From Best to Intentional Practices: Reimagining Implementation of Gender-Inclusive Housing

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Innovation in Practice Feature

From Best to Intentional Practices: Reimagining Implementation of Gender-Inclusive Housing

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Using findings from a national study of trans* students' experiences in gender-inclusive housing, we argue student affairs educators must move toward gender-inclusive housing as an intentional—rather than best—practice. We frame this innovation in the practice of gender-inclusive housing through findings related to the need to perform ongoing assessment regarding these housing options as well as challenging the conceptualization of gender-inclusive housing in ways that center cisgender staff members' fears and feelings.

Interviewer:	*What's your sense of gender awareness within the broader umbrella of Residence Life? Like, do you feel like you are one of the few voices screaming into the wilderness or do you feel like there are a lot of people who are down for gender justice?*
Shimika:	*I might be one of a few voices screaming into the wilderness and I … oh, and I am really trying to think of [sic] anyone has ever brought up anything besides me. That's a good question.*
Interviewer:	*So like, if you are in a broader staff meeting, and someone says something that might be kind of f----- up, do people just wait and say well, like "Shimika's gonna say something about that," right?*
Shimika:	*Yeah.*
Interviewer:	*Okay.*
Shimika:	*Yeah, oh you are making my heart hurt. Yes, that happens. Or if someone does speak, they don't push. No one pushes here, and I feel like I am the one who is like, "No, like, do this."*

Despite the ongoing social presence of trans* people in the United States (Stryker, 2008), the field of student affairs has just recently begun to recognize the trans* college student population. Whilst

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determining the exact numbers of trans* people[1] is a specious project (Nicolazzo, 2017b) and does not mediate the immediacy with which educators should attend to creating gender-expansive environments, Susan Stryker—a leading trans* scholar—has noted that estimates suggest there are three to six times more trans* people under the age of 18 than over that age (Gardner, 2017). This means there may well be an uptick in trans* people attending college, as several scholars have noted (Marine, 2011; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2017b; Pryor, 2015). As a result, some colleges are adapting practices and policies to better support trans* student success. One such practice is providing gender-inclusive housing (GIH), or housing that enables students to self-select housing based on criteria other than assigned sex or gender (Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013). GIH is designed to better serve gender-diverse student populations, as well as to alleviate the effects of trans* oppression, or the systemic oppression of "people whose gender identity or expression do not conform to binary cultural norms and expectations" (Catalano & Griffin, 2016, p. 183). Some common attributes of GIH may include: having a distinct specified area (e.g., a floor, wing, set of suites, or building); having gender-inclusive and/or single-stall restrooms; and having gender-inclusive-specific programming and/or a gender-inclusive living–learning community curriculum.

Some administrators and advocacy groups have even gone as far as to herald its implementation as a "best practice" (e.g., Trans* Policy Working Group, 2014). As such, a growing number of student affairs administrators have positioned GIH as an important component to ensuring a safe environment for trans* collegians. However, while some college and university administrators may indeed see GIH as a "best practice," the scarce amount of literature on the topic indicates there is a lack of intentionality in terms of how many are implementing the practice. Put another way, although there may be a growing sentiment that GIH is necessary for forwarding equity and justice alongside trans* collegians, there is a lack of institutional support for the intentional implementation of this practice. For example, as Shimika,[2] the hall director for the GIH option at Northeast University, highlighted in the epigraph quote, stated, she was painfully aware there was a lack of shared commitment to intentional gender-inclusive practices, including GIH, throughout her residential life department.

In this article, we elucidate findings from a national study of trans* students' experiences in GIH. We argue that student affairs educators must move toward GIH as an *intentional practice* rather than its staid conceptualization as a best practice. In other words, contrary to the notion of "best practices" that falsely suppose a standardized approach to improving campus environments (Nicolazzo, 2017b), we propose moving toward the creation and maintenance of GIH as an intentional practice that is prudently implemented, attentive to institution-specific histories and contexts, and open to ongoing investigation and revision. Specifically, we frame this innovation in the practice of GIH through findings related to the need to perform ongoing assessment. We also question the conceptualization of GIH in ways that center cisgender staff members' fears and feelings rather than the trans* students for whom gender-inclusive spaces were originally intended. In order to do so, this article addresses the following research questions: (a) How do trans* students, as well as residential life and housing staff, experience GIH? and (b) What must be done, if anything, to promote a more intentional framework through which student affairs administrators implement and maintain GIH?

