Troubling the Basics: How LGBTQ+ Trainings Function as Non-Performative Commitments[1]

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Abstract

> *In this paper we examine how those who design and facilitate LGBTQ+ social justice educational interventions (SJEIs), commonly known as Safe Zone or Ally Workshops, as part of their institutional role described the content and outcomes of those workshops. We provide insights about types, components, and approaches of these LGBTQ+ SJEIs. Then, using critical social justice education pedagogy and frameworks, we explore how LGBTQ+ SJEIs are insufficient to enact campus transformation and serve as an empty gesture that lacks commitment.*

Keywords: social justice education, design, LGBTQ+, pedagogy

Introduction

Higher education leaders must not become complacent in the belief that any current or previous efforts to improve campus climates for LGBTQ+ inclusion are sufficient to combat contemporary and future acts of state-sponsored trans and queer antagonism (Branigin & Kirkpatrick, 2022; Keenan & Nicolazzo, 2021). In this manuscript, we challenge how the ubiquitous presence of Safe Zone, Safe Space, and Ally Development programs indicates adequate efforts to improve collegiate environments for LGBTQ+ individuals. Safe Zone, and similar programs, became popular in the 1990s in higher education yet that their design, content, and learning outcomes remain largely unexamined through empirical research (Draughn et al., 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007; Woodford et al., 2014). What we do know is that these programs operate as LGBTQ+ social justice educational interventions (SJEIs) because they aim to intervene and interrupt, whether "momentarily or long-term, the matrix of heteronormativity and cisnormativity that shape collegiate structures and institutions" (Catalano, 2024, p. 581). Unknown after approximately three decades is how institutions of higher education deploy, define, and organize what it means to do LGBTQ+ campus-based transformational inclusion work (Thomas, 2018).

We conducted a deeper dive into the curriculum and design of LGBTQ+ SJEIs to examine their content and process to expose how they engage attendees in the unlearning of heterosexism

and trans oppression. This was a subset of data from a larger research project about the experiences of LGBTQ+ SJEI facilitators (Catalano, 2024). We begin with a literature review that frames the development of LGBTQ+ SJEIs in higher education. We then describe social justice education as our conceptual framing of this research (Adams, 2016; Bell, 2016) coupled with Ahmed's (2012) critical stance of institutional diversity practices. We provide greater detail into our methodological approaches of first counting as qualitative (Fife, 2020) and theorizing that data alongside our conceptual framework (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). We next discuss how designs of LGBTQ+ SJEIs are in alignment (or not) with social justice education (Adams, 2016; Bell, 2016) as a potential mechanism to transform campus climates. Finally, we conclude with implications for practice and calls for future research.

Literature Review

Many higher education institutions' efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion developed in response to student activism (Ferguson, 2012; Linder et al., 2019). For example, Black students on college campuses protested their treatment and lack of support on college campuses (Zerquiera, 2019; Patton et. al., 2019), their activism set a pathway for other marginalized groups on college campuses to speak up as well (Ferguson, 2017). Institutional responses to student activism mostly sought to quell protests and student uprisings, often through brute force and/or disciplinary sanctions (Rojas, 2007; Williams et al., 2021). Institutional leaders also responded to student protestors through tactics of appeasement such as the creation of retention programs and introduction of specialized staff, while ignoring systemic and structural demands on the campus (Stewart, 2017, 2018). Significantly, these efforts provided no guarantees of sustainability through leadership changes or budget cuts (Patton et al., 2019; Rojas, 2007; Squire, 2019; Stewart, 2017).

There continues to be a paucity of research that analyzes diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice (DIEJ) specific initiatives (Patton et al., 2019). Patton et al. (2019) traced the historical legacy (1968-2018) of racism and anti-Blackness in higher education. In their analysis of publications about DIEJ endeavors and various institutional and programmatic initiatives, Patton et al. (2019) noted, "the disheartening ways in which DIEJ initiatives receive fewer resources and are valued only to the extent that they enhance the reputation of a campus as one that values diversity" (p. 183). Creation of diversity workshops or training interventions make strides toward improving campus climate, and yet also elicit concerns about their efficacy as a larger strategy to alter campus climate and sustainability (Duran, 2019; Evans, 2002; Lange et al., 2019; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Diversity work on campus thus functions as a mechanism that only appears to transform an institution and fails to address institutional and structural oppression (Ahmed, 2012; Patton et al., 2019; Stewart, 2020; Thomas, 2018). This manuscript responds to the call by Patton et al. (2019) to increase research on DIEJ initiatives in higher education, with a specific focus on LGBTQ+ SJEIs.

