The Experience of Transgender Students in Ball State’s Residence Halls

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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July 2013

Expected Date of Graduation
May 2013
Abstract

Transgender individuals—those who express a non-normative gender identity—experience all aspects of life differently from cisgender peers. Although regularly included in research on and discussion about lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities (LGBT), the transgender experience is overlooked. Institutes of higher education are leaders for both LGBT research and inclusivity, yet they often lack the proper accommodations to fully support transgender students (Renn, 2010). This study focuses on the experience of transgender students in the residence halls at Ball State University. The synthesis of research on transgender expression and interviews with three transgender residents provides a view of the experience of transgender students in Ball State’s residence halls. This study, however, is by no means exhaustive and should only be used to further the conversation about accommodations that will allow transgender students to feel safe and included in their on-campus living spaces.

Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, and advice of countless people. All my friends, family, and mentors who have helped me on this project deserve my gratitude. Among them, a few people deserve additional and specific thanks. First, I would like to thank the interview participants for agreeing to share their experience with a stranger in the hopes of improving the residence halls. This project would not have been possible without your input.

I would also like to thank Becca Schafer for making me get down to work and for being a wonderful role model for working toward social justice. Sarah Gremer also pushed me to get through rough times in my thesis, semester, and job search. Thank you for your encouragement and for reading me Dr. Seuss.

This study was much easy to conduct because of Kyle Kittleson of the SafeZone program. He provided a foundational understanding of transgender expression and issues that helped me immeasurably. His eagerness to create allies for the transgender community is an inspiration to me.

Finally, I would like to extend infinite amounts of gratitude to my thesis advisor, my life advisor, my friend, Beth Wall. Not only did she unintentionally inspire me to pursue this topic, but also continued to be an inspiration throughout the whole process. Beth encouraged me, she pushed me, and she taught me. She has shown amazing dedication to both this project and to the well being of the LGBT community. Plus, Beth gave me candy.
The Experience of Transgender Students in Ball State’s Residence Halls

Introduction

In the past several decades, acceptance for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community has grown, although the growth has not been equal for all components. Transgender individuals, while in theory part of the LGBT community, have not received as much attention in research or societal institutions as their lesbian, gay, or bisexual counterparts (Gagné et al., 1997). Even colleges and universities, which are known for being leaders for both research and inclusivity, often lack the proper accommodations to fully support transgender students (Renn, 2010). Not only this problem impact institutes of higher education all over the country, but also it affects the entirety of a college or university. Transgender students experience all aspects of college differently than their cisgender peers, who express a normative gender identity; dining halls, classrooms, registration processes, and residence halls, to name a few, all provide potential obstacles to transgender students.

This study investigates the experience of transgender students in Ball State University’s residence halls in an attempt to better understand the problems and issues that transgender students face in one aspect of one university. While this study is limited in its scope, the results certainly can be used in implementing changes at Ball State, as well as potentially helping other universities similar in size and composition. If nothing else, this study can serve as the beginning of a conversation between the University, the transgender population, and the larger community about the accommodations for transgender students.
A Note on Language

When researching any topic concerning non-normative sexualities or gender identities, determining which identities and individuals fit into the “community” requires some objective decision-making. For this study, the community includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals. The research, however, included authors who defined the “community” as including some combination of questioning, queer, intersex, and allied individuals as well (LGBTQQIA). In discussing these works, this study will refer to the community as each individual author does to ensure that original intent is preserved as much as possible. When acronyms are used to refer to the community, they will always be listed in the order mentioned previously, to the extent that the author includes. Additionally, most sources use the adjective “transgender” as opposed to “transgendered” which also reflects the preference of transgender individuals. This study uses “transgender” even if the source uses “transgendered” to stay consistent with best-practice procedures.

Methodology

The study focused on the experience of transgender or gender-variant students living in the residence halls at Ball State University through interviewing students who self-identified as transgender or gender variant. Recruitment for interview subjects occurred through emails sent out through Listservs to organizations that support LGBT students, including Spectrum, SafeZone, and Call to Action. At the end of the interview, subjects were asked to contact other self-identified transgender students about the study. Whether recruited by the email or “snowballing” method, interested students were
instructed to contact the interview team. Interview subjects had to live in the residence halls at least one semester and be at least 18 years old.

