

Another World is Possible: Envisioning an Intersectional Social Justice Student Affairs Praxis

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Abstract

Developing an intersectional social justice praxis in student affairs is important given the wide sweeping economic and political shifts are occurring in society and are creating shifts within higher education environments. These shifts, referred to here as neoliberalism, adversely affect already minoritized populations (e.g., trans* students). Simultaneously, higher education professionals, particularly those in identity-based centers, seek solutions to common student problems (e.g., campus climate) through policies and practices, which may inadvertently advance a neo-liberal agenda. I propose a framework that seeks to develop policies, programs, and practices that work to subvert neoliberalism, or at the very least stop the advancement of neoliberal ideology within student affairs. In this article, I argue adoption of this framework in student affairs using findings from an exploratory study about the experiences of transgender college students. The framework calls for social justice approach grounded in Critical Trans Politics and draws on notions of intersectionality to understand the effects of larger social forces on individual students' experiences.

Recommended Citation

Pitcher, E. N. (2015). Another World is Possible: Envisioning an Intersectional Social Justice Student Affairs Praxis. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 4 (1).<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp-180810-38>

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The *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* is published by the Iowa State University Digital Press
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(<https://www.education.iastate.edu>)

Introduction

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives.” –Audre Lorde

Have single-issue, identity-based student centers, such as LGBTQ Resource Centers and Black Cultural Centers, outlived their usefulness? Practitioners often contend with the critique that these centers serve as mechanisms to promote self-segregation; yet, these centers are a vital source of student voice and provide opportunities for support and celebration of college students’ identities, especially for students from minoritized groups (Patton, 2010; Renn, 2011). Identity-based centers play important roles on U.S. college campuses.

While it is certainly correct to argue that identity-based centers serve critically important functions, the single-issue approach has unintended consequences for students with multiple, intersecting identities (Renn, 2011). Moreover, identity-based student centers exist within institutions that operate in a larger context that Shahjahan (2012) called neoliberal higher education or “the theoretical and practical restructuring of HE [higher education] according to neoliberal logics” (p. 3). These logics include marketization (e.g., brand and marketing strategies in admissions), privatization (e.g., reduction of state support), and human capital development (e.g., developing culturally competent workers).

Developing strategies to resist neoliberalism is a central concern within identity-based centers because, as Darder (2012) stated about neoliberal multiculturalism, “questions of [individual] difference have been neatly conflated and diffused by a hypocrisy fueled by racism, elitism, and a tenacious disbelief in the equality of those who exist outside the narrow rationality of its [neoliberalism’s] profit logic” (p. 413). More simply, neoliberal logics ignore and erase the social contract of upward mobility and social advancement for marginalized individuals through education. Further, identity-based centers attempt to mediate the adverse effects of oppression (e.g., genderism), but may inadvertently do so

under neoliberal logics (e.g., adding gender identity/expression to non-discrimination statements).

Because of the neoliberal higher education context, in this article, I posit that a framework that resists neoliberalism through intersectional social justice student affairs praxis is necessary. While this paper specifically develops a case for this framework based upon the experiences of transgender or trans*¹ students, the negative effects of neoliberalism influences all marginalized students' experiences.

While other scholars developed strategies for students or faculty to resist neoliberalism (Darder, 2012; Levidow, 2002; Shahjahan, 2012), I develop a framework for student affairs administrators (SAAs) to resist neoliberalism's negative effects through intersectional social justice praxis. In order to advance this framework, I further describe neoliberalism, and then define social justice and intersectionality as informed by Critical Trans Politics. Next, I describe a base of evidence from a small-scale qualitative study that supports the claim that continuing to conduct student affairs in a single-issue manner is problematic if we seek to adequately serve increasingly diverse student populations. Then, I address key issues related to the question of whether there is utility in the continued existence of single-issue identity centers. Finally, I develop some intellectual strategies and concrete steps for developing intersectional social justice student affairs praxis.

Describing Neoliberal Logics and Processes

Practitioners are already aware of the effects of neoliberalism in higher education, but may call these effects by different names, including the rise of corporate culture, noting the increased numbers of contingent faculty and administrators, and the emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities (Darder, 2012; Giroux, 2002; Spade, 2011). Students, who itemize their tuition into percentages of each class period, viewing education as nothing

¹ Trans* is used broadly and inclusively throughout this paper to refer to a group of gender diverse individuals including genderqueer, transsexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals. (Tompkins, 2014)

more than a fee for service, exemplify neoliberalism. In addition, increased accountability and reductions in state support are other features of neoliberalism (Darder, 2012).

Under neoliberalism, “politics are market-driven and the claims of democratic citizenship are subordinated to market values” (Giroux, 2002, p. 428). Neoliberalism views education as a private good, erasing the idea that public education is a human right (Darder, 2012). The hallmarks of neoliberalism in higher education are the treatment of all relationships as business relationships; increased focus on efficiency, accountability, and quality as defined by the bottom line; commodification of educational products (e.g., classes); and relationships between administrators, faculty, and students as mediated by consumption (Levidow, 2002). Neoliberalism operates within an individual rights framework that draws attention to the “incidents of intentional, individualized negative action, discrimination, exclusion, and violence” (Spade, 2011, p. 102). By directing attention towards individual acts of discrimination, the larger structure that supports oppressive ideologies remains intact. Further, within neoliberalism, the individual is the only acceptable unit of analysis for social and educational problems.

