KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

NASPA

GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER

**Research Summary
& Compilation
Whitepaper
Fall 2014**

CONTENTS

The Whitepaper is a resource provided by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Knowledge Community (KC) of NASPA in fulfillment of its mission to provide avenues for the personal and professional growth of its members, increase awareness and acceptance of GLBT professionals and students, and promote understanding of GLBT professional and student needs within the field of higher education and student affairs administration.

The KC produces Whitepapers, which are compilations of current and cutting-edge research summaries and briefs. The goal of the Whitepaper is to share knowledge and information about issues related to the status of the GLBT community in higher education that will prompt discussion, further research and showcase scholarship being conducted by students and professionals in the field. Higher education and student affairs professionals can consider these recent findings/results when tailoring programmatic and pedagogical efforts on their campus. All scholars, researchers and professionals are welcome to submit summaries or briefs about their scholarship to the whitepaper; membership in NASPA is not a prerequisite.

The White Paper is meant to be a space that spurs innovation, further research, and experimentation. Although contributions are welcome from all who wish to submit, space is limited and we reserve the right to hold pieces for publication in future editions of the Whitepaper or other GLBT KC research publication venues (blog, website, newsletter, etc.). All editorial decisions, including feedback on content and placement in a particular publication, are made by the Core Member for Research & Whitepaper in consultation with an editorial board consisting of GLBT KC volunteer members.

Our editorial board is drawn from our primary audience; student affairs administrators and practitioners. The Whitepaper has been used previously as a forum to offer a summary or preview of an article that has been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed or refereed journal but it does not qualify as a reputable trade or scholarly journal.

For more information about the submission guidelines, contact the KC leadership at glbtkc@gmail.com

Suggested APA Style Citation:
Barbour, C. (2014). The lived experiences of gay and lesbian college athletes. *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators GLBT Knowledge Community White Paper*. Spring. 7-10.)

Queer Asian male sexuality in media

Kevin Ngo | Champlain College | kngo@champlain.edu

Despite substantial contributions by journalists and bloggers, there is a decided lack of scholarly resources, about Queer Asian male (QAM) sexuality. This article summarizes a literature review for a study that examines QAM sexuality through media representation, including television, movies, and pornography.

Racial Historical Context

The sexuality of Asians has historically been viewed with negative scrutiny. An account from a sixteenth-century Italian missionary found the "unnatural" sexual activities in China to "reverse the order of things" (Fung, 1991a). A similar observation was made of Japanese Buddhists in 1549 by Francis Xavier, stating that they were "drawn to sins against nature" (Fung, 1991a). There is no explicit mention of what sorts of sexual activities these people were referring to, but this has led to the idea that Asian sexuality is wild and uncontrollable (Fung, 1991a). Legislation in Canada used to exist that was meant to "protect white women from the unbridled libidos of Asian men," likely exclusively referring to heterosexual Asian men (Fung, 1991a).

Asian Sexuality in the Media

Western television and movies very rarely, if ever, portray people that are both gay and Asian. Eng and Fujikane (2002) wrote "Asian/Pacific gays and lesbians share problems of invisibility specific to histories fraught with Orientalist stereotypes." They also added that racialized and gendered stereotypes abundant among heterosexuals "return to disfigure representations of Asian/Pacific homosexualities" (Eng & Fujikane, 2002). This has served to represent Asian/Pacific gay men as asexual, emasculated, or "repositioned as Cio-Cio-San from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*" (Fung, 1991a).

Fung (1991a) warned against simply using positive stereotypes as a reaction to negative ones, as those are still constructed from white straight men's thoughts. He talked about focusing on non-mainstream issues for queer Asians, such as relating to other ethnic communities, drag and role playing, and race without relating to white people. Erbentraut (2010a) believed that heterosexual whites mean to divide and conquer queer people of color (QPOC); finding ways to remove whiteness as a base of comparison for QPOC would certainly increase solidarity within the term POC. As Fung (1991a) argued, "we must place ourselves at the centre of our own cultural practice, and not at the margins."

Modern accounts from Asian men about media portrayal of people who look like them have not yielded very much positivity. If mainstream media conditions Asian males (queer or not) to be ashamed of their race and sexuality, imagine the impact of more specialized media focused on sex.

