

Introduction: LGBTQ+ issues in student housing

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Abstract:

Numerous scholars (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Nadal, 2013; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Wright & Wegner, 2012) examined issues that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer (LGBT) individuals experience while in college and when living on campus. For college students, Rankin et al. (2010) reported that “the climate was ‘least accepting’ of individuals identifying as LGBT” (p. 30), and historically residence halls provided safe and influential spaces for LGBTQ+ students (Evans & Broido, 1999; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007). However, other scholars (Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987) examined the negative impacts of residence hall living on minoritized or marginalized students.

Keywords: college students | LGBTQ+ | student housing | higher education

Article:

*****Note: Full text of article below**

Introduction to the 2020
Special Issue of *The Journal
of College and University
Student Housing*

LGBTQ+ Issues in
Student Housing

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The landscape of higher education has shown remarkable change with respect to LGBTQ+ students. Of the nearly 20 million students projected to attend college in Fall 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), the College Board estimated that 40 percent of full-time students at public universities and 64 percent of students at private colleges and universities live on campus in institution-owned residential facilities (“What percent of college,” n.d.). Annual iterations of the American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA II) showed the number of students identifying as asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning, same-gender loving, and trans (non-binary) averaged being approximately 20.19 percent (range of 17.3 percent to 22.3 percent) of the total number of students taking the survey (19,861 in Fall 2015 to 67,972 in Spring 2019) since Fall 2015, which is the latest data available by ACHA (American College Health Association, n.d.). Given the growing population of students living in institution-owned residential facilities and the increasing number of students identifying within the LGBTQ+ community, it is important that higher

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education be prepared to support these students in campus living environments.

The six articles in this special issue highlight the varied lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in college and university housing. These stories and the scholars' conclusions help move us towards Harvey Milk's (1977) aspiration that "all young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential" (1977, as cited in Mallon, 2010, p. 172).

To understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, one should first understand the heterogendered nature of higher education institutions. Jonathan T. Pryor and Garrett D. Hoffman take a critical look at the state of LGBTQ+ supportive practices in college and university housing. Using *The Traditionally Heterogendered Institution* (THI) framework, Pryor and Hoffman examine the ways in which heterogendered norms impact the experiences of LGBTQ+ students. Pryor and Hoffman present critical questions that challenge college and university housing professionals to center LGBTQ+ students in their practices as a way to dismantle the conditions of the THI.

Affirming policies are also crucial as markers of inclusion in the LGBTQ+ student experience (Pitcher, Camacho, Renn & Woodford, 2018). In their work, David J. Nguyen, Jodi L. Linley, Michael R. Woodford, and Kristen A. Renn examine survey responses from the 2013 National Study of LGBTQ+ Student Success to describe and explore students' awareness of two types of institutional policies: LGBTQ+ housing/living spaces and anti-discrimination

on the basis of gender identity/expression and sexual orientation. Their work highlights that while antidiscrimination policies on the basis of sexual orientation are common, those that protect individuals on the basis of gender identity/expression are far fewer. Additionally, the authors point to limited policies around LGBTQ+ housing that challenge housing professionals to foster more affirming environments for all.

Despite various improvements in campus climate, LGBTQ+ students still often face negative experiences. Microaggressions within college and university housing is the focus of the article by Zachary R. Blackmon, Robert M. O'Hara, and Jordan W. Viars. Blackmon, O'Hara, and Viars explore how LGBTQ individuals are often targeted by sexual orientation microaggressions in the residential environment and the impact those experiences can have on their sense of belonging. This article provides useful suggestions for housing professionals in creating welcoming spaces for LGBTQ students.

Shifting from environment and actions, J. Michael Denton and Leia K. Cain spotlight the residential experiences of trans students. Through the narratives of two transitioning students, Denton and Cain challenge institutions' reliance on the gender binary and present both problems and possibilities in the college and university housing context. They argue that professionals need to go deeper to understand the complexities of the trans student experience and center trans voices in both policy and practice. In doing so, practitioners can best support all residents while beginning to dismantle the heteronormativity inherent in institutions.

To best support students, it is crucial that practitioners consider their identities through an intersectional lens. Using Jones and McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity as a framework for their study, Allison BrckaLorenz, Kyle Fassett, and Sarah Hurtado explore experiences around belonging and discrimination of LGBTQ+ students with disabilities living on campus. This study highlights the marked differences between LGBTQ+ students and straight or heterosexual students both with and without disabilities. Further, the scholars note the alarming concentration of LGBTQ+ students reporting mental health issues and that LGBTQ+ students with disabilities generally reported feeling less comfortable being themselves, less valued by their institutions, and less like a part of the campus community than LGBTQ+ students without disabilities. BrckaLorenz, Fassett, and Hurtado close by challenging professionals to think about how our policies and practices can adapt to provide a more supportive environment for those facing multiple marginalized identities.

This issue closes with a piece from Matthew Antonio Bosch on the experiences of LGBTQ+ professionals within housing and residence life. Bosch notes that while housing and residence life is often a starting point for many professionals, LGBTQ+ individuals face these immersive environments without signposts for how to navigate their identities. The shared stories spotlight how LGBTQ+ professionals navigate coming out, personal safety, and experiences with threats and/or microaggressions. Bosch advocates for departments viewing the identities of LGBTQ+ professionals as strengths that uniquely enable them to

enact positive change for the overall campus living experience.

As guest editors, editing this special issue was impactful, both personally and professionally. As student affairs practitioners and scholars who identify as gay with strong ties to housing and residence life, we are highly committed to the residential experience of college students. The opportunity to work with these authors to share their knowledge and expertise for making college and university housing spaces more educational, influential, and comfortable is a reality we hope to see happen for all marginalized students.

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