Several measures were taken to ensure the anonymity of interview participants. Audio recordings of the interview were digitally saved in a password-protected folder until transcription to prevent risk of voice recognition. Interviews were recorded using pseudonyms for the informants, and other names of people whose identity may have made the informant identifiable. To also protect our informants from any discomfort they might have felt in the process of disclosing information during the interview, they were provided with resources available to them as Ball State students. The interview team was also prepared to report any accounts of abuse or discrimination to the proper authorities if needed. Participants were allowed to choose the location of the interview if they wanted to ensure their privacy and safety. One interview occurred over the phone, as the participant was a former student living out of town.

The interview team consisted of the primary investigator and the faculty advisor as scheduling allowed. Participants could request to be interviewed by only one person if it would help them to feel comfortable. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. Participants were asked twenty-one questions, and could choose not to answer any question without explanation. When composing the questions, the interview team attempted to not assume about the gender identity or experience of the participants. The questions were intentionally open ended so that participants could discuss the topic as they interpreted it. The interview team felt this was the best way to record the full experience of transgender or gender-variant students. The questions were also focused on different aspects of living in the residence halls, including roommates, room and
bathroom accommodations, and interactions with hall staff. The complete list of questions can be found at the end of this study.

In the data analysis process, interview transcriptions were coded for notable responses and experiences. These were then arranged into relevant categories as themes emerged. These themes included issues with roommates, transphobia and unawareness of transgender expression, experiences with floor bathrooms, interactions with hall staff members, community of support, campus resources available outside of Housing, language used for transgender students, and suggested accommodations for transgender students.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Research on transgender expression is not as prevalent as the other identities in the LGBT community. In the 1970s, researchers began developing theoretical stage models to describe the experience of gay or lesbian individuals (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), which were likely to exclude bisexual as well as transgender individuals. These often centered on the process of coming out, which involves the individual understanding, personally accepting, and disclosing his or her sexual identity. Schuler, Hoffman, & Peterson (2009) discuss three such models—Jones and McEwen’s Conceptual Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, Fassinger’s Model for LGB Identity Development, and D’Augelli’s Identity Development and Sexual Orientation Model. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) note that D’Augelli’s model can be applied to transgender individuals’ coming-out process as well, and Bilodeau (n.d.) adapted quotes from transgender students in other research to demonstrate this. The Jones and McEwen model also can apply to transgender
individuals since it is not exclusively concerned with sexuality (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). According to Gagné, Tewksbury, and McGaughey (1997), there is very little research compared to sexuality-based identities on the process of coming out as transgender.

More recently, queer theory has been providing opportunities for the transgender experience to be heard and understood. Abes and Kasch (2007) demonstrate the value of this strategy by providing a side-by-side comparison of constructivist-developmental models and queer retellings of one individual’s development of her lesbian identity. A constructivist-developmental model is based on the assumption that individuals develop increasingly complex methods of perceiving the world as they progress on a relatively linear path (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Queer retellings focus on the ways individuals develop, perform, and balance multiple aspects of identity as well as the intersections of these various identities (Abes & Kasch, 2007). By retelling the individual’s development of her lesbian identity through the framework of queer theory, Abes and Kasch (2007) were able to focus on reforming identity and managing multiple identities instead of focusing on obstacles lesbians and other sexual minorities face. The queer retelling also allows for intersection of multiple aspects of identity, for which a constructivist-developmental model does not consider (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Both Renn (2010) and Bilodeau and Renn (2005) note that queer theory, which challenges categorization of normative sexualities and gender identities, along with feminist and postmodern perspectives allow for the removal of a gender binary that can help to better understand LGBT issues. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) use both of these theories in examining the social construction of gender, gender ideology, and gender order. Lorber (1994) also examines the construction of gender as part of the social structure.
The theoretical frameworks in place are important because they translate into practices, even if they are unacknowledged influences, and this is true for higher education institutions as well (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Schuler et al. (2009) propose synthesizing the needs of LGBT students with a useful theoretical framework to establish practical strategies to support them both academically and developmentally. Renn (2010) also notes the newer research into LGBT identity and issues coexist with activism and advocacy for the LGBT community. Despite the usefulness of queer theory in understanding and supporting LGBT individuals, colleges and universities have not changed that drastically based on this approach yet (Renn, 2010).

Gender Identity

Gender is a complicated aspect of human identity, especially because in popular understanding it is equivalent to and interchangeable with a person’s sex or sexuality (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), although all three are interconnected and reflect both the individual and her or his culture (Abes & Kasch, 2007). For example, contemporary Western conceptualizations of sexuality categorize it around genders rather than genitals (Bornstein, 1994). A scholarly examination of gender reveals that it is a cultural construction with accompanying ideologies and social systems. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) and Lorber (1994) both examine gender as a social construction. They define gender as a categorization, based in sexual difference between biological males and female, that people do, perform, or achieve. Sex is a biological category based in part on reproductive capabilities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), although even the biological division is determined in social terms as there are multiple biological factors for determining sex, including hormones, chromosomes, genitalia, and secondary sexual
characteristics. Each society determines the significance of these biological factors (Lorber, 1994), although in Western culture, usually external genitalia are given prominence (Gagné et al., 1997). The presence of intersex individuals, which will be discussed in further detail later, challenges this dimorphic biological categorization.