There exists scholarship about facilitation and design for SJEIs broadly (Bell & Goodman, 2022), and the construction of LGBTQ+ SJEI curriculum specifically (e.g., Buggs et al., 2022; Poynter, 2017). Important to name are the doubts scholars have surfaced about the activities used in these designs in regard to the efficacy and appropriateness of reliance on one-off trainings (Keenan, 2017), and using activities that replicate oppression as an approach to end oppression (Shlasko, 2015) or limit analysis to the individual level (Barrett-Fox, 2007). Limited are design-focused scholarship, as publications about campus-based LGBTQ+ SJEIs mostly focused on the history of campus-specific LGBTQ+ SJEIs (e.g., Alvarez & Schneider, 2008), facilitation as part

of LGBTQ student services roles (e.g., Bazarsky et al., 2022), analysis of their ability to cultivate allyship (e.g., DeVita & Anders, 2018), and resources about design (e.g., Poynter, 2017). A notable exception was Woodford et al., (2014) who provided findings about what they termed ally training programs in their survey of 51 institutions about the "goals, content, and design" (p. 318). They determined that "many program descriptions had ambitious goals that seemed to outsize the training time allotted" (Woodford et al., 2014, p. 320). This manuscript aims to take up a deeper examination of Woodford et al.'s (2014) research.

In recent years, publications about LGBTQ+ SJEIs addressed facilitators' lack of formal preparation and reliance on personal experience for content depth (Catalano et al., 2023), as well as how LGBTQ+ SJEI facilitation functions as opportunities for campus engagement while also burdensome on facilitators given the impact of the work (Catalano, 2024). Catalano et al. (2024a) described LGBTQ+ SJEIs as an enactment of institutional benign neglect to characterize the absence of hostility and enthusiasm of the endeavor. They used three themes (unenforceable authority, administrative gaslighting, and perpetuation of scarcity) to describe how LGBTQ+ SJEIs function as non-performatives that "seem to center equity or address diversity and inclusion, yet fail to deliver" (Catalano et al., 2024a, p. 375). Lastly, Catalano and Perez (2023) revealed how facilitation of LGBTQ+ SJEIs focused on assuaging fears of cisgender and heterosexual participants of causing harm, yet noted limited desire to engage in active allyship. These findings illuminate both new empirical insights and large swaths of terrain still unexamined about LGBTQ+ SJEIs. Our purpose was to offer a more expansive description and analysis of LGBTQ+ SJEIs curriculum from participants for whom it is their responsibility to design and facilitate these trainings. Additionally, given their responsibility for this SJEI, we posited their descriptions would provide insights about how these trainings complicate institutional commitments of equity, support, and advocacy.

Conceptual Framework

In thinking about the design of LGBTQ+ SJEIs, we utilized Adam's (2016) framework of social justice education (SJE) pedagogy. Adams (2016) offered a framing of teaching and learning that requires recognition of an array of skills such as a variety of knowledges, ability to respond to emotional responses to learning, and "the coordination of concrete experiences with abstract frameworks" (p. 29). Adams (2016) contended that the interior space of a classroom or workshop reproduces injustice and oppression dynamics present in the larger world, making it an important site of examination. To engage in SJE pedagogy is to intentionally facilitate learning about injustice, power, and privilege that may cause discomfort, resistance, and inspiration (Adams, 2016).

To support our use of SJE pedagogy as an epistemological framework to explore diversity practices of LGBTQ+ SJEIs, we leaned on Ahmed's (2012) ideas of diversity practices as non-performatives. An LGBTQ+ SJEI is a form of diversity work that aims to create a venue where individuals engage in education aligned with a supposed institutional value or commitment—in this case LGBTQ+ inclusion. A non-performative provides a useful way "of rethinking the relationship between names and effects" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117) where the failure to bring into being the action or intention is the point of naming. In this research, LGBTQ+ SJEIs serve as a "stand in for the effects" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117), specifically, the effect is LGBTQ+ inclusion. When layered with Adam's (2016) SJE pedagogy, Ahmed's (2012) work supported our reconsideration of how LGBTQ+ SJEIs appear to enact institution's commitment to diversity *and* might fail to bring into

action any individual or institutional changes. LGBTQ+ SJEIs do not guarantee attendee transformation nor have any influence on the practice of inclusion at the institution (Catalano et al., 2024a). These frameworks shaped our analytical examination of facilitator descriptions of LGBTQ+ SJEI curricula and what those elements convey about equity practices aimed to address heterosexism and trans oppression on campus.

Methodology

The larger research project began as an exploratory study to understand experiences of LGBTQ+ SJEI facilitators and utilized Sandelowski's (2000) general qualitative descriptive method (Catalano, 2024). In alignment with general qualitative description, the initial project was open to theoretical frameworks through the process of data collection (Sandelowski, 2000). For this secondary data analysis, we first engaged in counting as a qualitative method (Fife, 2020) to organize how participants described their curriculum. Numbers give a sense of a pattern of behavior, or in this research, a pattern of curriculum. Our use of tables revealed patterns that were "harder to discern with standard forms of coding and interpretation" (Fife, 2020, p. 51). We then considered these patterns of our initial findings as "a descriptive summary of the informational contents of data organized in a way that best fits the data" (Sandelowski, 2000, pp. 338-339). We examined these summaries and explored them through our conceptual framework of social justice education pedagogy to determine what those patterns said about LGBTQ+ SJEI curricula.