Neoliberal higher education, with its accompanying logics of multiculturalism and colorblindness, provides a context where an emphasis is made on creating bias-incident reporting mechanisms, adding new categories of protection to nondiscrimination statements, and efforts to reduce individual bias within identity based student services rather than addressing the larger social structures which produce the conditions of oppression (Cabrera, 2014). These moves, while worthwhile, are insufficient given the advancement of neoliberal logics and processes. I contend that neoliberalism has profound effects on the ways that SAAs engage in their work.

SAAs are not intentionally following neoliberal logics; rather these logics are unduly influencing the lenses through which practitioners engage in their work. Often, identity

centers exist within relatively conservative campus environments, which may capitalize on neoliberal logics as ways to find niche markets and respond to the current demands for producing diverse human capital. The demands of neoliberalism challenge the student affairs profession's values of advancing democratic citizenship and social justice (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), thus understanding the effects of neoliberalism, and developing ways to resist it, are critically important in continuing to advance the profession's values. I propose that one strategy to resist neoliberalism is to develop an intersectional social justice framework rooted in Critical Trans Politics.

Developing an Intersectional Social Justice Framework

To underscore the significance of an intersectional social justice framework, I define these terms and the importance of this framework for my research. First coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality addresses the overlapping, mutually reinforcing, and intersecting matrix of subordination that impacts the lived experiences of Black women which, at the time, could not be easily understood within existing feminist frameworks or anti-racist frameworks. Rather than viewing the experiences of Black women as racism plus sexism, intersectionality aims to understand how a combination of social forces (e.g., racism, sexism) uniquely shapes the experiences of Black women.

Emanating from legal studies and Black feminist thought, intersectional frameworks seek to understand oppression beyond unitary political identities. More specifically, "intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 68). I would like to make a distinction here between intersectionality and holding multiple identities. Intersectionality is a construct specifically created with the experiences of multiple forms of subordination in mind (Black women), while multiple dimensions of identity might

include multiple forms of subordination (queer, woman) and forms of dominance (whiteness) (Crenshaw, 1989; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). In considering the population discussed in this article, namely trans* college students, societal level forces (e.g., heterosexism, racism, genderism²) shape the experiences of these students.

The concept of intersectionality is important to student affairs practice because this framework better equips practitioners to conceptualize the ways in which larger social structures affect college students' experiences. Adding an intersectional analysis to a social justice framework moves away from singular understandings of identity and towards a model where the multiple, intersecting identities of students are addressed. In this paper, I use intersectionality in two ways: first, to refer to the social structures that privilege groups (e.g., white³, cisgender) and disadvantage groups (e.g., Black, queer); and second, to refer to the ways that identities come together within one's lived experiences with privilege and oppression (e.g., white, pansexual). Having described intersectionality, I now define social justice.

While social justice seems to be an increasingly popular buzzword throughout U.S. education systems, there appears to be little consensus about what social justice actually means (Furman, 2012; Strayhorn & Hirt, 2008). Drawing on the work of Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007) and Young (2011), I define social justice as efforts intended to foster the full and equal participation of all groups by eliminating institutionalized domination and oppression. Educational institutions are important sites of resistance to unjust social forces, including neoliberalism. Therefore, I posit that social justice is a noun and a verb, a goal and a process. As such, the goal of social justice is to eliminate the interlocking systems of oppression, and the process is taking the necessary steps to do so. Social justice is not simply a moment of arrival at some pre-determined destination; social justice is a process

² Defined by Bilodeau (2007) as the belief that there are two and only two genders.

³ I do not capitalize "white," as APA recommends, as a means to dislocate the dominance attached to this word.

that we must continually engage in to eliminate all systems of domination and oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Young, 2011).

The notion of Critical Trans Politics (CTP) also informs the intersectional social justice framework. CTP is grounded in Critical Race Theory and Women of Color Feminism and seeks to center the experiences of gender diverse individuals, who are often left out of mainstream lesbian and gay movements (Spade, 2011). As such, CTP distinguishes itself from mainstream lesbian and gay rights movements that seek legal recognition (e.g., marriage) and inclusion (e.g., domestic partner benefits). CTP instead focuses efforts on transforming current ways of understanding social equality through coalitional politics that focus on larger systems of inequality (Spade, 2011).

With CTP, resistance of social norms, power structures, and oppressive social forces becomes the focus (Spade, 2011). Instead of policy and legal reform, CTP focuses on opposing norms that center the experiences of dominant groups (e.g., white, male, cisgender, heterosexual), and proposes that resistance must affirm that minoritized ways of being are legitimate (Spade, 2011). An example of affirming minoritized ways of being as legitimate might include using a person's requested pronouns, instead of assuming which pronouns a person uses based on their gender expression. This framework signals a movement towards livable lives and increasing the life chances of trans* individuals, including college students, by shifting social norms rather than accommodating non-dominant identities through policy (Butler, 2004; Spade, 2011). Having defined my terms, I now define the proposed framework.