Although gender is related to sex, the gender categories are exaggerations and elaborations of biological differences between the sexes (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Fausto-Sterling (2000) refers to gender as “cultural genitals” demonstrating that the process of determining gender occurs without inspecting physical genitals. Physiological variations exist between biological males and females, although in reality social and cultural factors influence the performance of various gender behaviors and expectations. For example, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) note that while approximately half of men and half of women are between 64” and 70” tall—a relatively tiny window in the spectrum of human height—society generally expects and even interprets men to be taller. The same is true for gender behaviors: most behaviors are physiologically available to people of either gender, yet societal expectations of gender limit which actions a person are “allowed” to perform (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Lorber (1994) notes that disturbances of gender norms are usually the moments when people become actively aware of gender.

Since gender is not an innate attribute, people have to learn “appropriate” gendered behaviors. At the same time, they are learning to embrace the gender dichotomy and social structure it creates. Developing a gender identity—an individual’s internal sense of self (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005)—is a life-long process that begins even before birth (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Adults do gender work for young children
through intentional and unintentional actions before the child can do gender work for him or herself (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), in a process that Bornstein (1994) calls “gender assignment.” Fausto-Sterling (2000) claims gender is flexible for approximately 18 months, although Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) state that children develop gender identity at age 3. After a child establishes a gender identity, he or she can join authority figures in enforcing gender expectations on peers and her or himself (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Lorber, 1994). Additionally, an individual will recursively compare him or herself to other members of their own gender to judge their own success at achieving that particular gender (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). A queer theory view of gender identity posits that it is fluid throughout life, constantly influenced by experiences of the individual (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). These gender sanctions from authority, peers, and self also reinforce the gender dichotomy and order, supporting a system of androcentrism that undervalues feminine behaviors and traits (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Androcentrism measures the world using masculinity as the standard, creating a gender order that finds femininity secondary or inferior (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

One way people learn various gendered behaviors are through the division of labor—physical, mental, emotional—which is a universal phenomenon that varies cross-culturally on the specifics of organization (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). According to the Bem Sex Role Inventory, which investigated the ways various societies divided up 200 tasks between gender categories, found no task was consistently allocated to a specific gender category, proving the artificiality of division of labor (Boswell, 1997). Division of labor shapes an individual’s gender identity by designating a set of
specific roles for members of each gender. Lorber (1994) demonstrates how these roles appear in society, through work, parents, and organizational life, to which Bornstein (1994) would add hobbies, positions, and actions available depending on gender. Further, the division of labor also creates a division of value, as some tasks gain more prestige, and a division of space (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). This separation of sexes can occur institutionally, such as segregated restrooms, and informally, like Sweet Sixteen parties (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), and reinforce expected gendered differences (Lorber, 1994). Paradoxically, intentionally integrating genders in mixed groups also reinforces the idea that the genders are essentially different (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

These divisions of labor also vary within a society based on social factors, such as age, race, or class (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Differences in these factors also cause the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities, so that masculine or feminine identities vary with social factors (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Social factors—religion, law, science, and value systems, spirituality, and sexuality, among others—legitimate the gender dichotomy by setting gender expectations (Lorber, 1994; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Thus gender is also a system of classification (Bornstein, 1994) that is used to distribute rights and obligations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003) and to establish authority (Lorber, 1994). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) explain how a dominant ideology of gender differences becomes a social “fact” through the process of naturalization, demonstrating that for people the social is natural (Lorber, 1994). These social factors, like the gender categories themselves, are institutionalized into power inequalities based on dominant ideologies (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). A queer approach to
gender, such as the one adopted by Renn (2010), demonstrates how limited views of gender lead to limited personal and societal understandings and choices and could work to undo some of the gender inequality that exists.