Gay Asian Males in Pornography

Asians in gay male porn typically play very racially-slanted roles such as karate masters, Chinatown delivery boys, or Chinese food delivery boys, limiting portrayals of what Asian males can be sexually (Hoang, 2014). Fung (1991b) has also examined the sexuality of the races and has observed that Asians have the most sexual restraint, followed by whites, followed by blacks, who are often hypersexualized. Fung (1991b) makes a distinction between the stereotypes of "Orientals," referring to East and Southeast Asians, and "Orientalism," concerning the Middle East. Within the "Oriental" stereotype, there are some qualifiers attached to certain groups; the Japanese are supposed to be kinky whereas Filipinos are seen to be "available" (Fung, 1991b). "Oriental" people can also be

considered sexless (Fung, 1991b). Compared to a black man, who is treated as a penis, the Asian man is marked by the absence of a penis. Fung (1991b) asked, "…if Asian men have no sexuality, how can we be homosexual?" Furthermore, where do we go for real life romance?

Internet Dating Sites

A large part of the gay dating scene today revolves around dating sites and mobile apps—one in particular. Grindr is basically an app designed to facilitate hook-ups based on distance from the user. A number of people have noticed a common trend on Grindr users' profiles when advertising their interests (or disinterests as it were): no fats, no femmes, no Asians (also no blacks, no POZ, or HIV positive); Chee (2012) stated there is "a special place in Internet Hell reserved for the ones who put NO ASIANS on their profiles." Chee (2012) construed "no fats, femmes, Asians," - the exclusionary triad, as Erbentraut (2010b) refered to it - as to mean that being Asian is something that can be treated with a visit to the doctor or with behavioral therapy. When these people are confronted, they'll often claim that "'preference isn't racist'" (Chee, 2012). Notably, a study that was done with OKCupid found that the queer male culture seems to care more about race than its heterosexual counterpart (Woo, 2013).

Huang (2012) states that today, it's almost worse to be called a racist than to actually be one. Some people in the queer community believe that because they are already part of a "disenfranchised minority" that they couldn't possibly be racist, sexist, classist, or anything else like that. He says being able to talk through it will help the community grow stronger, however, if people were able to get over their "knee-jerk liberal reactions to the general concept of race and racism" (Yellow Fever, 2012c). Being gay "transcends race, class, gender, location, even time. Gay people are everywhere and we come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Acknowledging this can only be a good thing" (Yellow Fever, 2012c).

Conclusion & Implications

This is an excerpt of a literature review conducted in advance of launching a larger project that aims to advance the stories of QAMs (QAM). The aim of the project is to blend personal experiences with traditional research findings into a collection of short fictional stories that will represent a wide range of narratives. These narratives are meant to offer support to QAMs struggling with their identity and will also attempt to deconstruct the horizontal oppression found in the queer community concerning race. Projects that blend creative artistic methodologies and presentations hold a particular appeal for queer people of color.

This text will add to the small library of resources available to those individuals who identify as QAMs and to the larger collection of writings centered on the experiences of QPOC. I believe that expanding this library can reduce the likelihood that QAMs (at any age) develop or hang onto negative self-identity perceptions.

References

Chee, A. (2012, January 11). No Asians! *Out Magazine*. Retrieved February 8, 2014.

Eng, D. L., & Fujikane, C. (2002). Asian American Litertaure. *Glbtq.com: An encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer culture*. Retrieved February 8, 2014.

Erbentraut, J. (2010a, August 22). The last bias: How and why we tolerate gay anti-Asian prejudice and its pernicious effect on our community. *Edgeonthenet.com*. Retrieved February 10, 2014

Erbentraut, J. (2010b, September 6). Gay anti-Asian prejudice thrives on the Internet. *Edgeonthenet.com.* Retrieved February 10, 2014

Fung, R. (1991a). Centring the margins. In Russel Leong (Ed.), *Moving the image: Independent Asian Pacific American media arts*, pp. 62-67. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center & Visual Communications, 1991.