Taking the previously defined terms, intersectional social justice student affairs praxis works to ensure the full and equal participation of all students. This is accomplished by addressing structural oppression and domination where possible, conceptualizing students' multiple identities in intersectional ways, affirming non-dominant ways of being as

legitimate, and actively resisting the logics of neoliberalism, to the greatest degree possible. Student affairs is nested within a larger institutional structure that is organized hierarchically and within institutions that are subject to neoliberal demands of accountability, decreased funding, and marketization.

Some may dismiss this framework as too idealistic or unrealizable. I argue that changing our intellectual approach to our work is just as important as the outcomes of our work; intersectional social justice praxis is about *how* one does their work. This framework is especially important as a mechanism to support marginalized students, especially for those whose desire for social justice emanates from the need to retain hope that another world is possible—that a more socially just world is possible and desirable.

SAs play a central role in providing opportunities for students to engage in social justice work. By aspiring together, practitioner and student, it is possible to collaborate in the creation of a new vision of the world. By providing opportunities for advancing social justice, one must not inadvertently advance neoliberalism. Moving forward with this notion of intersectional social justice praxis, I now review existing literature about transgender college students, and then review my findings from an exploratory qualitative study about trans* students' perspectives about an LGBTQ resource center. I close with an extension of this framework, derived in part from the findings and in part from my argument that intersectional social justice praxis is necessary.

Understanding Trans* College Students

Based on six interviews conducted at a selective large, public, Midwestern university, I developed a body of evidence demonstrating the ways in which an intersectional social justice framework would better serve a particular student population, namely transgender college students. While I speak specifically about trans* college students, the principles and analytic tools provided here could improve the institutional conditions for gender diverse

student. This would ensure that institutional leaders treat, not only gender diverse students with dignity and respect while pursuing their education, but all students from marginalized subject positions.

Relevant Literature about Transgender College Students

Transgender students are increasingly visible on college campuses and could be welcomed more fully on campus by improving facilities like gender neutral bathrooms, increasing health care access, and improving student records processes (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Despite increasing research that is inclusive of transgender college students, there is little published empirical data that looks beyond identity formation (e.g., Bilodeau, 2009; Pusch, 2005) and transgender students' experiences on college campuses (Beemyn et al., 2005; McKinney, 2005). In keeping with the idea that trans* students are diverse, Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet (2012) affirmed that meaningful differences exist across transgender identities (e.g., trans-feminine, trans-masculine, genderqueer).

Transgender college students consistently report experiencing a hostile campus climate, and many transgender college students have been subject to assault and harassment (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). As a result of being part of a marginalized group, transgender college students report a lower sense of belonging and lower levels of engagement in formal leadership positions (Dugan et al., 2012). Additionally, many universities lack appropriate mental and physical health services for transgender students (Bilodeau, 2009; McKinney, 2005). While changes to policy are vitally important for symbolic purposes (e.g., demonstrating commitment to trans* people), the positive impacts on students' experiences seem partially unrealized (Beemyn & Pettit, 2006).

Transgender Student Perspectives about an LGBTQ Campus Resource Center

During the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters, I interviewed six trans* identified students about their experiences with the LGBTQ Campus Resource Center (LGBTQ CRC) on their campus. This study used purposeful sampling and I selected interview participants based on their ability to provide information-rich interviews suitable for in depth analysis (Patton, 1990). I purposefully recruited students who were both actively involved and not involved with the LGBTQ CRC. I also recruited participants who had varying degrees of disclosure about their trans* identities and a range of academic majors, which I describe in more detail later. While the sample size is modest, this within sample variation allowed for a variety of perspectives about the LGBTQ CRC to emerge.

Students were recruited through two mass email lists administered by the LGBTQ CRC, one for trans-feminine spectrum individuals and one for trans-masculine spectrum individuals. This effort connected me with many potential participants. Through brief email exchanges with participants, I determined how involved a particular student was with the center and ultimately selected Sally, Amber, and Ian who represented a range of participation within the center. Sally was quite involved, Amber was marginally involved, and Ian's involvement varied over their time at the institution.

I also recruited participants from local community based groups for trans* people. By doing this, I connected with Brad and Mo, two individuals who also had quite different levels of involvement with the center. Brad was highly involved, and Mo was not very involved, but indicated that they would likely become more involved. Finally, I used my personal connections within the trans* community to recruit Wyatt into the study, who described many negative experiences with the center. Wyatt was not formally involved, but was a frequent visitor to the center, as described below.

All semi-structured interviews took place with current students at a large selective research university in the Midwest (Upper Midwest University, UMU). Interviews lasted 40-60 minutes. Six interviews provided a modest, but rich data set. Given the emergent design of this research, the findings of this study have some limitations. All participants are from a single campus, a noted limitation within LGBTQ research in higher education (Renn, 2010), and the demographics have limitations in terms of racial and ethnic identification, among other identities. Given the small size of the population, this sample, while small, is appropriate given the exploratory nature of this research.

I recorded, transcribed, and open coded all of the interviews. I also used field notes immediately after each interview to ensure the richest description of participants' experiences (Bogden & Bilken, 2007). The protocol asked about experiences with and perspectives about the Campus Resource Center using intersectional language such as, "As a white genderqueer person, what three to five things do you want from the LGBTQ Campus Resource Center at your university?" An example of an intersectional follow-up question is, "How might your needs be shaped by your identity as a white gender fluid person?" All interviews were conducted in person during the 2010–2011 academic year at UMU.