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[1] It is beyond the scope of this article to detail how such attempts to quantify the trans* community both in the United States and globally. Readers interested in learning more about this topic should review the complete special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 2, Issue 1) titled, "Making Transgender Count."

[2] All participants, institutional affiliations, buildings, and locations in this article have been given pseudonyms to mask identities.

Trans* College Students in Residence

Responding to Marine's (2011) assertion that "few or no examples of transgender students' resiliency are noted" throughout higher education research (p. 73), there has been a recent proliferation of research alongside trans* collegians from affirmative and resilience-based perspectives. That is, rather than replicating the deficit-based research about trans* students that position the population as always under threat and/or not matching their cisgender peers across various indicators for success, new empirical research—much of which is being done by trans* scholars—is focusing on the ways trans* students are resilient and able to promote their own success, however they understand it (e.g., Catalano, 2015; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2017b; Nicolazzo, Pitcher, Renn, & Woodford, 2017).

Of this emerging research, few studies focus specifically on the experiences of trans* students in residence (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2017b; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Pryor, Ta, & Hart, 2016), all of which highlighted both institutional trans* oppression and the various strategies trans* students used to respond to living on campus. Moreover, at the time of submission, we as authors could not identify any studies centering on trans* students' experiences of GIH. For example, while Kortegast (In press) wrote about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer (LGBTQ) students in housing, her study was neither trans*-specific nor was it focused on GIH as a "best practice" in student affairs. To be clear, we do not intend this as a critique of Kortegast or others who have studied LGBTQ student populations in residence (e.g., Krum et al., 2013; Seelman, 2014). Instead, we conceptualize these previous studies as providing foundational research upon which we built the present study.

Furthermore, as Catalano (2015) has pointed out, many studies that purport to be about LGBT students may include few, if any, trans* student participants. As such, we find it of importance to center trans* students as the sole population with which we researched, as well as to address GIH specifically as a way to interrogate how this "best practice" is operating in relation to its espoused benefits. Focusing specifically on trans* students and their engagements with GIH also has the benefit of heeding Renn's (2010) warning not to perpetuate the conflation of gender and sexuality that continues to occur through educational research and practice. We now move to a discussion of how we designed the current study before elucidating the study's findings.

Study Design

The present study employed critical trans politics (CTP) as a theoretical framework (Spade, 2015). CTP was an outgrowth of critical race theory (CRT), and intentionally centers the lives and experiences of trans* individuals. Parallel to critical theoretical frameworks framing of oppression as an everyday phenomenon, CTP takes institutional trans* oppression as a given and elucidates how such oppression negatively impacts the life chances of trans* people. Originally conceptualized as a legal framework for addressing the ways legal policies and administrative practices further perpetuated trans* oppression—what Spade (2015) termed *administrative violence*—higher education scholars are recognizing the transferability of CTP to educational praxis (e.g., Catalano, 2015; Jourian, Simmons, & Devaney, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2017b; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Pitcher, 2015). The present study draws from and adds to this lineage as a way to center trans* students and their experiences in GIH options.

The methodology used for the present study was critical narrative inquiry (Jørgensen & Largacha-Martinez, 2014). Not only did this methodology make the most sense given our use of CTP as a theoretical framework, but critical narrative inquiry also provided a way to situate participants' narratives "within the context of cultural narratives which delimit what can be said,

what stories can be told, what will count as meaningful, and what will seem to be nonsensical" (Lawler, 2002, pp. 242–243). As such, our methodological choice to use critical narrative inquiry allowed us to interrogate how "institutional discourses influence and are influenced by personal everyday narratives" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163).

Seeking to understand both institutional and personal narratives regarding trans* students' experiences with GIH, we as researchers performed 60–90 minute semi-structured interviews with 19 trans* students and 13 student affairs administrators at four institutions throughout the United States. We used maximum variation sampling (Merriam, 2009) in identifying both our four research sites as well as our student participants. Not only did we seek research sites from a range of geographic locations (i.e., Northeast, Northwest, Southwest, and Midwest) as well as there being both public and private institutions in our sample (i.e., three public, one private), but we also intentionally sought student participants with various racialized, disability, class, and gender identities. Participants were chosen based on students' responding to recruitment emails sent out by key institutional constituents at each research site. Participants filled out an online demographic survey, and we as researchers then contacted participants to establish a date and location for our interviews (see Appendix A for student participant interview protocol). Participant criterion consisted of individuals who (a) self-identified as transgender undergraduate students who (b) currently or previously had lived in GIH.