Fung, R. (1991b). Looking for my penis: The eroticized Asian in gay video porn. In Bad Object-choices (Eds). *How do I look? Queer Film & Video*, pp. 145-168. Seattle: Bay Press

Fung, R. (1994). Seeing yellow: Asian identities in film & video. In Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Ed.), *The state of Asian America: Activism and resistance in the 1990s*, pp. 161-1711. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Hoang, N. T. (2004). The resurrection of Brandon Lee: The making of a gay Asian American porn star. In L. Williams (ed.), *Porn Studies*. pp. 223-70. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Huang, J. (2012, April 30). Talking about race in the gay community shouldn't be such a bitchfest. *Huffington Post Gay Voices*. Retrieved September 12, 2014, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/justin-huang/talking-about-race-in-the-gay-community_b_1466043.html

Woo, J. (2013). *Meet Grindr: How one app changed the way we connect.* Self-published.

.

Gay students at Christian colleges: Implications for Student Affairs practice

William C. Takewell & Kamden K. Strunk | The University of Southern Missipippi | William.Takewell@usm.edu, Kamden.Strunk@usm.edu

Christian Colleges are unique institutions of higher education in their symbolic power and educational mission. Christian colleges are described as important to advancing and protecting the faith, as well as training a new generation of adherents. However, many have policies openly barring admission or graduation of openly-gay students. In this study, interviews, of men who identify as gay and who attended Christian Colleges and Universities are used to discuss and describe the experiences of gay males in heteronormative educational places close to home. Many of these spaces are described as being meaningful in influencing identity development experiences had as college students by the participants in this study.

Supporters of Christian Colleges describe the important role such spaces play in advancing and protecting the faith and creating a new generation of proselytizing believers (Adrian, 2010) while church officials tout the protective value of Christian Colleges against the secularizing influence of higher education and for retaining young people in their denominations (Kingsriter, n.d.). Central to maintaining an evangelical mission is the need to carefully prescribe and enforce both student and staff standards of behavior. For students, such standards can include signing a 'lifestyle covenant', attending religious services, following guidelines regarding interactions with the opposite sex (e.g., 'visitation hours'), alcohol restrictions, learning the theology of the institution's host denomination, and various other standards particular to a given campus or denomination. Among these standards are norms and regulations concerning sexual morality.

Many of these norms and standards can be troublesome for student affairs practitioners because of their direct conflict with ethical standards of practice, like those included in the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's (CAS) Shared Ethical Principles— sometimes known as being the ethical compass many professionals and professional organizations use to guide work on college and university campuses (CAS Ethics Statement, 2006). Issues of justice, equity, and student harm come to mind when considering a professional faced with the decision to ask a student to leave the university or to strip the student of certain campus privileges and rights because of his sexual orientation. There are also many potentially harmful implications to a student's development when keeping part of their identity hidden, or developing multiple identities, for fear of retaliation from the institution or from classmates and friends.

Participants for this study were recruited through snowball sampling. Six individuals who attended four colleges were interviewed: David, Nathan, Joshua, Jacob, Simon, and Jason [pseudonyms]. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed collaboratively using inductive analysis (Patton, 2002). The following highlights some of the general themes described in participant interviews that when made aware of, could be of direct benefit to student affairs practitioners on Christian College campuses.

Silence & Isolation

For gay students in Christian College and University spaces, who in some cases are still developing an understanding of themselves as gay, silence and isolation produce an unspoken mandate for repression. One participant, Nathan, recalled, "I didn't even have the words to use… It was something no one talked about, something you're not allowed to discuss." He stated, "When you're not given any tools for dialogue about that given thing it led to some really awful dark places for me." Maintaining silence helped protect educational investment as well. Another participant, Joshua, even after reconciling his faith and gay identity by his senior year, "didn't really want to come out, because well…I didn't want to get kicked out of school. I put too much money into it at that point."

The silence also served an institutional purpose. Although Nathan and Joshua report visits to campus from outside groups to preach against 'homosexuality' and tout ex-gay programs, only one participant, Simon, recalls campus officials publically discussing the issue. In these colleges, where financial viability relies on both retaining students as well as preserving their Christian identity, silence becomes either an overt strategy or collateral effect of negotiating the incendiary power of the topic of LGBTQ issues both on campus and in the broader political climate, given that LGBTQ issues can attract unwanted outside attention. This silence may be related to the complex in-group/out-group political messaging that emanates from conservative Christian circles with out-group messaging often crafted to 'sell' the theological message (Burack, 2008).