Our iterative qualitative research method led us to engage in an epistemological bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001; Tillapaugh & Nicolazzo, 2015) to intentionally center our analysis on how LGBTQ+ SJEIs operate to expose dynamics of oppression and power (Pasque et al., 2012). We examined the content and process of the curricula using an SJE pedagogy framework (Adams, 2016). Our tables revealed insights about the types, components, and approaches of the LGBTQ+ SJEIs as opportunities for attendee learning, reflection, transformation, and application. We then interpreted and contextualized those patterns in how they contribute to individual or institutional learning and actions to potentially disrupt dynamics of oppression and power. Finally, our discussion engaged with thinking about the intention of LGBTQ+ SJEIs given their design as a pedagogical tool.

Researchers' Positionalities

We come to this research as trans scholars with different racial identities who both previously worked as full-time LGBTQ+ student services professionals in higher education. We came together in our mutual interest to explore the emancipatory potentialities of SJEIs. What Catalano, as a white, trans masculine person, brings to this work are his concerns about how SJEIs center whiteness in language, terminology, and applications. Simms, as a Black genderqueer and transmasculine person, has examined neoliberal demands from institutions to measure the efficacy of SJEIs and remains critical of how they may convey hollow allyship rhetoric. Together, we co-constructed a frame of analysis that questions the efficacy of the SJEI's given the containers of whiteness and exploitation that is so often present on college campuses.

Data

Through email lists (e.g., ACPA CSP Talk, Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Center Professionals) and social media platforms, Catalano invited a diversity of participants (social identity categories, institutional types, higher education role, and region of the U.S.) to semi-structured interviews about institutional context, history and content of the SJEI, facilitation style and experiences, perceptions of impact, and conceptual ideas conveyed. This project focused on 39 participants whose job responsibilities formally include facilitation of the LGBTQ+ SJEI and are a subset of a larger research project (n=87). We posited those 39 participants whose job responsibilities formally include facilitation of the LGBTQ+ training would likely dedicate the most time to construction and implementation of the LGBTQ+ SJEI.

Catalano conducted semi-structured intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2006) in 2020 that covered broad areas: career path, institutional context, LGBTQ+ SJEI campus history, curricular components including ideas about allyship and safety, style of facilitation, facilitation experience and preparation, and perceptions of LGBTQ+ SJEI influence on participants and campus. As a form of ensuring trustworthiness, all participants had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym and received transcripts for member-checking (Charmaz, 2006) to provide any additional clarifications to responses or updates. As the demographic questionnaire used only open fields, we provide a summary of identities because responses were not uniform. Only one participant identified as heterosexual, most participants (23 of 39) identified as white, and 21 identified as cisgender. As we did not use social identities as specific axes for analysis, we do not provide specific demographic information in this manuscript. Given how diversity metrics are often utilized to suggest a particular subjectivity (and unintentionally delegitimize participants' narratives), we avoid using participant demographic diversity to relay the goodness of our research (Stewart, 2022). For clarity, we refer to facilitators as participants and those who attended the SJEIs as attendees.

Counting as a Qualitative Method: LGBTQ+ SJEI Curricula

To effectively analyze this data, we first employed counting as a qualitative method (Fife, 2020) to organize the data presented through Tables 1, 2, and 3. To do this, both authors isolated the sections of transcripts that focused on the history and content of the SJEIs, then separately engaged in line-by-line coding. Each author then grouped the initial codes into larger, axial codes, identifying the how and the what of participant descriptions of the intervention. Next, we discussed the data as a trustworthiness and confirmability mechanism to ensure sufficient opportunity to consider the data without influencing each other (Mertens, 2015). Then we created tables to note our initial findings to discern patterns (e.g., training length, learning outcomes, who attends). Counting as a qualitative method works in conjunction with other qualitative methods, and only offers approximations of similarities, not statistical findings (Fife, 2020). Numbers give a sense of a pattern of behavior, or in this research, a pattern of curriculum. We then put direct participant quotations and summaries of descriptions into a table format and determined theme saturation, and thus ensured consistency in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

From the descriptions provided by these 39 participants, we characterized the various pieces that make up LGBTQ+ SJEIs into types (models for structure of instruction, Table 1), components (content pieces, Table 2), and approaches (learning outcomes, Table 3). There was one notable outlier in the type of SJEI (Table 1) of a participant who described a consultative approach to her one-time SJEI. She met with those interested in the training as an office, department, or

organization prior to the SJEI before she determined the complete design. Yet, this one variation within this type still reflects a general consistency of components that varied in emphasis and contextual specificity for the group, and the length of time varied based on availability of the requestor. For clarity, we refer to facilitators as participants and those who attended the SJEIs as attendees.