I analyzed the data using an open coding procedure, following the principles of Grounded Theory, wherein I developed initial codes and later refined these codes to reflect the entirety of the participants' responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I refined codes to a point where each participant's responses fit into one of the unique response categories. By using an open coding method that involved determining codes, applying codes, and refining codes over time, I sought to identify, name, categorize, and describe the phenomena from the interview transcripts. Additionally, I employed member checking to ensure the trustworthiness of these data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Overview of Findings

Three themes related to student affairs practice emerged from these data. First, participants described the ways in which the gender binary and persistent genderism affect their college experiences (Bilodeau, 2009). Genderism, or structural inequalities based on the underlying assumption that there are two, and only two genders, manifests in sex-segregated facilities within these data. Second, participants expressed a high need for the LGBTQ CRC to provide safer social space for community building. Finally, students expressed the need for programs that address the intersections of identity. I expand on these three themes— sex-segregated facilities, the need for safer space, and intersectional programming needs—in the following sections. Before discussing each of these themes, I briefly discuss identity disclosure among the participants.

There appears to be some relationship between identity disclosure and academic major within this sample. Some students reported being very out, such as Wyatt, while others were less out. Brad, a science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) major, was not out in his major classes, but was out selectively within other contexts. Brad decided not to be out as trans*, electing instead to be read as a cisgender man in his major classes because he felt that this identity gave him more credibility in his department, which was male-dominated. Mo, a social sciences major, disclosed their identity in interpersonal and social settings, but never in academic or work contexts. Mo said that they “leave it [their identity] up to perception” with most people whom they do not have a close relationship with. On the other hand, Amber, a humanities major, was fairly out in her major classes, at least in part because she wanted to be part of the women’s group within the department. She described herself as “fairly out, mostly because I want to be able to socialize with the women’s group in my department.”

Three participants expressed ambivalence towards “outness,” as these participants mostly wanted to be able to do their gender without having to deal with others' expectations about their genders. Wyatt described the frustration of being known as “the trans-dude.” He said, “People...I don't even know, will come up to me all the time and be like, ‘You're Wyatt, right? You're the trans dude that so and so was telling me about.’ That's really frustrating. I just want to be Wyatt.” Sally also described being rather out, at least in part stemming from their active involvement at the LGBTQ CRC. Sally said, “Most people know I am genderqueer because of where I work and how I dress, you know, being so androgynous, people make assumptions.” The possibilities and perils of “outness” and visibility are numerous, but beyond the scope of this paper. My purpose in highlighting these stories is to provide a sense of the range of experiences within the sample of participants. I now describe the range of experiences students reported with sex-segregated facilities.

Genderism and Sex-Segregated Facilities

All six participants expressed concerns about sex-segregated or binary gender (men's and women's) campus facilities and classrooms. One participant, Sally (pronouns: they, them, theirs), stated they used a gender-neutral bathroom map provided by the LGBTQ CRC to plan their class schedule so they were never far from a safer bathroom. Admittedly, they walked as much as fifteen minutes across campus to avoid the harassment and uncomfortable space that a women's bathroom became, given their androgynous presentation. While Sally used the resources available to them, the notion that any student should have to plan their class schedule around their ability to access a safer bathroom seems antithetical to the mission of creating safer and inclusive campus learning environments. Sally was not alone with their experiences with genderism on campus.

Brad (pronouns: he, him, his) relayed a story about his and a friend's participation in ballroom dance classes and the ways in which dividing students by gender excludes trans* students. He said,

"I want to learn how to lead [in dance], that's why I am taking the class. I danced for twelve years, but... as a girl... I know someone who tried to take the class and was completely gender variant, you know, completely in the middle, and they had to drop the class... the professor told my friend that they couldn't lead. It's very gendered [the ballroom dance class is gendered]."

The instructor allowed Brad to take the role of lead in ballroom dance because his sex/gender was read as male/man and masculine. However, Brad's friend, whose gender did not conform to societal expectations, was not permitted by the instructor to lead or to learn different roles in dance. This story highlights how rigidly gendered spaces can marginalize trans* students. Adopting an intersectional social justice practice within classroom spaces would ensure that students could learn regardless of their gender identity or expression. Campuses that seek to fully include trans* students would create facilities that accommodate a range of genders. I elaborate on facilities and educational programs in the section on proposed strategies for enacting an intersectional social justice framework. In light of the highly gendered spaces, the need for safer space emerges.

Need for Safer Space

All six participants expressed the importance of the LGBTQ CRC in providing for a safer social space that helps to build community and foster the development of a peer network. The need for safer space is well established (e.g., Patton, 2011). Despite all participants expressing that there is a positive campus environment for LGBT people at UMU, participants universally needed a safer space. As interviews progressed, participants further clarified their particular vision for safer space. Some interview

participants wanted a space for positive identity development, while others wanted educational and social events.