Interactions with Staff and Administration

Further interactions with staff and administration were reported by the participants. Nathan described his coming out process at his university as "terrifying" and "lonely." However, Nathan states that his experience got better when he sought out his university's counselors upon reaching the point of acknowledging his identity as a gay male. Nathan described, "My counselor was very good about helping me find my path and that sort of thing, and helped me come out to my parents which was very difficult and necessary." Nathan also recalled an experience his senior year with the university's Dean of Students. "We had a kid who had been checking out to his boyfriend's house on the weekends…and basically someone saw him kiss his boyfriend in front of the guys dorms on campus and reported it." Nathan went to the Dean of Students to make an attempt to plead a case for the student, even going as far to self-disclose to the dean his own struggles with his sexual identity. Nathan noted that he thought this put the dean in a difficult position, because if a student who identified as straight were to do the same thing, they could also be asked to leave the university—the dean cited trying to remain fair through his processes, and that there were other students who he noted were causing issues by being openly gay, but were not being sexually active, leaving him with little ability to do anything to correct their conduct.

The colleges and universities attended by the participants in this study are institutions that have very strict and specific standards for students to abide by in regard to conduct on campus. Of particular note are standards that restrict sexual identity. However, as discussed in this brief and further discussed in the related book chapter, there are some instances of faculty and staff in these spaces who provide safe, inclusive spaces for males who identify as being gay. However, the experiences of LGBTQ students who attend Christian Colleges and Universities still call for further interrogation and understanding.

References

Adrian, W. (2003). Christian universities in historical perspective. *Christian Higher Education, 2*(1), 15-33.

Barton, B. (2010). "Abomination" – Life as a bible belt gay. *Journal of Homosexuality, 57*(4), 465-484.

Burack, C. (2008). *Sin, sex, and democracy: Antigay rhetoric and the Christian right.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education Statement of Principles. Retrieved from http://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/CASethicsstatement.pdf.

Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, Ad Hoc Task Force on Human Sexuality. (2001). *Report of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Human Sexuality.* Retrieved from http://www.cccu.org/filefolder/cccu_Report_of_Human_Sexuality_Task_Force.pdf.

Crespino, J. (2007). *In search of another country: Mississippi and the conservative counterrevolution.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Estanek. S. M. (1998). Working with gay and lesbian students at Catholic colleges and universities: A student affairs perspective. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, 2*(2), 151-158.

Howard, J. (1999). *Men like that: A southern queer history.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Kingsriter, D. A. (n.d.). *Is the lower cost worth the high price?* Retrieved from http://agchurches.org/Sitefiles/Default/RSS/AG%20Colleges/FAQ/Is%20the%20Lower%20Cost%20Worth%20the%20High%20Price_.pdf.

Levinson, B. A., Foley, D. E., & Holland, D. C. (Eds.). (1996). *The cultural production of the educated person: Critical ethnographies of schooling and local practice.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Mayo, C. (2007). *Disputing the subject of sex: Sexuality and public school controversies*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.Meiners, E. R., & Quinn, T. M. (2010). Doing and feeling research in public: Queer organizing for public education and justice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 23*(2), 147-164.

Meiners, E. R., & Quinn, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Sexualities in education: A reader.* New York: Peter Lang.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ribas, M. (2004). The church in the closet. *Theology and Sexuality, 10*(2), 83-89.

Rodriguez, N. & Pinar, W. (Eds.). (2007). *Queering straight teachers: discourse and identity in education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Sears, J. T. (1991). *Growing up gay in the south: Race, gender, and journeys of the spirit.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Talburt, S. (2000). *Subject to identity: Knowledge, sexuality, and academic practices in higher education.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Whitlock, U.R. (2007). *This corner of Canaan: Curriculum studies of place & the reconstruction of the south*. New York: Peter Lang.

Wollf, J. R., & Himes, H. L. (2010). Purposeful exclusion of sexual minority youth in Christian higher education: The implications of discrimination. *Christian Higher Education, 9*(1), 439-460.

Wollf, J. R., Himes, H. L., Kwon, E. M., & Bollinger, R. A. (2012). Evangelical Christian college students and attitudes toward gay rights: A California university sample. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 9*(3), 200-224.

Yoakam, J. R. (2006). Resources for gay and bisexual students in a Catholic college. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 14*(3), 311-321.