In Table 2, we provide details about the five most common components present in over 70% of one-time and multi-session types of SJEIs: terminology; sex, gender, and sexuality; trans and nonbinary identities; heterosexism and trans oppression/cissexism; and allyship in action. We analyzed the participant described learning outcomes to determine four pedagogical approaches to LGBTQ+ SJEIs: content, action, reflection, and conceptual (see Table 3). These categories serve as descriptions, without any intention of indicating any are more valuable or appropriate than another. Most participants utilized multiple approaches in their LGBTQ+ SJEI, so there are aspects of more than one approach in every SJEI regardless of length, type, and learning outcomes. Our hope is practitioners and scholars will use this knowledge to consider how their own types, components, and approaches work (or do not) towards developing a more socially just campus.

Analytic Approach

After we completed counting the data, we conducted a deeper reading of our data, using Adams' (2016) social justice pedagogy to critically examine how, if at all, these LGBTQ+ SJEI function as a diversity practice (Ahmed, 2012). In this second reading of our data we determined what the pattern revealed by counting said about LGBTQ+ SJEI curricula, to explore the story that undergirds the initial findings. We then analyzed and consolidated the data to enumerate themes that we present in our findings section as a conversation between our conceptual framework and the data. In this way, we demonstrate the interplay between the patterns we determined and social justice education pedagogy.

Findings

We present our findings as interrelated with our conceptual framework. First, we offer more depth to the components and types of LGBTQ+ SJEIs that we found using counting as a qualitative method (Fife, 2020). Then, we elucidate connections between our conceptual framework of SJE pedagogy (Adams, 2016) and participant descriptions of how they construct and/or facilitate their LGBTQ+ SJEI curricula as an innocuous process and deal with the ambiguity of allyship.

Counting as Qualitative: Components and Types

The organization, content, and impetus behind LGBTQ+ SJEIs provide necessary details to clarify LGBTQ+ SJEI designs. Yet, these tables belie the complexity of content, conceptual framework, and outcomes. Based on the data from Tables 1, 2, and 3, many of these LGBTQ+ SJEIs function as an assemblage of activities rather than a concerted effort to intentionally design a liberatory learning environment for the participants. For instance, absent from many designs (26 of the 39 participants) was any explicit conceptual or theoretical framework to guide the design of their LGBTQ+ SJEI, turning their SJEI to a collection of activities instead of an intentional build of content and process. Jackson shared, "We might've replaced an activity here or there… There's

not necessarily any training theory behind it other than building upon information that's offered." In their desire to offer attendees an LGBTQ+ SJEI with foundational terms and an exploration of allyship, designers seemed to oversimplify and overpromise what a single or multi-session SJEI can accomplish. We worry such approaches flattens out the nuance of LGBTQ+ identities and communities and encourages doubts of those who display the symbol (DeVita & Anders, 2018).

A Naive & Innocuous Process

Participants hoped that attendee engagement in the LGBTQ+ SJEI would lead to attendees applying newly acquired knowledge to their lives and practices. Participants also hoped attendees would continue their learning journeys beyond the LGBTQ+ SJEI. Taylor described their learning outcomes this way,

> Basically, we want people to come away with a baseline understanding of gender and sexuality. And we want people to understand privilege, power, and oppression also on a very introductory level. And ways to be an ally, I guess. So have some really tangible action steps that they can take coming out of it. Those are probably the big three.

Part of LGBTQ+ SJEI design work meant participants imagining how attendees would and could use their learning. Clarke shared, "I really want people to be able to build or see for themselves a path that includes them using this knowledge to improve the environment." While participants expressed sincere desires for attendees to implement their learning beyond LGBTQ+ SJEI, the espoused outcomes of LGBTQ+ SJEIs expose an unresolved tension between idealistic and practical goals, such as how to ensure achievement within the time constraints of a session.

Adding to the tension was also the considerable attention participants gave to shaping the design to ensure attendees desired to engage in the LGBTQ+ SJEI. Jamie described their approach this way: "We just strive really hard to make it engaging and fun as much as possible…I think that the feedback we get is it can be dry or it can be challenging. So we try to have it be multifaceted." Facilitators felt compelled to educate *and* to "put on a show" (Catalano et al., 2023, p. 5), where the performance of education overshadowed the content within. Participants often used words such as engaging, relaxed, and conversational to relay their approach to process and content.

Participant words also reflected their desire to address issues of power and privilege while also not being too aggressive. Facilitators choose what they perceive as less controversial knowledge to avoid overwhelming or repelling attendees with complex or too controversial content. "This attention demands a lot of mental energy from facilitators and skews LGBTQ+ SJEI intentions toward using SJE pedagogies to protect cis and heterosexual fragility instead of addressing the harms of non-performative allyship" (Catalano & Perez, 2023, p. 47). For instance, Mateo shared this about how he delivers his trainings: "I don't really introduce these really big topics because you can lose people very quickly and they get, they feel really attacked, right? They're like, well, I didn't make it this way. So, like, why are you attacking me?" Ahmed (2012) cautioned around a similar phenomenon of friendliness within diversity documents, a simplification of information to ensure the content does not challenge thinking. This accessibility cannot be too complex nor too assertive of values about LGBTQ+ inclusion for fear of alienating those who are most resistant to the content (Ahmed, 2012). In other words, these trainings must maintain collegiality, or they will be ill attended and perhaps subject to university scrutiny. However, to focus on friendliness diminishes connections to social justice precepts and pedagogy that highlight the importance

of how new knowledge is disruptive to hegemony and self-understanding (Adams, 2016; Bell, 2016). This balancing act between educating thoroughly about social justice concepts and notions of palatability in process and content to ensure engagement of attendees undercuts any radical actions that could result from these workshops.