When I asked participants if the LGBTQ CRC met their needs for safer space, five agreed and one participant stated that the LGBTQ CRC did not meet their needs. As the only Person of Color who participated in an interview, Wyatt, a two-spirit⁴, working class, American Indian man (pronouns: he, him, his) expressed his continued dissatisfaction with the programs offered at the LGBTQ CRC, particularly around issues relevant to Communities of Color. Despite Wyatt's need for a safer social space, the structural social system of racism prevented his full inclusion within the space. He said, "The idea of an LGBT Center is very important to me, but...the campus center on this campus, the space, I have never really felt comfortable there." He later added, "The folks who, like, work at the campus center are, I feel are very...uh, cliquey. It is like their little group. [Whose group?] You know generally white folks who are not competent in POC [People of Color] issues."

At the time I conducted this study, it was widely understood by participants that issues of race and racism were not handled in particularly generative ways within the LGBTQ CRC. While the pool of participants in this study are mostly white, and therefore have limited views of the inner workings of racism within the LGBTQ CRC, every participant responded with nearly the same answer when asked the question, "Is there anyone who you think is not especially welcome in the LGBTQ CRC?" Sally said, "Well, I know that folks of Color don't feel particularly welcomed at the CRC but we are trying to work on that. We really want to make the center a place for everyone." Amber stated, "I mean...the few times I've been there, it's mostly been white people...but I know that there are issues around race and stuff within the center." Mo

⁴ A contemporary term that refers to the historical and current First Nations people whose individual spirits were/are a blend of male and female spirits.

similarly pointed to issues of race when they said, “It [the CRC] offered me what I needed, which was a way to network and a sense of community. But I know that not everyone experiences the CRC that way. [Interviewer: Who doesn’t experience it that way?] Well... I would say Black people don’t like the CRC.”

Given the consensus among participants that there was something going on with the CRC and the racial politics of this space, I conclude that the CRC must not be a particularly welcoming space for Communities of Color. Given the predominantly white campus context, as well as the widespread issues of genderism as indicated by comments about highly gendered spaces, it is especially important that LGBTQ students of color can find comfort from the harmful effects of a myriad of oppressive social forces (e.g., genderism, racism).

Participants further described the racialization of space within the LGBTQ CRC. Specifically, Wyatt and Ian both described specific instances in which the professional and student staff created a cliquish environment that welcomed certain identities (white, masculine women) and not others (femme, queer People of Color). While the CRC provided a safer space to white students, in doing so, the staff of the center often excluded queer Students of Color. Both Wyatt and Ian described the larger institutional structure wherein the Multicultural Student Affairs focuses on issues of race and ethnicity and the LGBTQ CRC emphasizes sexuality and gender. This arrangement inadvertently reified singular notions of identity, leaving very few spaces for queer and trans* Students of Color to explore the intersections of their identities. Further, the structure follows a unitary identity politic (single identity focus) that allows whiteness and other processes of racialization to go unacknowledged within the LGBTQ CRC and the dismissal of genders and sexualities of racially minoritized individuals. Creating safer space that affirms intersections of identity is important. Students who were already satisfied with services would likely continue to be satisfied with the services they received from the LGBTQ

CRC. However, those students who previously felt excluded would now have access to a safer social space that affirms their multiple, intersecting identities.

Intersectional Programming Needs

While the majority of participants felt their need for a safer social space was important, specific intersectional identity programmatic needs often go unmet within the LGBTQ CRC (e.g., programs for trans* People of Color, international LGBTQ students, queer transmen). I am using intersectionality as a way to think about programs that examine the intersections of one's identities (e.g., race/ethnicity and sexual orientation). As described in the section about safer space, the structure, programs, and staffing of identity-based centers can limit discussions about the intersections of identity. Wyatt expressed extreme discomfort with the level of cultural competency on the part of the professional and student staff at the LGBTQ CRC, and he noted the lack of programming specific to queer People of Color. He said,

“I do not feel comfortable in there. I do go there often, to invade their space [white people's space]...they are interestingly competent in trans issues. My struggle is different and I would like for that to be addressed. I need resources for People of Color. They do not have People of Color working on POC issues.”

Wyatt was not alone in the understanding that the campus LGBTQ center did not meet the needs of Students of Color. In fact, without prompting, all but one participant mentioned that LGBTQ CRC professional and student staff did not address the needs of queer People of Color in program planning. In addition, there were few other avenues for queer Students of Color to receive support for their various identities. Further, five of the six participants felt that there were very few opportunities to address the intersections of identity within the LGBTQ center.

Three participants were particularly cognizant of the lack of culturally relevant programs, yet all participants affirmed the problem of cultural competence on the part of

the professional staff. For example, Ian said, “Sometimes the programs are in a white model and there are cultural differences for people who are part of different [cultural] groups.” A specific example Ian offered was regarding language such as butch versus stud, as mostly white communities use the word butch. Whereas, in an African American context some people might use the word stud to describe a masculine presenting female assigned person.

Paraphrasing from Wyatt’s discussion, the struggles of Queer Communities of Color are different from the experiences of queer white folks, and specific programs and outreach to Communities of Color are important. Ian shared a compelling example about an incident he observed in the LGBTQ CRC involving the former director. Ian described the situation as follows,

“My friend, an African-American masculine of center person, was fired a year or so ago from the center, in a very public way. I mean, I was just in there one day [at the LGBTQ CRC] and Jack, the former director, started yelling at my friend. The director said that my friend bullied him... and then the director banned him from the center... We walked out together in solidarity.”