Gender politics & trans visibility in gender-inclusive housing

Chase M. Ledin | The Ohio State University | chaseledin@gmail.com

LGBT living-learning communities (LLC) are paradoxical and unequal spaces for transgender and gender-queer students. These LLCs produce a categorization of difference much in the way the LGBT acronym purports, and fails, to espouse trans visibility. A recent interview with trans activist Carol Steele in *Polari Magazine* (2014) reiterated that "the T in LGBT is not always visible, and more often than not tacked on to the end rather than being understood, or even accepted. On a rudimentary level, sexual orientation [LGB] defines preference, whereas the T defines gender." To the extent that LGBT communities provide accessible resources for non-normative, queer people, they rarely focalize the trans experience as other than sexual preference. "Trans," as a constituent of the LGBT acronym, assumes a sexual connotation because LGB identities denote sexual preference. Its continued conflation with gay, lesbian, and bisexual sexualities deemphasizes its gender politics, veiling trans experience as sexual. I argue that transgender policy, and particularly forthcoming gender-inclusive housing (GIH), must focus attention away from sexual politics and move toward gender politics in order to "lift the veil" from transgender bodies. I utilize Fiona Buckland's (2002) "queer world-making" to substantiate trans visibility though community dialogue and affirm the importance of trans lives by implementing trans-specific community education. Gender-inclusive housing that deconstructs gender essentialism, I contend, prioritizes gender politics and provides trans and gender-queer students a space to develop more comfortable gender identities.

As of March 2014, an estimated 149 accredited four-year universities in the United States had written policies enacting gender-inclusive living spaces (Beemyn, 2013; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2013). Universities such as Boston University (2013), the University of Michigan (2013), the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (2015), and The Ohio State University (2014) have recently developed exceptional LGBT-oriented, gender-inclusive living communities. Gender-inclusive housing (GIH) serves as an alternative space for transgender, transitioning, and gender-queer students. Its primary goal is to de-normalize the gender dichotomy by maintaining gender as a socially constructed reality (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). By contrast, traditional housing units arrange students in same-sex suites, relying heavily on biological sex, or "gender," for placement. This arrangement assures the conservation of cisnormativity. Cisnormativity belongs to transphobia, sustaining the "expectation that all people are and should be [their assigned, biological sex]," and that transgender identity is a deviant and "transitional" form (Marcellin, Scheim, Bauer & Redman, 2013). Gender-inclusive housing erupts from traditional same-sex housing pairs by disregarding the formalities of biological gender and favoring the safety of friendship and family (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis & Tubbs, 2005; Yagoda & Santos-Gonzalez, 2012).

The problem with existing gender-inclusive housing, however, is in its representation: Administrators are compelled to emphasize GIH's queer potentiality, subsuming gender identity with broadened sexual politics. Because there is little effort to detach the T from LGB (a contested discourse, nonetheless), administrators must consolidate their resources to assume support for *categories* of minority students. Master's candidate Maria Anderson found that LGBT-homogenized communities coupled with vague transgender policies tended to mask trans voices. Current university policies for trans students, according to Anderson, do nothing to dispel "campus-wide transphobia and perpetuate an essentialist understanding of gender identity as a dichotomy" (Anderson, 2012, p.ii). As Anderson's title suggests, administrators *implicating* inclusion is not enough to equivocate support for transgender students. Gender essentialism remains as policy because queer gender

experience is not an explicit concern among the student population (p. 99-100). Trans activist Carol Steele furnishes an excellent definition for why gender politics remains absent in collegiate spaces: "Because sexual orientation is social, and our ideas about gender are learned and applied socially…any [sexual behavior] that deviates from the norm throws the issue of gender into confusion" ("Lives no longer hidden," 2014). Thus, while transgender students are welcomed into these quasi-sexual spaces, their identities are misconstrued by sexual desire and not legitimated as a gendered experience. For many transgender students, sexuality is not their "variance." LGBT-oriented, and not transgender-specific, housing supports *sexual* identities in tandem with cisnormative and gendered formalities, but housing truly inclusive of trans students must construct non-binary policies as the fulcrum of social and identity development.