Ambiguity of Allyship

Of the 39 participants, 35 stated that they gave some kind of token to attendees to recognize completion of the LGBTQ+ SJEI. These tokens ranged from stylized stickers to placards and certificates that attendees could place in a visible location. Notably, half of the participants who gave out ephemera expressed skepticism or reluctance about this exchange, only keeping it because they yielded to pressure from institutional leadership or campus expectations that they provide an outward token. To be clear, those reluctant to give out some form of token echoed the sentiments of individuals who did not give any kind of token to attendees. For example, Jesse C. clarified that he gives attendees a placard only if the attendee signs and submits a pledge of commitment. However, Jesse C. also expressed frustration with the transactional dynamic (of allyship) that accompanies the exchange saying, "I hate when allyship for any population is used as a badge, or something to say, 'Look I did this thing to say that I'm an ally.'" Alternately, Mateo stopped token distribution as a sign of completion and instead gives attendees educational or office promotional material. Their perspective is that the token is a misrepresentation: "Because, you can't promise a safe zone or safe place in two hours. You just can't, that's just not the reality." Jesse C. and Mateo differed in their approaches to the token distribution, but they had similar concerns about what those tokens signal to attendees and the campus community.

What it means to cultivate allyship is a challenge because participants did not share any universal definitions of ally or allyship. Approaches to content and process (Table 3) delineate how participants hoped to cultivate allies such as content acquisition to provide exposure to LGBTQ+ communities and actions for attendees to gain mastery and/or provide exposure to LGBTQ+ communities and their issue. Many LGBTQ+ SJEIs prioritized the interpersonal dynamic including the benefit of receiving a token to display their allyship. And yet, as our participants shared, the incentive slowly became the priority for attendees as it seemingly sufficed as an institutional commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion. River summarized their challenge this way,

> So I just don't like giving the token and then that being like the check box…I would love to give [the institution] rainbow stickers and stuff to folks who do things on their own or with our help that show they have the initiative and…are committed to it rather than like, "Oh, I went to a training over my lunch break."

The desire to increase visibility through stickers or placards is in clear tension with the desire for LGBTQ+ SJEIs to be more than a form of tick-box diversity (Ahmed, 2012).

LGBTQ+ SJEIs are a form of institutional messaging regarding diversity that makes proclamations of inclusion and acceptance without the structural changes to accompany it (Ahmed, 2012). The attention on the process of bestowing attendees with ephemera in exchange for attendance at LGBTQ+ SJEIs turns attempts to cultivate allies into a performative transaction that obscures the efforts to hold institutions accountable for their lack of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Participants'

resistance to tokens as credentialing attendees signals a move toward a development of partner-ships with attendees to cultivate sustainable, not time bound, practices. This led us to question who participants imagined as the intended audience of LGBTQ+ SJEIs.

Ally identity and allyship was described in previous scholarship as an identity or behaviors for those with privilege (see Broido, 2000; Hardiman & Jackson, 1982; Washington & Evans, 1991). This would lead to an LGBTQ+ SJEI design that expected heterosexual and cisgender at-tendees. Gwen said:

> I'm trying to change the culture around ally training here because, prior to me coming onboard here, ally training was really considered the place where you send anybody who's not LGBTQ. And particularly for people that maybe have not shown all that much support for LGBTQ people.

Not only did facilitators often operate from an assumption that attendees were neither trans nor queer, facilitators also presumed that attendees were potentially hostile to LGBTQ+ people, topics, and openly perpetuating heterosexism and trans oppression (Catalano et al., 2024b). This assump-tion ignores the realities of intra-group oppression and the responsibilities of trans and queer peo-ple to educate themselves by assuming there exists "an affinity, familiarity, and equal depth of knowledge across LGBTQ+ populations" (Catalano & Christiaens, 2022, p. 92). Instead, framing ally as solely those with heterosexual and cisgender privilege fails to address the plurality of queer and trans communities and the necessity to consider intersectional differences and influences of other identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Lange et al., 2019). An additional implication an assumption of audience has is the expectation this has on the identities of the facilitators as trans and/or queer, and how that contributes to dynamics of queer and trans battle fatigue (Robinson, 2022).