The exchange that Ian observed between the former director and a former student staff member indicated that the director invoked racialized imagery within the context of the disagreement. Had the previous director adopted an intersectional social justice framework, the disagreement would have emphasized equitable human relations and affirmed non-dominant ways of being as legitimate. Also, the former director would have seen themselves in a position of structural power and acknowledged how their words may carry more weight as a result of this structural power. Intersectional social justice praxis not only requires practitioners to acknowledge their power and privilege, but also to understand power and privilege relationally, both at the individual, and group levels.

Unfortunately, the experiences that participants shared are far too typical at institutions of higher education. Extensive evidence supports the idea that many groups of students (e.g. Students of Color, students with disabilities) are met with hostility while pursuing their degrees (e.g., Magallanes, 2012; Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, Hurtado, & Allen, 1998; Reid & Knight, 2006). By adopting an intersectional social justice framework that seeks to empower students and treat all students with dignity, I believe student affairs professionals can support students in successfully navigating college. Having addressed the key findings, I now address the question of whether single-issue identity centers have outlived their usefulness.

Continued Utility of Single-Issue Identity Centers

The question of whether single-issue identity centers have outlived their usefulness is a critical concern for SAAs. Renn (2011) argued for the continued utility of identity based centers, while Patton (2011) stated that today's college students occupy multiple, intersecting identities. Therefore, administrators need to shift the focus of their center's mission and programs to move beyond single identity models and address intersecting identities (Patton, 2011).

A neoliberal logic views students as consumers and the institution as the marketer (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This logic plays out in single-issue identity centers wherein these centers must justify their existence, proving the 'value added' of their work. Meanwhile, privatization (e.g., push for corporate and alumni giving) influences how identity based centers operate and potentially erodes their mission. Neoliberalism can ultimately limit the ability of centers to ameliorate the effects of a negative campus climate that is structured around interlocking systems of domination and oppression (Hill Collins, 2000).

Renn (2011) observed that identity centers provide safer space, and serve a symbolic function to show a commitment to diversity (Patton, 2010; 2011). Because of

the symbolic functions and safer space provided, especially in the face of a hostile campus climate, identity based centers are vitally important to support the success of marginalized students. In response to Patton's (2011) call for shifting the mission and program, I seek to provide a way for identity-based student affairs work to better serve students with multiple, intersecting identities by moving towards intersectional social justice praxis. Rather than proposing a solution to the question of the continued utility of identity based centers, which I believe is best decided at the campus level, and in relationship with the staff, students, faculty, and administrative units directly affected, I describe some of the key issues associated with single-issue identity centers.

First, participants in this study described the ways in which the organizational model and white cultural practices of the professional and student staff marginalized Students of Color. Shifting away from a single issue or singular identity model, towards a multi-issue center might better serve students. However, shifts in organizational structure without attending to the myriad issues that would arise with such a merger (e.g., historical struggles of each of these communities) would prove problematic. Further, if the staff of an LGBT CRC is reputed to marginalize Students of Color, a partnership with the Multicultural Student Center is unlikely to be successful, as inter-group conflict remains a key issue for higher education professionals in identity-based centers (see Renn, 2011).

Second, participants in this study described issues of cultural competence on the part of the professional staff. Increasing professional development for staff in identity-based centers may improve the context for one's work; however, a question remains as to whether professional development could fundamentally change the culture of an administrative unit. Patton (2011) rightly argued that administrators in identity-based centers need to shift their practice in order to address the needs of students with multiple and intersecting identities, but this shift must come from social justice oriented

individuals or the efforts will fail to address the systematic issues that continually perpetuate such oppression.

Each campus and their staff must determine what works best for their individual campuses, while also considering the historical and contemporary needs of their students. As Marine (2012) argued, “the hard work of assessment, analysis, goal identification, action, and further assessment precludes almost all forms of the easy win, but the payoff promised is far more rich for ending homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia on campus” (p. 109). Answering the thorny issue of the continued utility of identity-based centers is not the “easy win,” but part of a longer-term strategy to address oppression on campus. By adopting a stance of social justice and working to ensure the full, equal participation of all students, practitioners may be able to address the ways in which structural boundaries between certain identity groups manifest within campus organizational structures. Further, if SAAs in identity-based centers work at the intersections of identity, it is possible to address the structural divisions of social groups, at least on campus. In order to advance such a practice, I develop strategies to enact the proposed framework.

Proposed Strategies for Intersectional Social Justice Student Affairs Praxis

Intersectional social justice based student affairs praxis cannot remain solely an intellectual endeavor. In order to resist neoliberalism, one must combine reflection with action (Freire, 1993). Based on the evidence provided in this article, and my argument that intersectional social justice student affairs praxis is necessary, I provide some cursory strategies to develop this framework with both analytic tools and concrete strategies for the SAA toolbox. Rather than prescribe a set of “best practices,” I attempt to demonstrate what resistance to neoliberalism might look like through the following proposed strategies. The notion that one could develop best practices, or that it is even desirable to do so, only seeks to advance a neoliberal logic that emphasizes palatable,

and therefore marketable, ways to address perennial issues in higher education. Further, the implementation of these proposed strategies could serve as an action plan to resist neoliberal logics and processes within student affairs.