In identifying staff participants for our study, we used critical case sampling (Patton, 2015). This sampling practice allowed us as researchers to identify a small set of participants who would "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" for our particular study (Patton, 2015, p. 276). As such, we spoke with staff members who worked in one of three distinct functional units: residence life, housing assignments, or the campus LGBTQ center. Additionally, all staff we interviewed had a direct connection to the creation and/or continued implementation of GIH on their respective campus. Although our interviews with staff lacked a formal interview protocol, we used information gleaned from student interviews on each particular campus to craft questions.

When analyzing data, the three primary researchers engaged in a three-step analytical process (Saldaña, 2016). First, we each read sets of transcripts corresponding to two institutions, ensuring that each institution was reviewed by at least two of the researchers. Our first step of coding involved our reading all transcripts for each institution line-by-line to refamiliarize ourselves with the data and create initial codes, using our theoretical framework and research questions as guides. For our second step of analysis, we wrote analytical memos in which we "reorganize[ed] and reanalyze[ed] data coded through first cycle methods" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). Our third step of our analytical process involved sharing our individual analytical memos and talking through them as a way to refine our coding schema and resultant findings further. In essence, our third round of analysis mirrored Saldaña's (2016) description of axial coding, albeit being verbal rather than written. In addition, one of the primary researchers repeated this process with a research team of three graduate students in a higher education master's preparation program, with each student analyzing either the student or staff interviews at one institution.

Several practices were undertaken to ensure the trustworthiness of the present study. First, our sampling methods increased the confirmability and transferability of our findings. Specifically, by ensuring maximum variation of research sites and student participants, we were able to highlight how findings maintained consistency across geographies, institutional types, and student identities. Furthermore, our choice of using critical case sampling for identifying staff participants increased the dependability of our findings, as these participants were the most knowledgeable about GIH as

it was conceptualized and implemented at their institutions. The multiple processes of individual and group coding acted as a form of data triangulation, thus increasing the credibility of the study (Mertens, 2015). Finally, we engaged participants in member-checking interview transcripts and also presented preliminary findings at various national conferences, sometimes with participants and other institutional agents from our four research sites in the audience. These practices not only increased the credibility and confirmability of the study findings but also enhanced their transferability (Jourian, 2017; Mertens, 2015).

Collectively, we as a research team have over 20 years of experience in residence life administration. Furthermore, all three of us center critical approaches to gender (i.e., feminism, masculinities, and trans* resilience) through our research agendas, and have varying gender, racial, disability, and ethnic backgrounds. Our administrative experiences and research acumen regarding issues of gender in higher education are particularly salient in relation to the current project, especially as they provided us a depth of practical and empirical knowledge with which to approach this research study. In other words, we were able to bring together our research and practical experiences to formulate critical perspectives on the implementation of GIH all while recognizing the various limitations (e.g., budget, staffing, training) of doing so.

Findings

In the subsections that follow, we elucidate the findings from our research study. As a way to reflect our framing this study through CTP, we have organized the findings around questions we as researchers found to be central to sound policy formation regarding GIH. We arrived at these questions based on what student participants were asking—explicitly and implicitly—of their campuses policies related to GIH throughout our interviews with them. In doing so, we attempt to foreground both the administrative violence (Spade, 2015) embedded throughout these policies, as well as the ways in which trans* students are currently not centered in the creation and implementation of GIH. Specifically, the questions student participants were asking of GIH policies were: Where is the policy?; who is making the policy?; and why has there been no ongoing assessment of the policy? It is also important to note that while students may not have used these exact words to frame their questions of GIH policies on their campuses, the questions represent the collective sentiment of students as shared through their interviews.

Where is the Policy?

Almost every single participant, across all campuses, described having a hard time finding information regarding GIH options at their institutions. Not only were these policies hard to locate, but many of them were ambiguous, leading to confusion regarding what GIH meant at each campus. This ambiguity then led to several challenges in the actual implementation of GIH. While these challenges are beyond the scope of this particular manuscript, we have written about them elsewhere (Marine, Nicolazzo, & Wagner, in review).