**Transgender Expressions**

As previously mentioned, gender is related to, although not interchangeable with, biological sex. In Western society, the normative expression of gender is the one that "matches" the biological sex, and "cisgender" is used to refer to a person who expresses this relationship. The term "transgender" is an umbrella term used to describe any kind of non-normative expression of gender identity relative to biological sex (Gagné et al., 1997), or a term used when an individual transgresses gender norms (Boswell, 1997). Bilodeau and Renn (2005) note that "transgender" is often an inclusive category for a wide variety of gender identities. These identities may be enacted or internalized, meaning that a person can identify as transgender while appearing or behaving as a cisgender individual (Gagné et al., 1997). This also means that a person could have undergone sex reassignment surgery, be in the process of transitioning, intend to transition, or have no desire to change his or her sex and identify as transgender (Gagné et al., 1997). These components form the conceptual definition of "transgender" this study will be using.

Transgender expressions include identifying as the "opposite" gender, androgynous, gender queer, freely gendered, or ambigendered, among others. Gagné et al. (1997) includes transsexuals, fetishistic and nonfetishistic cross-dressers, and drag queens as transgenderists, which Boswell (1997) also lists as three of most recognizable components of the transgender community. Transgenderism is not a new or Western
phenomenon, as transgender individuals have been found in societies throughout history and around the world. Some of these societies even place special status on transgender individuals, such as the *berdache* of Native American tribes or the *hijra* of India (Boswell, 1997). All of these various types of expression show the breadth of the “transgender” category (Graff, 2001).

As mentioned briefly at the end of the discussion of biological sex as a categorical system, biological sex is not as cleanly dimorphic as traditional conceptualization would suggest. Intersex individuals, who were briefly discussed earlier, possess characteristics from of sexes, including genitals, chromosomes, and hormones. Graff (2001) reports that 1 in 20,000 infants are born with ambiguous genitalia. When other physiological factors are taken into account, Fausto-Sterling (2000) reports that 17 in 1,000 births have some intersexual condition, a number consistent with Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s (2003) statistic of 1 in 100 infants falling outside the male or female standard. People with intersexual conditions, while not usually conceptualized or identified as transgender, have physiological variations that cause them vary from the idealized male or female forms. While intersex individuals face different issues than transgenderists, their presence challenges the idea of humans as a “perfectly dimorphic species” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), and by extension, the system of gender identity based on it.

**Transgender Issues**

Although often included in the same community as minority sexualities, transgender individuals face very different challenges than gay, lesbian, or bisexual people. Renn (2010) highlights four areas where the LGBT community still remains behind normative communities in higher education settings: access, equity, learning, and
leadership. Schuler, Hoffman, and Peterson (2009) also list four obstacles for LGBTQ students: invisibility, multiple social identities, homophobia, and heteronormativity. In the case of the last two, "transphobia" and "cisnormativity" are more appropriate terms when discussing transgender expression. Transgender invisibility leads to lack of resources (Schuler et al., 2009), and Renn (2010) suggests that increasing visibility will further develop policies and support. Transgender individuals face daily systematic disadvantages because of their gender identity (Renn, 2010). As Schuler et al. (2009) explains, even language used on forms can be exclusive for transgender individuals, such as providing only "male" and "female" as options for identifying gender. This cisnormativity can be seen in higher education settings in phrases like "all-girl floor" which erases potential transgender presence. Transgender individuals not only face misguided homophobia, but also transphobia, as both Renn (2010) and Schuler et al. (2009) demonstrate. This can include discrimination, fear, or ridicule. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and especially transgender individuals face increased threats of violence (Graff, 2001). Transphobia can manifest itself internally or externally (Schuler et al., 2009; Bornstein, 1994; Gagné et al., 1997), and absorbing either can negatively impact a transgender individual's view of self (Schuler et al., 2009; Lorber, 1994).

Part of this transphobia comes from the view that transgenderism is an unnatural expression of gender. Lorber (1997) explains that gender is so ubiquitous to society that people tend not to notice it until norms are disturbed, which usually get negatively labeled and conceptualized. If a transgender person wishes to medically transition his or her appearance, he or she must first be diagnosed with a mental illness (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Gagné et al., 1997). While being diagnosed with gender dysphoria is an
important step to receiving hormones or surgery to make their physical appearance match their view of self, the status as a “mental illness” also reinforces the notion that transgender individuals are wrong or unnatural (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Being diagnosed is only the start of a long process of transitioning, if the transgender individual chooses to transition.

As the previous examples have shown, transgender individuals are usually included in the non-normative sexuality community. Although some of the issues they face are similar, there are differences that can be ignored by grouping too many minority groups together at once (Bornstein, 1994). Whereas gay, lesbian, and even bisexual identities have gained acceptance and validation over the last few decades, transgenderism is not as socially accepted, equivalent to the status of the LGB community in the 1970s (Gagné et al., 1997). Further, the transgender community has not developed as strongly as its lesbian, gay, and bisexual counterparts (Gagné et al., 1997).