While these proposed strategies operate at the level of everyday doings of practitioners, larger structural concerns also exist (e.g., institutionalized racism). There are no easy actions or intellectual approaches to remediate unjust social structures. It may also be useful to consider the ways in which the very structure of one's Student Affairs Division expands or constrains possibilities for success among marginalized student groups. While this paper speaks to individual practitioners, the collective efforts of the profession of student affairs also matter. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the ways in which institutions, as a collective of individuals, can and must address the oppressive forces (e.g., racism, classism, sexism, genderism) enacted within the structures of their institutions.

Strategies for Policy

Analytic Strategies. Policy making at the institutional and divisional/unit level has the ability to shape an organization slowly over time and is guided by organizational values (Gillborn, 2005). SAAs could be more explicit about how their values influence policy-making processes. Gillborn (2005) argued that education policy making is an act of white supremacy and in routine policy making, the privileging of white interests in the policy making process goes unnoticed. While Gillborn (2005) discussed policy making at a national level for K-12 schools, his arguments are equally applicable to higher education policy, at both the institutional and divisional level. Social forces like racism, sexism, and genderism influence policy making. Social forces like racism are deeply rooted, and even well intentioned actions have racist consequences (Gillborn, 2005). Further, Marine (2012) argued that identifying and reducing the effects of genderism is the most important initiative a campus can pursue in support of trans* students.

When developing policy, considering the implications of policies might include asking the following questions: Whom is the policy intended to benefit? Does the policy improve the college experience for the intended beneficiaries? Whom might the policy exclude? Does a particular policy serve people at the intersections of identity? Does this policy address the struggles and needs of historically marginalized groups?

Concrete Strategies. Using the example of a name change or chosen name policy, I describe an ideal policy from the perspective of the intersectional social justice framework. A chosen name change policy that allows students to self-determine their name and gender pronouns (he, she, they, ze), and does not rely on legal documentation, is helpful. Requiring legal documentation creates unnecessary financial barriers for students. Further, not requiring legal documentation avoids any potential discrimination that students may face in the court system. Additionally, regardless of immigration status, or country or state of origin, this policy ensures that faculty, staff and other students address others using their chosen name and gender pronoun. In order to enact this policy, SAAs need support from the various offices on campus. Engaging in training, outreach, and educational activities creates support for this proposed policy. This strategy resists neoliberal logics by moving away from policy as an end in of itself and ensuring that leaders pair policy change with educational programs and training to ensure its effectiveness.

Educational Programs and Training

Analytic Strategies. Educational programs inform institutional culture and climate (Rankin et al., 2010). Previous literature suggests the importance of offering programming that both addresses transgender students' need for belonging (Dugan et al., 2012), and educates the non-transgender population about trans* lives (Beemyn et al., 2005). Also, as is evidenced by this study, programs informed by intersectionality

and that focuses on the range of experiences within the trans* community would better serve the needs of trans* students.

When developing programs, one must think about the relations of power and the intersections of identity, and avoid using the individual as the only unit of analysis as a means to resist neoliberal logics. Developing programs that meaningfully address intersections of experience, which are created through a social justice process that engages inclusive pedagogical practice, better reflects an intersectional social justice framework. These programs can engage participants with the intersections of identity including race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation, even, or especially, when the training is not necessarily about these issues. While campus partnerships are a hallmark of student affairs practice, moving away from tokenization and towards deep, meaningful connections reflects the proposed intersectional social justice framework. By moving away from exclusively examining trans* experiences as individual experiences, which follows a neoliberal logic, consider the range of experiences of this social group and the ways in which lives are made livable and are structured around larger social forces (Spade, 2011).

Concrete Strategies. I encourage SAAs to continue to ask critical questions and continue to understand the variety of perspectives within student program planning. Hosting difficult dialogues that challenge one's perspectives and occur in open (“anything can be said here”), bounded (“it all stays here”), and hospitable settings (a comfortable environment to engage with uncomfortable matters) are important steps to enact the proposed framework. While facilitating difficult dialogues is far from a new idea, hosting them in ways that address the intersections of identity (e.g., racialization of gender), emphasize social justice, and resist neoliberalism would greatly enhance these conversations. One way to engage this work from my own professional experiences was to host a trans* Person of Color who worked with two organizations to enhance the

programs that addressed structural issues at the intersections of racism and genderism. Following Marine's (2012) caution that one off programs have a "Band-Aid effect," having a one-time educational speaker and building the capacity of student leaders to be more inclusive are quite different. I favor capacity building and community development over the novelty of a lecture, especially as a longer-term strategy of resistance against neoliberal logics.