Existing gender-inclusive policy and LGBT categorization align, because both assume paradigmatic membership for sexually stigmatized bodies. Queer and trans bodies—especially those visibly Other, intrinsic or contemptuous—face undue pressure from this sexually specific system. "[Some who identify as transgender] refuse to 'complete' the process of surgical sex reassignment, and thus in some sense remain alienated from any identity or readily labeled group" (Califia, 1994, p.212). Students who might not have queer sexual desires and identify as transgender (or gender-queer) sometimes find their connection to the queer community lessened or even severed. In a 2013 article, *Huffington Post*'s Todd Clayton wrote: "[Trans] voices are conspicuously absent, and too many uninformed and insensitive lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer persons are doing harm to the [trans] community while simultaneously purporting to speak for them." Clayton's article enumerates (and by no means freshly exhumes) the tension transgender and gender-queer persons pose as members of the LGBT minority. Lesbians and gays may welcome transgender people into their community, but continued slighting reveals that they too manifest and perpetuate transphobic behaviors, which oust trans identified persons.

So, what does trans politics look like in gender-inclusive space? Ideologically, gender-inclusive space implements builds upon public and private experiences to delegitimize the gender binary. An effective gender-inclusive community disrupts learned interpretations of binary genders and occupations with genitalia, marking them as transphobic. Thus, living units must be open to assignment regardless of biological sex. An effective community also negotiates cisgender privilege through frequent educational sessions on trans allyship. Gender-inclusive space that actively engages students in volunteering, trans activism, and trans scholarship stresses the importance of cisgender allies as supporters of trans politics and lives. In other words, working alongside transgender friends and colleagues, cisgender students (regardless of sexuality) defend the right to non-normative gender and sexual identities. Programs should include, what Fiona Buckland calls, a dialogue process of "queer world-making" to inspire unique queer identities. By conflating public and private identities, "[queer world-making] opens the way to understanding the agency of individuals and groups to produce sites of interaction and intersection with other groups and concerns…" (Buckland, 2002, p.5). Queer world-making brings together unique individual experiences, causing the threads to overlap and concretize; affirms trans experiences as legitimate; assures the agency of individual lives; and creates a community identity through lived experience. While this list does not enumerate the many ways in which a trans-specific community might emerge, these suggestions capitalize on the importance of dialogue between trans and cisgender informants.

The battle for gender-inclusive housing yanks at the LGB-T tension. Some existing GIH, and many policies in development, fail to acknowledge gender politics and fall back on sexual politics, but exemplify the need for trans-specific learning spaces. Maria Anderson remarks: "Institutions must make the decision as to whether or not their policy will explicitly include transgender students… To only implicitly include transgender students places the burden of interpreting the policy on the student" (Anderson, p. 111). Administrators must create collegiate living spaces that emphasize trans

experience through gender politics. Gender-inclusive housing, after all, is not a sex zone,[1] nor should it model sexual identity. After all, gender inclusion requires an intense investigation of gender norms. We must encourage housing administrators to re-focalize the importance of gender variation—suggesting, even, the redevelopment of existing LGBT-oriented communities. As S/M activist Pat Califia wrote: "Before we can even think about…creating better, safer, bigger social space for ourselves, we have to find one another. [Creating] satisfying, healthy [relationships] is as politically radical as AIDS activists' chaining themselves to the axles of a pharmaceutical company's delivery trucks" (Califia, 1994, p.230).

References

Anderson, M. (2011). *Implicit inclusion is not enough: Effectiveness of gender neutral housing policies on inclusion of transgender students* (Master's thesis). The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Beemyn, B., Curtis, B., Davis, M., & Tubbs, N. J. (2005). Transgender issues on college campuses. *New Directions for Student Services*, *111*, 49-60.

Beemyn, G. (2013). *Colleges and universities that provide gender-inclusive housing*. Retrieved from Campus Pride Index website: http://www.campuspride.org/tpc-gih/.

Buckland, F. (2002). *Impossible dance: Club culture and queer world-making*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Califia, P. (1994). *Public sex: The culture of radical sex*. Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press.

Clayton, T. (2013, February 27). The queer community has to stop being transphobic: Realizing my cisgender privilege. *Huffington Post: Gay Voices*.

Lives no longer hidden: An interview with Carol Steele. (2014, August 21). *Polari Magazine*.