For example, Addison (pronouns: they/them and she/her/hers), a first year student at Midwest University, a small, highly selective, public, four-year institution, began describing what seemed like a fairly simple process for accessing GIH. As Addison described, "I was filling out my housing application and there was a little button that said, 'Do you want GIH?' and I checked it. It was great." However, the ease of finding out that GIH was an option at Midwest University belied the lack of understanding what such a housing option actually meant. Explaining their first conversations with one of their suitemates, Addison explained,

> At the beginning, we were like, "Oh, so what made you sign up for gender-inclusive [housing]?" and one of them I think did it accidentally, and then the other two very well-meaningly (sic) just didn't realize it was like a trans*, non-binary kind of situation. They were like, "Oh, I'm down to live with girls as well as guys."

While the ease with which Addison learned there was GIH at Midwest University is commendable, the lack of a visible and well-articulated policy of what GIH is, and for what purposes—and for which student populations—the policy was intended was apparent through Addison's conversation with their roommates.

Similarly, at Northwest University, Jorge (pronouns: he/him/his and they/them) shared his experience about finding out his roommate was unaware of being placed in GIH. He stated,

> I actually picked a roommate, who [was] also genderqueer. I am not actually 100% sure of how they identify, but they ended up not coming to Northwest University. And then I got assigned a random roommate, which is actually pretty funny, because I had assumed that my roommate had picked or that floor, so I was just talking about trans* stuff and was really open, and I asked her like, "So, why'd you pick Morker Hall" and she was like, "I didn't, I got placed in it." And I was like, "Oh" (laughs). But like, it got pretty lucky because she's like totally fine with everything.

Although Jorge framed this story as "actually pretty funny," there is nothing funny about the ambiguity associated with a GIH policy in which students are unaware that the housing they selected is gender-inclusive. In fact, it may be quite a violent practice, as trans* students may face violence from roommates. Indeed, this was an experience several students at Midwest University mentioned having due to their placement with a transphobic roommate.

Butch (pronouns: they/them), a junior at Northeast University, shared how they only learned about GIH through LGBT friends and spaces:

> Interviewer: Are there other ways you know of that this space is kind of marketed or shared with the broader community, or is it kind of like a you need to know someone to know that it's there kind of deal?
>
> Butch: I mean, unfortunately, it's kind of the latter. … And not necessarily someone, but you have to have some sort of, like … I know [the LGBT Center] advertises it, and different LGBT spaces advertise it, but I've never seen it anywhere else.

Although GIH is a policy set and maintained by residence life, Butch's experiences suggested that residential life professionals at Northeast University were not transparent about what the policy was or where students could find information about the policy. In fact, the only place Butch mentioned finding information from residence life about GIH was on a webpage that had a list of special-interest housing options, which included GIH. However, this list did not have information about the gender-inclusive policy nor did it discuss how the policy operated at Northeast University.

In contrast to Butch's experience, Carter (pronouns: they/them) was able to find information about GIH at Northeast University. However, as Carter shared,

> Online, on Northeast's housing website, it says [GIH] is only available to sophomores and above. So I didn't apply for it. I didn't realize until after I got in my sophomore year, you could be a freshman (sic) and live there. So, like, I don't know, Northeast has to update that, because when I got there my sophomore year, 50% of the people that lived there were freshman (sic) and I had no clue that that was possible.

The ambiguity of Northeast's GIH policy, as well as the competing narratives from Butch and Carter about where they (did not) find information about GIH, as well as who could access it, further point out the vexing nature of ambiguity related to where the policy was and how it operated.

Who Is Making the Policy?

Across all four institutions represented in this study, trans* students were often left out of the creation of GIH policies. Clearly, the creation of these policies and spaces was often coming from a good place. However, good intentions may not have been enough to create policies and spaces that were most beneficial for trans* students themselves. In fact, as we discuss elsewhere (Wagner, Marine, & Nicolazzo, in review), the problematic implementation of gender-inclusive policies may have been mitigated were students brought into the process.