Facilities

Analytic Strategies. Institutions demonstrate through facilities planning how valued or "expected" particular bodies are (Titchkosky, 2003). If a campus is inaccessible to people who use mobility devices, this sends a clear message about who belongs on that particular campus. Because sense of belonging is related to one's psychological need for belongingness and love (Maslow, 1958), when students' needs for belonging are not met, they are less likely to persist (Strayhorn, 2012). Campus facilities that meet the needs of the students who access the physical spaces ensure the continued success of all students. Often, colleges have not planned for the types of students who currently enroll at their campuses. By ignoring the needs of marginalized populations, campuses create a physical atmosphere of exclusion. Planning for facilities that consider the needs of as many campus constituents as possible will ensure the overall success of faculty, administrators, and students. Being democratic and transparent in the facilities planning process ensures as many voices as possible are heard.

When considering how to address facilities needs for one's college or university, engaging in a dialogue about who accesses the campus, what their needs are, and how to best meet those needs while adhering to budget constraints is key. Facilities planning might ask the following questions: Who does not have access? How can we eliminate barriers to access? Does accessing facilities make students vulnerable to harassment or

discrimination? Do the proposed solutions improve the chances for success in college for both the entirety of students and attend to salient needs of particular social groups?

Concrete Steps. Advocating for these facilities using an intersectional social justice framework requires looking beyond the experiences of trans* students, but also considering the needs of people with physical disabilities who may require an assistant (potentially of another gender), those who need to nurse, and still others who may need this privacy for medical or social reasons. Thus a single stall locking bathroom meets not only the needs of the trans* students who shared their stories, but also the needs of other campus community members. Providing single occupancy bathrooms and locker room facilities ensures the ability for many student populations to access campus facilities. This option includes people with physical disabilities, parents with children of another gender, people with caregivers, and trans* people. If limited by structure, placing shower curtains for privacy or ensuring that bathrooms within group restroom facilities have single locking stalls that are wide enough to allow wheelchair access are appropriate alternatives.

Disrupting White-Space

Analytic Strategies. A final avenue to engage this framework is through the disruption of white institutional spaces. Wyatt described his experiences with interrupting white space in the LGBTQ CRC at his university. SAAs who have adopted an intersectional social justice framework in their praxis must also consider the ways in which the culture of their office and the institution writ large thoughtfully and respectfully engages with the multiple, intersecting identities of the campus community members.

Wyatt described a kind of white institutional presence (Gusa, 2010), which has four attributes including white ascendancy, monoculturalism, white blindness, and white estrangement. Gusa (2010) argued, and Wyatt affirms, that white institutional presence permeates predominantly white institutions and negatively influences the sense of

belonging for minoritized racial and ethnic groups. Predominantly white institutions serve as gatekeepers of mainstream knowledge (Gusa, 2010). Gatekeeping privileges white, Western voices and views the perspectives of those considered non-white as irrelevant (Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). Within the current neoliberal context, the process of white institutional presence is less visible (Darder, 2012; Gusa, 2010).

Here, I extend the concept of white institutional presence to spaces wherein male, cisgender, heterosexual, and other dominant groups control the space's culture. When a dominant group's presence controls the culture of particular spaces (e.g., white cisgender men controlling the culture of an LGBTQ resource center), non-dominant groups are pushed to the margins (e.g., queer and trans* People of Color). The type of control described here is precisely what interviews with transgender students revealed. An overwhelmingly white, cisgender staff at the LGBTQ CRC created a white, cisgender space wherein individuals of Color and white trans* people were not especially welcomed or valued. Shifting the culture of a particular space can be difficult, but is worthwhile. Some specific ways to address this are to hire gender and racially diverse staff, to have specific conversations about gender or racial socialization as a part of professional development, or to assess one's progress towards becoming a socially just organization. Understanding the ways in which our daily practices as professionals may create a queer cultural space that excludes trans* individuals, or how a white queer cultural space marginalizes Queer People of Color, is vitally important in the pursuit of an intersectional social justice student affairs praxis.

Concrete Strategies. The values of marginalized cultures must be present within institutional spaces to ensure that dominant groups do not create a mono-cultural environment wherein dominant groups' beliefs are seen as the only legitimate way of being. SAAs can affirm the importance of students' voices, but must do so in ways that

are not tokenizing. Visual and physical representation of a variety of voices must be evident in one's office. By engaging a variety of perspectives, the culture within one's office can be more inclusive and socially just. Additionally, ongoing assessment of student needs, especially those students with multiple marginalized identities, ensures that the needs of those students are met. Developing or continuing a student advisory board that represents a variety of perspectives can further facilitate an inclusive organizational culture.

Conclusion

Using an intersectional social justice framework to both resist neoliberal logics, and guide one's work, ensures that more students have positive collegiate experiences. In the face of increasing accountability measures and diminishing state support, two key features of neoliberal higher education, the need for developing creative, cost effective strategies that continue to advance justice while reconciling the demands of a neoliberal agenda is critically important to all students, but especially to marginalized students. Engaging in the practices described here is but one potential path the field of student affairs could take. Throughout this paper, I have resisted being prescriptive in my recommendations in order to respect the professional autonomy of student affairs administrators. I am however, firm about the importance of extending social justice work throughout one's life.

This proposed strategy of resistance must not cease at the end of the workday. Being politically and intellectually active with social justice projects is equally important to the proposed analytical and concrete strategies outlined in this article. Engaging politically in anti-oppressive projects that encourage deep engagement with the issues affecting the lives of marginalized groups expands empathy and increases one's capacity for sustained engagement in intersectional social justice work.

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