Marcellin, R. L., Scheim, A., Bauer, G., & Redman, N. (2013, March 7). Experiences of transphobia among trans Ontarians. *Trans Pulse*, *3*(2), 1-2.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2012* (NCES 2014-015), Table 5.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, *1*(2), 125-151.

Yagoda, J., & Santos-Gonzalez, I. (2012). *A proposal for the expansion of gender neutral housing*. New Haven, CT: Yale College Council.

---

[1] Pat Califia, in "The City of Desire" (1994), values the queer potential of space by dividing the city into sectors that are relegated and stigmatized based on their sexual affect. In this case, gender-inclusive housing that upholds trans experience cannot prioritize the sexual form; in conjunction with sexual politics, GIH must dismantle gender essentialism in order to include transgender and gender-queer students.

Making their own way: How gay male students experience the STEM fields

Adam R. Smith | Oklahoma State University | adam.ryan.smith@okstate.edu

Introduction

College is a period of self-discovery, knowledge acquisition, and maturation. Students learn just as much from their experiences out of the classroom as they do within the brick and mortar walls. But what if, while in their classroom, students are being oppressed, feeling threatened, or finding that their environment is incongruent, inhospitable, and generally uncomfortable because of their sexual orientation?

For many students, specifically those who identify as male and gay, the hyper-genderization of the STEM field may be conflicting with the student's perception of their own gender. As noted by Connolly (2000), "Despite their valiant efforts in the midst of educational neglect, LGB students may struggle in their development of an authentic sense of identity and experience difficulty succeeding academically" (p. 125). This struggle is the result of many factors, such as privilege and power, sexual identity development, gender identity, and the impact of the educational environment.

Methodology

After a lengthy exploration of literature in queer studies, gender and sexuality, student development theory, and even pedagogical studies of the STEM fields, a noticeable hole was discovered. There are an extremely limited number of studies that concern themselves with students who identify as LGBT in STEM. However, research on women in STEM, like Clark and Corcoran's (1986) study on the accumulative disadvantage of female STEM professionals, provided a valuable foundation for this research.

Three questions guided the research:

- How do students make meaning of their experience in STEM environments through the interaction of their gender, gender schema, and sexual orientation?
- In what ways is a gay identity (for a male student) mediated by the heteronormative masculinity of the STEM field in which they are majoring?
- How do students' experiences differ considering their openness with their identity?

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using qualitative frameworks through constructivist and transformative lenses. Because the study required deep, meaningful reflection by the participants, Seidman's (2013) episodic interviewing scheme was used to generate the context necessary to understand and explore the meaning of the participants' experiences. In the first interview, participants were asked to begin the reflective process by exploring general themes of their experiences on a larger temporal scale. The second interview asked students to explore more specific interactions within their major and classroom settings. This interview also utilized a photo-elicitation technique based on Comeaux (2013). This technique asked participants to review a series of images on flashcards and respond with how closely they identified with the images. At the end of the second interview, participants were given a Peaks and Valleys worksheet based on the work of Weichman (2013). This activity asked the participant to draw their experience as a series of peaks and valleys. Discussion of the participant's drawing was the subject of the third and final interview.

Participants

Participants of the study were all gay males enrolled as students in a STEM degree program at a post-secondary institution and were recruited through either the NASPA GLBT Knowledge Community listserv or the researcher's local LGBTQA resource center listserv. Five students were selected to participate and only one failed to complete all three interviews.

Bill. Growing up in a small town in the Deep South, Bill often felt he needed to hide his identity. Rather than stir up trouble, he adopted an outward coldness. Now, at Appalachia University, a large, land grant, research institution in the region, he is able to live openly, even date and find other out friends while studying in the engineering college.

Chip. As the oldest participant, Chip has much more experience from which he can draw. At his baccalaureate institution in the Great Plains, Chip was forced out of a prestigious position in the athletic medicine program because of perceptions about his sexuality. Now, Chip is in the northeast at Upstate University in a combined PhD/MD program working to bridge the relationship between healthcare provider and queer patient.

Jim. Jim is a quiet individual who speaks softly and shyly. He grew up in the Rocky Mountain region but now attends a large, flagship, research institution in the Great Plains where he studies forensic sciences. He often volunteers with the campus LGBTQA resource center and makes a point to be open about his sexuality.