For example, Karina (pronouns: she/her/hers), a staff member at Northwest University, described the creation of GIH as a conversation between staff members and faculty, only one of whom was trans*. She stated,

> Colin, Quinn, and Juan, they were all sitting in a room together with Thad. And Thad, who is in housing, asked a question like, "If you could create any living learning community what would you create?" And they talked along their sort of interdisciplinary lines and their passions and were like, "Oh, it would be really cool if we had some sort of community that would look at social justice, but through an artistic or arts expression lens." So what was an idea, and at that time Living Learning Communities were being fast tracked because even though we say that we're all about Living Learning Communities, we're a little bit behind as a University in terms of requirements for Living Learning Communities, what our expectations are for them … So when I entered this, I had never traversed into the Residential Life arena. [I] didn't really know what that meant, didn't know what it would take, I just happened to be present, and our organization was going through a reorganization, so I went from having one mentoring program to kind of overnight having three different programs, became an associate director, and now also balancing working with housing and things like that. So, the idea [for GIH] came up in like November and then I think we were live, I came on board in January, and I think we were live by that fall.

Karina's extended comment on the genesis of GIH at Northwest University details multiple elements. First, the creation of this housing being infused with an arts perspective was not what trans* students had suggested, wanted, or needed. Additionally, while we do not question Karina's abilities, it was clear that Karina was handed oversight of GIH with little to no experience and limited institutional context. She also was not a staff member in residence life, which again underscores the confusing nature of who has control, responsibility, and ownership over these policies and their maintenance. Finally, this community was conceptualized and implemented within a single year without the direct contributions of trans* students in the planning and implementation process.

Beth (pronouns: she/her/hers), an LGBTQ professional at Southwest University, mentioned that before GIH was an option on campus, LGBTQ students were invited to take part in multiple focus groups to discuss their experiences in campus housing. As Beth stated,

> When [a colleague] and I started to engage [residence life staff] in that conversation [about GIH], part of that process involved two focus groups with LGBTQ+ students, which were the first that had happened that I was aware of to engage residence life with what would something like this look like? You know, there were, like, 40 students at the first one. We called it a focus group, but it was really like we just put the call out and people came. And a lot of people came. And then a lot of people came. And then about 30 or more people came to the second one as well. And in those conversations it was like trying to, I mean the upper administrators of residence life were present and wanted to hear from experiences students had had in the halls and like, is there a need for this? Yes there is.

However, while Beth talked about the important role queer and trans* students played at Southwest University in initiating the creation of GIH, when we asked Michelle (pronouns: she/her/hers), a housing professional at Southwest, if there were any trans* students involved in the ongoing work to address gender inclusion policies, we got a one word answer: "No."

The conflicting narratives regarding when, where, and if trans* students are included in the creation and maintenance of GIH policies on campus raises questions about the value of trans* students themselves. Put another way, when trans* students are invited to share negative experiences in housing but are not involved in the creation of better policies, one wonders to what extent those students are truly being centered through the process. Additionally, only using trans* students to hear negative experiences furthers the continued conflation of being trans* on campus as an overwhelmingly bad experience, and of trans* people always being hurt, harmed, and harassed. Moreover, while professionals can be energized to create GIH, and the process can be fast tracked if the right people are in the room—as was the case at Northwest University—if trans* students are not involved, there may be a risk of not creating a policy that speaks to the students' actual lived experiences on campus.

Why Has There Been No Ongoing Assessment of the Policy?

Although not an explicit question we asked student participants, we quickly learned there was no ongoing assessment of how GIH was (or was not) working. These comments often occurred after we stopped recording, mirroring a phenomenon Ahmed (2012) experienced when interviewing diversity practitioners about racism on campus. The sentiment of not being asked how GIH was (not) working also mirrored Ahmed's (2012) notion of "tick box diversity," or the idea that those administrators charged with creating GIH were doing so as a way to check it off a list rather than create a housing model that truly worked for trans* students.

Exemplifying the notion of "tick box diversity" discussed previously, Addison and interviewers had the following exchange:

> Addison: I'm sure there are people who like love their gender-inclusive experience in housing and I'm sure you've interviewed them, but I'm just a salty person …
>
> Interviewer 1: No it's, I mean, we're really interested in your experience right.
>
> Interviewer 2: Yeah! This is what it's all about, the whole range. And it doesn't sound like at any point anyone's asked you or invited you into a conversation about what would be ideal?
>
> Addison: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer 2: No one's done that?
>
> Addison: No one's done that.

Although Addison suggests that perhaps she is "just a salty person," or someone who has a negative disposition, it is clear no one has thought to check in with them about how they are experiencing GIH. If one had, Addison would have been able to express that GIH was *not* working at Midwest University, as they had experienced transphobic slurs and comments from one of their roommates. However, because no one followed up with Addison, housing professionals on campus continued to assume their job was done after having created a GIH policy. In fact, when asked directly about the experience Addison had, Darnell, a housing professional at Midwest University, shared the following during an interview:

Interviewer: No one has ever come forward and said, "My roommate … I'm trans or I'm gender queer and I'm living with people who checked the box but they're not really friendly, or supportive, or kind or whatever." You've not heard that?