Discussion: (Non)Performing Social Justice Education

We found limited connections when we juxtaposed our theoretical frameworks of SJE ped-agogy (Adams, 2016) with the characteristics of the LGBTQ+ SJEI designs described by partici-pants. Certainly, activities within the various curricula offered examinations of oppression, such as how to enact allyship through learning why terms and concepts functioned to shame and other trans and queer communities. At the same time, the lack of intentionality in the construction of the overall design of the LGBTQ+ SJEIs made them inadequate to prepare attendees to contribute to a larger effort to disrupt heteronormative and cisnormative realities on campuses. What our find-ings show is how the commonplaceness of LGBTQ+ SJEIs in higher education obfuscates the complexity the undertaking requires. In short, participants described their LGBTQ+ SJEI as an opportunity to educate about the basics of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, yet minoritized sexualities and genders are anything but basic.

A common assumption many participants shared was the existence of a baseline of content most attendees should grasp of gender and sexuality or what Jem called "the bare minimum." This baseline or 'basics' communicates an arbitrary minimum knowledge necessary to create harm re-duction towards queer and trans communities. The common components that comprise this base-line are terminology, conceptual distinctions between sex/gender/sexuality, trans and nonbinary identities, identification of manifestations of heterosexism and trans oppression/cissexism, and al-lyship in action. We concede these as integral components to unlearning heterosexism and trans oppression, but we also contend they represent complexity that just listing them obscures. For

instance, grasping conceptual distinctions between sex, gender, and sexuality requires historical and contemporary content knowledge and conceptual frameworks that span multiple academic disciplines, which include intersecting systems of oppression. Facilitators would need to understand and complicate the categories of biological sex and genetics alongside carefully tracing how white settler colonialism in the U.S. sought to eradicate Indigenous gender and sexual diversity and used binary gender and sexuality to organize labor systems (Lugones, 2007). The time and attention required to delve into these histories and nuances would likely exceed the 60 to 90-minute time constraints of many LGBTQ+ SJEIs.

Resolving tensions of content and process through deploying conceptual and theoretical frameworks based in social justice ideologies can alleviate some of these complications by naming educational paradigms and scaffolding the learning process. Significantly, only about one-third of the participants used conceptual/theoretical framework to guide the design of their LGBTQ+ SJEI, despite being knowledgeable about the benefit of theoretical or conceptual frameworks to guide their design construction. Instead, participants focused on attendees who came with little prior knowledge, to determine what they could teach that would leave an impact on those attendees. To approach LGBTQ+ SJEIs as facilitation of the basics is a perplexing conundrum: how to provoke enough interest to encourage attendees to return for future SJEIs on nuanced content (or seek out additional content) without flattening out LGBTQ+ identities and experiences?

Offering SJEIs that lack sufficient depth and are devoid of any conceptual framework allows them to function as a mechanism to solely check a box of its existence (Ahmed, 2012). In other words, institutions count LGBTQ+ SJEIs existence as doing work that they may never call into effect and thereby obscures any absence of efforts to grapple with heterosexism and trans oppression on campus. To interrupt oppression in higher education, LGBTQ+ SJEIs must be one of many interventions that seek to address manifestations of trans oppression and heterosexism, not the solution. To use "basic" as the design approach for LGBTQ+ SJEIs has the effect of oversimplifying key concepts like intersectionality to an identity inventory (e.g., what identities do I hold and which have privilege) instead of illustrating the lived complexities of marginalized populations through individual, institutional, and systemic oppression. This keeps attention on individuals instead of institutional and systemic maintenance of heteronormativity and cisnormativity through other forms of normativity such as whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Barrett-Fox, 2007; Patton et al., 2019). Additionally, an LGBTQ+ SJEI that attempts to cover 'just the basics' may amplify the culture of transactional education versus transformational education in which the signifier (sticker, placard) of attendance is more important than the educational impact of the LGBTQ+ SJEI (Catalano & Christiaens, 2022).

Limitations

These data are a result of participants summaries and perceptions of the overall design and various components. Thus, the most notable limitation to this research was that the interview protocol did not ask participants to share copies of their design or facilitation notes and cues. We recognize our counts do not reflect any topics facilitators did not think or want to share. Finally, we acknowledge that our analysis might obscure facilitator intentions embedded in their designs.

Implications for Practice

The heavy emphasis on creating institutionally sanctioned diversity educational opportunities actually made LGBTQ+ SJEIs an new iteration of normativity, counterproductive to their liberatory goals (Ahmed, 2012). Instead of embracing the potentialities of queerness and transness, the impetus to simply cover the basics places normativity as the sole influence on queerness and trans*ness (Zanghellini, 2009). Put differently, in current curricula, queer and trans identities must fit neatly into hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality, thus the emergence of homo- and trans-normativities.[2] Our analysis brings to question how good intentions led to the centering of heterosexual and cisgender attendees, which caused facilitators to focus more on cultivating allies (an identity) instead of cultivating allyship (a pedagogical and social justice set of behaviors) or changing institutional climates.