John. John has had a colorful career while at Fidelity University, a mid-sized, private, Jesuit, nonprofit research institution in the mid-Atlantic region. He is only in his second year at Fidelity, but has already had to leave the school, attend a drug rehabilitation program, and find a way to restart his career. Now, as a biochemistry and mathematics double major, John is getting more comfortable with himself at Fidelity.

Payton. Payton grew up in the Sierra Nevada with two sisters and religious, conservative parents. At Rocky Technical University, a small, public, engineering and applied science university in the Rocky Mountains, studies mechanical engineering, works as a resident assistant, and was a varsity track athlete. Unfortunately, Payton's sexuality made him feel uncomfortable remaining on the track team.

Findings

Following the interviews and transcription, data analyzed using a hybrid *a priori* and inductive approach, which resulted in three main themes. Each theme also contained two subthemes. First, it was found that the participants were using their STEM spaces as a place of escape from social norms and pressures. The STEM environment socializes into its students a set of objective viewpoints and an individuality wherein orientation, gender, and other social identities are not considered important. Furthermore, discussing matters of identity is simply not an efficient way to complete the work necessary in the field. Second, it was found that these participants felt uncomfortable revealing their queer identity in the STEM space. Some of that discomfort stems from not wanting to make others uncomfortable or because of an internal sense of awkwardness while other parts of that discomfort may develop out of a feeling of constantly having to be vulnerable because the coming out process is so arduous. Finally, it was found that these participants might experience academic challenges in the STEM environment because of their sexual orientation. However, in a world of challenge, it was found that even small gestures could translate to big support. Similarly, those who reported strong mentorship relationships with allies also felt much more positive emotions regarding their experience, even when discussing domestic abuse, drug use, and depression.

Conclusion and Implications

There is no easy way to remove all of the challenges facing gay students in STEM programs.

However, through the implementation of several small-scale changes, this study suggests student affairs professionals can make the STEM environment a far more welcoming and inclusive place. First, student affairs professionals should strive to extend the reach of LGBTQ resource centers into the academic space. Second, student affairs professionals are uniquely positioned to inject the curriculum and co-curricular experiences with team-, community-, and relationship-building techniques, which can foster positive and inclusive environments.

Not every campus is fortunate enough to have a standalone LGBT resource center, but some campuses have absolutely no space for students who identify as part of the LGBT community to call their own. While a physical space where these students can locate themselves would be ideal, having at least one dedicated staff member or supporter can be valuable. This can even be done in individual departments or academic units regardless of the existence of a centralized institutional resource center. As the third finding suggests, even a small gesture of support, like conducting allyship and inclusive spaces training or displaying a safe space sticker can be valuable to a student who identifies as gay.

In many STEM programs, curricular focus is shifting away from the well- established scientific courses to introducing more leadership and interpersonal skills- focused courses. This is a great opportunity for student affairs professionals to impact the STEM environment in a very positive way. As campus leaders in equitable practices and social justice, student affairs professionals can offer our time to instruct our students on building teams and being a member of a team in a cross-cultural space. By injecting a conversation on social justice or interpersonal team building into the curricular requirements, professionals in higher education can disrupt and positively affect the individualistic nature of STEM environments.

These solutions need not be paradigm-shifting. Rather, by supporting each student who walks in the door, student affairs professionals can positively impact every student's experience. Small gestures, such as earning and displaying a safe space sticker, providing an accepting and encouraging environment for students to express their frustrations and their victories, and checking heteronormative language in the academic space, can help a student whose experience would otherwise be negatively impacted because of their sexual orientation.

References

Clark, S. M., & Corcoran, M. (1986). Perspectives on the professional socialization of women faculty: A case of accumulative disadvantage? *The Journal of Higher Education, 57*(1), 20-43.

Comeaux, E. (2013). Faculty perceptions of high-achieving male collegians: A critical race theory analysis. *Journal of College Student Development, 54*(5), 453-465. doi:10.1353/csd.2013.0071

Connolly, M. (2000). Issues for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in traditional college classrooms. In V. A. Wall & N. J. Evans (Ed.), *Toward acceptance: Sexual orientation issues on campus* (pp. 109-130). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Seidman, I. E. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Weichman, T. J. (2013). *Success informs success: Experiences of persisting first-generation college males.* (Unpublished thesis). University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Digital Commons.