

Article of Influence #2

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For the second article of influence I focused on a more personal matter. As an openly LGBTQ+ identifying individual with a desire to work in student affairs at a small to medium liberal arts college, I read “Other Duties Not Assigned: Experiences of lesbian and gay student affairs professionals at small colleges and universities” (Kortegast & van der Toorn, 2018). The article was a qualitative study focusing on the experiences of nineteen lesbian and gay student affairs professionals at colleges and universities with enrollments of less than 5,000 students.

What became clear through the article is that while the professional student affairs associations are direct about their dedication to social justice and inclusion, some institutions, particularly small religiously affiliated colleges and universities, struggle to or actively choose not to extend this practice to LGBTQ+ identities. While I was aware prior to reading the article that in most states sexual orientation and gender identity is still not a protected equal opportunity employment status, I was struck by the way this is enacted by diverse institutions. The article very clearly stated that “...it is not safe or acceptable to be out [open about their sexual identity] at every institution of higher education in the United States” (p. 272), and several study participants relayed their reluctance or hesitation to disclose their identity during the job interview and search process for fear of discrimination. However, the article also highlighted the alternative experience, at institutions that had a supportive environment, where “...the ability to be open about sexual identity was seen as a recruitment and retention tool” (p. 272).

The article went on to discuss expression of sexual identity on campus, extra or informal job duties created by an LGBTQ+ sexual identity, and the recognition received due to those extra or informal job duties. On the topic of their sexual identity expression, participants seemed to agree that “Being seen as too blatant, out, or gay may potentially be interpreted as not being professional” (p. 273). When it came to assumed roles and responsibilities many “felt

responsible for providing support to LGBTQ+ students; educating others about LGBTQ+ topics, and advocating for LGBTQ+ programs, people, and policies” (p. 274) with little to no recognition. To this end, “lesbian and gay student affairs professionals are potentially being exploited because of their social identity” (p. 276). The article concluded with a discussion of limitations and directions for future research.

Applying the article to my own life and future practice, I plan to be open about my sexual identity during my future interview processes, acknowledging that I will likely encounter discrimination and be excluded from some opportunities. Even after being hired, on campus discrimination and the perception of being unprofessional is a concern, though I am comforted by the fact that a large portion of the study found satisfaction in being open about their lesbian or gay relationships. As someone who is in a long-term committed same-sex relationship with another future student affairs professional I was proud to read: “My partner also works at the institution. So we are invited to everything as a couple...” (p. 273). Working at the same institution and attending events together means a lot to me. I am excited to see that it is possible, even at a small college or university. While I am troubled by the exploitation/commodification of LGBTQ+ professionals by institutions, I am aware that the social change work must be done, even if it’s done alone and without due recognition.

The article showed me that not all colleges and universities treat LGBTQ+ student affairs professionals equally and that my future profession will have its challenges but also its victories. One such challenge, the article suggested that LGBTQ+ professionals may be hesitant to pursue advancement or change institutions, for fear of losing what acceptance they have built around them. Ultimately, I feel more prepared as an LGBTQ+ individual, wanting to work at small college or university, for having read this article.

References

Kortegast, C. A., van der Toorn, M. (2018). Other Duties Not Assigned: Experiences of lesbian and gay student affairs professionals at small colleges and universities. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(3), 268-278.