That many of the LGBTQ+ SJEIs exist without a conceptual framework reifies hegemonic notions of LGBTQ+ communities as a monolith, while framing heterosexism and trans oppression as operating in isolation from other forms of oppression (Lange et al., 2019). The challenge of LGBTQ+ SJEI designs remains how to address intersectional dynamics without overwhelming attendees, as well as how to find facilitators who have a breadth and depth of knowledge along with communication skills to navigate such complexity. For LGBTQ+ SJEIs to achieve a liberatory potential for equity within campus communities, specifically the work required in the (re)creation, facilitation, and assessment of these trainings, we must recognize the impossibility of the limitations placed on them. We must reckon with the truth that there is nothing basic about trans*ness and queerness, and remind ourselves that liberation requires continuous engagement (Love, 2018). We offer some general suggestions for how designers and facilitators could move towards liberation. However, we refuse to offer a specific prescriptive approach because there is no one-size fits all and requires knowledge of the system where the under-resourced facilitators function (Catalano et al., 2024a).

A Tactic within a Strategy

Instead of efforts to make LGBTQ+ SJEIs a panacea that solves all forms of trans and queer antagonism, think of them as a tactic (a small and intentional intervention) within larger strategies to transform campus (Kezar, 2008). As a tactic, LGBTQ+ SJEIs' components must conceptually align with social justice frameworks, and operate in relationship to other campus SJEIs. These both/and approaches require time, resources, and collaboration where facilitators can conceptualize the LGBTQ+ SJEI as more than a series of activities, opportunities to test out designs, and foster relationships with other campus community members engaged in a broader social justice project. To garner interpersonal and institutional transformational change requires resisting the expectation that LGBTQ+ SJEIs will provide the most basic form of knowledge in the most palatable way to ensure buy-in. Ahmed's (2012) analysis of "problematic language or language of problems" (p. 64) reminds us of how designing an LGBTQ+ SJEIs in effort to not seem antagonistic towards heterosexual and cisgender people and risk the facilitators and the SJEIs perceived as straight-phobic, reifies institutional power as opposed to making actual social justice interventions.

Purposeful Activities

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2. Transnormativity, possibly most often deployed through the trans enough discourse (Catalano, 2015).

We encourage designers of LGBTQ+ SJEIs to reflect on the activities they use and the purpose of those activities to advance goals of education and liberation. For example, A common component for designers to question is the purpose of explorations about terms and definitions. Is this a handout that the facilitator reviews? Is there an activity where attendees grapple with language, context, histories, and temporality? Is the goal to disrupt assumptions and dismantle how hegemonic norms shape attendees' perceptions of queer and trans/nonbinary identities, bodies, and experiences as abnormal? Does the activity function as a decision tree of which words to not use without depth in thinking about why? These questions might help examine facilitation approaches as well as attendee learning to avoid placing certainty about evolving language (Keenan, 2017). Additionally, designers and facilitators should examine what it means to offer 'key words' as an introductory exposure and how they will complicate that with changing and contradictory personal narratives (including by those in the space). For instance, the use of the word queer might be offensive to older gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, or nonbinary might feel "too white" by People of Color.

Collaborative Approaches

Examinations of activities is a path toward constructing LGBTQ+ SJEIs that require attendees to enact continuous actions of allyship and confront their own and other's heterosexism and trans oppression/cissexism. Facilitators must contend with this precarious balancing act of being invitational to attendees with less exposure and those with knowledge about LGBTQ+ identities and communities, as well as openness to LGBTQ+ attendees lived experiences as sites of exploration (Adams, 2016). Therefore, we recommend facilitators operate in a collaborative environment with other SJEI facilitators, where they can examine various activities together to explore how activities, tied to components, align with social justice education. This synergistic approach would allow facilitators to imagine and reimagine the type, components, and approach of their LGBTQ+ SJEI.

Given the fact that 38 out of 39 of the participants responsible for LGBTQ+ SJEI's identify under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, to place all responsibility only on them relieves heterosexual and cisgender people of responsibility. We imagine a shift to a collaborative and consultation-based model in a collective with other cultural centers or diversity workers would interrupt the siloed dynamics of SJEI designs, activities, approaches, frameworks, and facilitation (Ahmed, 2012). We recommend evaluating the role LGBTQ+ SJEIs play in institutional strategic plans (Kezar, 2008), paying particular attention to SJEI development and facilitation (to whom does this burden fall). A collaborative approach might diminish the harms facilitators of LGBTQ+ SJEIs (who mostly identify within LGBTQ+ communities) experience through forms of queer battle fatigue (Gershon, 2020; Robinson, 2022; Story, 2020; Wozolek & Carlson, 2022). Collaboration also allows for consideration of lived experience within queer and trans communities without excluding a more nuanced design that addresses the complexities of individuals' multiple and intersecting identities alongside various relationships to power.