Darnell: Correct. Oh yeah, "I'm not in a safe environment." No, I've never heard that. And I feel like our students, I feel like I would have at least heard. If I wasn't aware of a specific situation where it was occurring, by now I feel like we are a small enough community where I would have heard that this kind of thing occasionally happens. And I never, there's never been an inkling of any kind. And if anybody were to hear that, my gosh that would really raise a lot of red flags for me. It would create more urgency around us adding that educational piece. No doubt.

However, it had happened, and the lack of ongoing assessment about whether and to what extent GIH policies were doing their intended job was the reason why Darnell did not know of Addison's experiences.

Finally, at Northeast University, the first thing Clark (pronouns: he/him/his) shared with us as interviewers was, "I'm really excited that there's finally going to be some studies done about trans inclusive stuff." Admittedly, Clark's statement may seem like a throwaway comment to some. However, when it is combined with Addison's comment, one begins to recognize how trans* students are not invited to share their opinions, thoughts, or experiences in the very housing that was originally intended to promote their inclusion on college campuses. It is also worth noting that not a single one of the four research sites had, or was currently engaged in, any kind of assessment with trans* students—or any students, for that matter—living in GIH.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, the way GIH policies were created, maintained, and (not) assessed reflect Spade's (2015) notion of administrative violence, or the ways in which trans* oppression is embedded throughout administrative policies and practices. Specifically, the lack of centering trans* students themselves throughout the policy development and implementation process, along with the ambiguous and hard-to-find content of these policies, is highly distressing. Not only do these realities suggest that cisgender people[3] are framing policies through their own perspectives, but it also suggests that the actual experiences trans* students are having in GIH are not of interest to administrators. Furthermore, recognizing that such experiences could have been addressed in a proactive fashion had trans* students been involved throughout the policymaking process adds yet another layer to the notion of these policies' adherence to administrative violence. Had trans* students' voices, experiences, and lives been made central in the creation and maintenance of GIH policies, there may have been a decrease in incidents like those experienced by Addison.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, the data presented in this article suggest a connection to Ahmed's (2012) notion of "tick box diversity." Specifically, gender-inclusive policies acted as ends unto themselves rather than something to be continually assessed and shifted as needed. There are inherent dangers to positing GIH policies in this manner, especially if trans* students are not included in the creation, implementation, maintenance, and/or assessment of such policies. For example, framing a gender-inclusive policy as merely something that needs to be checked off a list of work tasks may occlude the actual real life importance of such a policy. Viewing the creation of policy as just another task that needs finishing overlooks (at best) or dismisses (at worst) the

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[3] It is important to note that only two of the professional staff members across all four research sites with whom we met identified as trans*, and neither worked in residence life.

ways that GIH policies must reflect—and can greatly influence—the overall life chances of trans* people as the very people for whom such policies are intended.

Implications for Innovative Practice

In imagining implications for innovative practice, we first invite those professionals who work on campuses with GIH policies to reflect on how they know these policies are doing the job they were intended to do: Creating safe and engaging spaces for trans* students to live. As our data reflected, housing professionals are not engaging in ongoing assessment of their GIH policies and spaces. Simply put, this is a problem, and one that needs to be rectified. We assert that creating opportunities to listen to trans* students at the beginning, middle, and end of policy creation/ implementation is an essential component to increasing life chances for trans* students. For those professionals who may not know where to start in creating assessments, we have offered our interview protocol (Appendix A) for use. This protocol could be used with focus groups as well as for individual interview purposes during and after students live in GIH.

