consent form for participants to review.

Participation is confidential. Only the two researchers involved will know the participant's identity, which will not be shared with anyone.

Thank you for all of the hard work that you do. We hope that by gaining more understanding of how LGBTQ+ undergraduates are experiencing the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers, we can better comprehend what support these offices provided and what emotions students may be experiencing due to the centers' closures.

Sincerely,

Maggie R Borders & Dr. Lisa Rubin (rubin@ksu.edu)

Student Email

Subject: Doctoral research on LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experience of loss of LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation

Dear Student:

As anti-DEI legislation continues to be passed in U.S. states, LGBTQ+ culture centers are being forcibly closed and their services paused, canceled, or assigned to other departments. We are researching how LGBTQ+ undergraduates are experiencing the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers. Participants need to be current undergraduates or have attended the institution as an undergraduate within the past two years. Attached is the informed consent form, which provides more information about our study.

If you are interested in participating, you may reply to this email or complete the interest form/informed consent form at https://linktr.ee/maggieborders. Your participation is confidential. Only the two researchers involved will know your identity, which will not be shared with anyone.

We appreciate your consideration. We hope that by gaining more understanding of how LGBTQ+ undergraduates are experiencing the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture centers, we can better comprehend what support these offices provided and what emotions students may be experiencing due to the centers' closures.

Sincerely,

Maggie R Borders & Dr. Lisa Rubin (rubin@ksu.edu)

The following message and image were posted and shared via Facebook and LinkedIn:

Social Media Message

We are conducting a study on how LGBTQ+ undergraduates from four-year public universities are experiencing the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center. As anti-DEI legislation continues to be passed in U.S. states, LGBTQ+ culture centers are being forcibly closed, leaving students without a service they had previously relied upon.

We are looking for current or former undergraduate students who identify as LGBTQ+ and who regularly accessed (4+ times a semester) their on-campus LGBTQ+ culture center. Former undergraduates who attended their institution within the past two years are eligible pending they meet the other criteria of identity and regular access.

Interested individuals can complete the interest form/informed consent survey at

Figure A.1: Seeking study participants for doctoral research



https://linktr.ee/maggieborders.

For questions, please contact Maggie Borders (doctoral student) via the site's messaging software or at mborders@ksu.edu. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Lisa Rubin (rubin@ksu.edu).

Appendix B: Interview Guides and Debriefing Statements

The following interview guides and debriefing statements were used for each interview.

Interview 1 (Focused Life History) Guide & Debriefing

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study "How LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation."

We are researching how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experienced the loss of their institution's LGBTQ+ culture center due to anti-DEI legislation. We seek to gain an understanding of how students experienced their center and then how they reacted to the forced closing of that center. This research has the opportunity to provide insight into how this population experiences the loss of a previously-relied upon office. It can provide higher education staff and faculty with more understanding of how these places supported students and what emotions students may be experiencing with the loss of the centers.

This interview will last 45-60 minutes. You can keep your camera off throughout the interview. The interview will be recorded audio only. We will not refer to you by name and not reference your institution. If it does get mentioned, this information will not be included in any notes or results.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

I will now begin recording.

Interview Questions

1. Pseudonym and spelling, pronouns
2. What interested you in this study?
3. How do you describe yourself?
4. Which identities do you feel are most important in your life? How do they appear in your day-to-day?
5. Why did you choose to attend [site]? Where do you feel like you belong at [site]? Tell me about your experience.

6. Where did/do you like to spend time on campus? Describe the place and/or an interaction.
7. How did you learn about [LGBTQ+ Center]? Tell me about your first experience with it.
8. How would you describe [LGBTQ+ Center] to a new student?
9. Describe your experience of deciding to return to [LGBTQ+ Center].
10. Tell me about your favorite event or activity hosted at the [LGBTQ+ Center]. Why is that your favorite?
11. Who did you connect with at the [LGBTQ+ Center]? Tell me about your experiences with those individuals.
12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

I have stopped recording.

Debriefing

You recently participated in a research study about LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experiences of loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center. You volunteered to be interviewed about your experiences related to this study. The purpose of this debriefing statement is to review the study importance and information important to the protection of your identity.

Information on national mental health support options targeted to LGBTQ+ individuals (The Trevor Project, National Suicide Crisis Lifeline (988), and the Human Rights Campaign's Mental Health Resources in the LGBTQ+ Community) will be sent to you after the conclusion of this interview.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to understand how LGBTQ+ undergraduates at four-year public universities experienced the loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center when those places were forcibly closed by state legislation.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject or institution. Research records, including recordings of interviews, will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. You will be referred to in the research with pseudonyms and no mention of the institution name or other identifiers like name or position will be used.

Contacts and Questions

The researchers conducting this study are Maggie Borders and Dr. Lisa Rubin (rubin@ksu.edu). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Maggie Borders (mborders@ksu.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Kansas State University Office of Research Integrity, Compliance, and Security:
Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance
(785) 532-3224
comply@ksu.edu

Interview 2 (Experiences and Reflections) Guide & Debriefing

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study "How LGBTQ+ undergraduates experience the loss of LGBTQ+ culture centers due to anti-DEI legislation."

We are researching how LGBTQ+ undergraduates experienced the loss of their institution's LGBTQ+ culture center due to anti-DEI legislation. We seek to gain an understanding of how students experienced their center and then how they reacted to the forced closing of that center. This research has the opportunity to provide insight into how this population experiences the loss of a previously-relied upon office. It can provide higher education staff and faculty with more understanding of how these places supported students and what emotions students may be experiencing with the loss of the centers.

This interview will last 45-60 minutes. You can keep your camera off throughout the

interview. The interview will be recorded audio only. We will not refer to you by name and not reference your institution. If it does get mentioned, this information will not be included in any notes or results.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

I will now begin recording.

Interview Questions

1. Pseudonym and spelling, pronouns
2. How do/did you feel when you entered [LGBTQ+ Center] before the closing?
3. How has [LGBTQ+ Center] affected your time at [site]? How might it be different if you had not encountered [LGBTQ+ Center]?
4. How did you find out about the closing of [LGBTQ+ Center]? What were your first thoughts upon hearing this news?
5. How did you respond to the closing of [LGBTQ+ Center]?
6. How has the closing affected your daily life? How you plan for the future?
7. Do you use off-campus LGBTQ+ resources? Why or why not?
8. Based on the previous interview, additional questions tailored to the student may be asked.

I have stopped recording.

Debriefing

You recently participated in a research study about LGBTQ+ undergraduates' experiences of loss of their LGBTQ+ culture center. You volunteered to be interviewed about your experiences related to this study. The purpose of this debriefing statement is to review the study importance and information important to the protection of your identity.

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Mental Health Resources in the LGBTQ+ Community) will be sent to you after the conclusion of this interview.

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