A collaborative partnership between departments and organizations who facilitate SJEIs would support innovation in content to address concerns about overwhelming attendees. We envision a consultation model of SJEI development within the departments where the facilitators could consider the intersections of their work and shared language for attendees that would help reinforce learning instead of identities viewed as discrete by attendees (e.g., gender as unrelated to race). While a consultative approach certainly takes more time and investment from all parties involved

at the onset, we believe it to move against neoliberal structures of productivity, engaging in sustainable and transformative work that shifts the environs that we live in. Lastly, a collaborative approach can help facilitators move away from focusing solely on specific components (e.g., coming out stars, gender unicorns) and instead think more about the process, pedagogy, praxis, alongside content of learning. This creates a more compelling and engaging experience and shifts how practitioners and institutions engage with equity and justice.

Conclusion

Our hope is that our research inspires conversations to revisit LGBTQ+ SJEI curriculums and facilitation. Our contributions to the field of higher education are twofold. First, we provide an update on the types, components, and approaches of LGBTQ+ SJEIs. Second, we aim to support practitioners in their work to improve the conditions for queer and trans individuals on campus. We desire for practitioners to pause and reflect about their intentions and implications of LGBTQ+ SJEIs on their campus and observe the various pressures from attendees and campus leadership about outcome expectations. We imagine conversations where those facilitating LGBTQ+ SJEIs question its role in broader higher education diversity and inclusion efforts. The existence of LGBTQ+ SJEIs in higher education for over 30 years means their designs should incorporate nuance and be conceptually complex with an intersectional design; these training must and should move past a model consisting of a series of activities toward an educational practice that furthers campus equity and inclusion efforts of LGBTQ+ community members.

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Appendix

Table 1. Types

Type	Length of LGBTQ+ SJEI	Notable Details
One-time	30 minutes to 7 hours (average 3 hours)	Almost exclusively fixed components, order, and content*
Multi-session (topical or sequential	1-3 hours (average 60-90 minutes)	One foundational or primer session followed by 2-4 other sessions

* denotes an outlier that used an consultative approach to determine final design based on office/department/organizational need or interests.

Table 2: Components

Component	Description
Terminology	Activities or presentation slides that reviewed terms and definitions related to LGBTQ+ lives and identities
Sex, gender, and sexuality	An exploration in the distinctions between sex, gender, and sexuality (e.g., genderbread person or gender unicorn). The focus of this component is to make clear distinctions between assigned sex at birth, gender, and sexuality and dominant assumptions about these identity categories' influence on identity
Trans and nonbinary identities	Providing education about trans and nonbinary genders including activities and skill development about using appropriate pronouns.
Heterosexism and trans oppression/cissexism	Awareness of and ability to recognize manifestations of heterosexism, trans oppression/cissexism, and cis- and heteronormativity. Increase attendee awareness of how heterosexual and cisgender people experience privilege.
Allyship in action	A skill-based component that instructs attendees how to apply the knowledge gained within the LGBTQ+ SJEI to other spaces (e.g., work, home). Often when attendees receive a token of completion (i.e., sticker or certificate).

Table 3: *Approach*

Approach	Description
Action	• Emphasize skill development as a central tool of engaged allyship such as making referrals to appropriate resources, establishing relationships to build community, unlearning harmful perspectives, and relearning inclusive practices, applying LGBTQ+ knowledge to various contexts, and dealing with difference • Encourage attendees to consider how their behaviors and skills are integral to their learning • Aims to build emotional capacities of attendees, specifically increased empathy (common activity used was coming out stars) • Hope that attendees who displayed token of completion, would enact behavior and attitudes supportive and knowledgeable of LGBTQ+ people's existence
Conceptual	• Focus on the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression, specifically heterosexism and trans oppression/cissexism • Engage attendees in explorations of manifestations of oppression, such as impact and experiences from interpersonal, institutional, and structural lenses • Used or described a connection to a conceptual or theoretical framework in the construction of the design (i.e., critical race theory, queer theory, adult learning theory) • Sought inspiration from various disciplines within higher education, as well as outside of higher education
Content	• Center LGBTQ+ knowledge acquisition such as terminology, histories, identity development, experiences on campus and beyond, available resources, policy and policy trends, and pronouns. • Include some foundational concepts, such as distinctions between sex assigned at birth, gender, and sexuality, campus and community resources, histories, and policy trends. • Aim to help attendees understand distinctions and correct previous misconceptions of appropriate language and ideas. • Hope to expose attendees to a wealth of knowledge who will seek out deeper knowledge.
Reflection	• Encourage attendees to deepen their self-awareness through examining how they understand their own sexuality and gender, to (re)consider what they need to learn about LGBTQ+ communities and language, and to explore how

they may experience power and privilege regarding gender and sexuality (i.e., working through the cisgender or heterosexual privilege checklist)
- Provide opportunities for attendees to examine their behaviors and perspectives as a pathway toward personal and campus transformation
- Requires attendees to recognize interpersonal barriers to learning, understanding, and empathy, acknowledge their learning edges (areas for growth and development) that require further exploration, and intrapersonal work needed to cultivate their allyship.
- Hopes for attendees' continuous engagement, conceptualization of allyship as a verb, and examination of motivations and growth