Alongside our suggestion for ongoing assessment, we also suggest decentering cisgender narratives, fears, and feelings throughout the process of creating and maintaining gender-inclusive policies. As our data reveal, trans* students were often at the margins in the creation of such policies. As a result, decisions about these policies, and their roll out, were always framed through cisgender perspectives. While we recognize and are thankful for cisgender staff who have a deep desire to do right by trans* students (e.g., Karina), there can be no denying that the lack of trans* student involvement in creating policies that impact their lives is a form of administrative violence. In other words, trans* students' lack of involvement in the creation of GIH policies represents a form of erasure in that trans* voices are positioned as not mattering or having enough significance to be involved through the process. We also wonder how, if at all, cisgender administrators' fears about cisgender people's responses to openly publicizing GIH policies may have been operating through our study, as well as on campuses where GIH does not exist. Namely, we wonder if the reason trans* people had a hard time finding gender-inclusive policies resulted from cisgender administrators' worries of a backlash from external (cisgender) constituencies were they to be more forthcoming and transparent. Indeed, this was the case at Northwest University, where a gender-inclusive restroom on the GIH floor was removed after cisgender parents complained to housing staff during a move-in weekend. Due to this example of (not) implementing GIH environments based on cisgender people's desires—themselves rooted in transphobia—it stands to reason that creating a GIH policy on any college campus may not be as altruistic or rooted in increasing life chances for trans* students as we as researchers would hope.

Finally, reflecting Spade's (2015) CTP, we suggest that GIH policies must be created and continually revisited by a broad-based, intra-office coalition of students, faculty, and staff. This implication holds for all institutions, regardless of if they currently have a GIH policy. Sound policies are rarely made in isolation, and as such, it would behoove housing professionals to engage various different constituencies both on- and off-campus. Beyond trans* student representation on such a committee, administrators in residence life, housing, operations and facilities, judicial affairs, affinity-based centers (including and beyond LGBTQ centers), faculty who do research with and alongside trans* students/youth, and trans*-specific community non-profits are just some of the places where representation for such a committee could come. It would also behoove such a collaborative group to discuss how trans* students could be recognized and compensated for their ongoing labor, a point we as authors make elsewhere and is likely of interest for various constituencies working alongside trans* students/people on and off college campuses (Nicolazzo, Wagner, & Marine, 2017).

Additionally, professionals in student affairs can no longer claim that there is a lack of empirical literature about trans* students. As such, educators at campuses with and without GIH would benefit from immersing themselves in the empirical literature about trans* students. There has been a nascent growth of trans*-related literature in higher education, which is likely to keep growing. Therefore, it falls to educators to leverage the critically informed work being produced and use it to move from implementing best practices to implementing intentional practices related to GIH.

Conclusion

As trans* activists and scholars have noted, the increase in trans* visibility has been accompanied with an increase in trans* vulnerability (Gossett, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2017a). Similarly, the push for promoting "best practices" alongside trans* students without ongoing, intentional efforts to ensure such practices are actually working is, as the aforementioned findings detail, subjecting trans* students to further vulnerability. Furthermore, the push from some student affairs administrators toward gender equity is being lost amidst the broad adherence to binary gendered ways of thinking and operating throughout residential life and housing. As the present study has shown, much needs to be done to center trans* students, regardless of widely agreed upon desire from student affairs administrators to do better by this highly marginalized population. However, as the title for this article argues, rather than just claiming one wants to do better, there is a need to actually do better (Nicolazzo, 2016b). It is incumbent upon student affairs educators to move from best to intentional practices when working alongside trans* students. While residential housing was the specific site for this study, other studies have found similar findings (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2017b). However, due to the machinations of power, and the ubiquity of cisgender people in the field of student affairs, student affairs practice will not change until cisgender administrators do the necessary work to realize liberatory approaches to their work. Thus, the question facing all cisgender student affairs administrators at the end of this article is quite clear: How will you shift your practice to move from best to intentional practices alongside trans* students?

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. How is your year going so far at [institution here]?

2. When and how did you come to understand yourself as trans?

3. What was the process like for accessing gender-inclusive housing at your institution?

4. How did you learn about its existence, and the steps needed to secure it?

5. What was it like to go through that process? What barriers or supports did you encounter?

6. Upon arriving at your new housing, what was it like to move in there? did you experience any judgment, support, or other reactions from peers? What was that like?

7. What kind of support (if any) did you receive from residence life paraprofessional staff (e.g., RAs)?

8. Did you perceive that the person was trained to support trans* students in GIH effectively? What about experiences with professional staff?

9. Tell me a few stories that describe your daily experiences with GIH.

10. Did you choose to remain in GIH? Why or why not?

11. What would you say to other trans* students considering living on campus in GIH?

12. Should GIH continue/be expanded? Why or why not?

13. What recommendations would you make for ensuring that housing on your campus is truly inclusive and welcoming of trans* individuals?

14. Is there anything about GIH or your experiences living on campus that I have not asked you?