Even scholarly understandings of non-normative genders and sexualities often exclude transgender identity, as transgender, along with bisexual, individuals lie outside the scope of theoretical traditions (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Renn (2010), Gagné et al. (1997), and Bilodeau and Renn (2005) all acknowledge a gap in the literature on transgender issues, identity, and development. Renn (2010) notes the absence of a theoretical foundation for transgender studies, as well as the lack of healthy transgender development models (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), although at least one such model exists: Bilodeau (n.d.) adapted D’Augelli’s Life Span Model to apply to transgender individuals.
Higher Education Issues and Strategies

Despite being the source of much research and theory on LGBT communities and development, especially approaches using queer theory, colleges and universities have not changed much to adapt to these findings (Renn, 2010). One area where institutes of higher education have been effective, however, is at conducting campus climate studies to gauge the acceptance of and obstacles facing LGBT students (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). These surveys are critical to finding out the actual needs to LGBT students so that the institution can take steps to correcting problems. Schuler et al. (2009) outline a general strategy for colleges and universities to help LGBT individuals that combines the needs of LGBT students, theoretical frameworks, and practical strategies together to create effective solutions.

Additionally, educators can take steps to support LGBT students individually in conjunction with institutional initiatives. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) notes that during college students are likely to be experimenting or attempting to understand their sexuality, to which Schuler et al. (2009) adds that it is also potentially the first time a student can express a new gender identity. At the same time, institutes of higher education are still often heteronormative, or cisnormative in cases of transgender issues. Thus it is educators who can really help students develop understanding and acceptance of their own sexual or gender identity. Abes and Kasch (2007) recommend educators help students recognize obstacles to expressing their identity as well as having the educators themselves challenge their own assumptions about LGBT students to ensure they are
providing the best support. Renn (2010) calls for holistic care of LGBT students, which can come in part from educators being unbiased and knowledgeable of LGBT issues. Another way educators can be better allies of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students is by examining and checking the cultural power they may have over students (Abes & Kasch, 2007). This can also include better understanding dominant social structures, such as the gender dichotomy, or the relationship between social power and dominance.

Besides educators, other people involved in higher education institutions— and elsewhere— can provide support to LGBT individuals by transitioning from onlookers to allies (Abes & Kasch, 2007), especially if these people are involved in researching LGBT issues. Research should lead to activism, according to Bilodeau and Renn (2005), since these individuals will already be versed in the issues. Colleges and universities can advocate for this kind of activism by training student leaders and staff in LGBT issues and advocacy efforts (Schuler et al., 2007).

Institutes of higher education can also help to increase the status and visibility of LGBT students (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). This can occur by establishing role model programs, as well as LGBT and allies clubs and organizations, as well as creating support and advocacy centers. College and university presidents should develop strategic action plans that include multicultural events, speakers, and student staff to develop the prominence of the LGBT community (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Additionally, schools can establish scholarships for members of the LGBT community as well as Rainbow and Lavender graduation ceremonies for LGB and transgender students respectively (Schuler et al., 2007).
All the suggestions so far have been geared toward the LGBT community as a whole, with very little emphasis on transgender issues. While these strategies will also support transgender students, there are additional actions that higher education institutes can take to specifically help transgender students. While it may be logistically complicated to do, colleges and universities could make an effort to end the spatial separation of genders which reinforces gendered differences (Lorber, 1994). Gagné et al. agrees that the organizational separation of the sexes leads to a rigid view of the gender dichotomy that is harmful to transgender individuals. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) also advocate for gender neutrality in higher education institutes, with Schuler et al. (2009) emphasizing living spaces, including bathrooms and rooms, as a primary target for gender-neutrality. Additionally, Fausto-Sterling (2000) and Schuler et al. (2009) also note that having students select their gender on a form could potentially be troubling for transgender students. If knowing gender is absolutely necessary, as in gendered residence halls for example, providing students with a transgender or write-in option could be helpful in allowing transgender students to accurately and comfortably express their gender identity while working to loosen the gender dichotomy.

Findings

In the interviews, participants were asked about specific aspects of their residence hall experience through the perspective of their gender identity. While the questions were focused on particular topics, the questions were left open-ended to allow participants to answer freely. Additionally, the participants were given the opportunity to share any other thoughts or comments that were not covered in the interview questions. Despite the diversity of topics covered in the questions, eight common themes arose: issues with
roommates, transphobia and unawareness of transgender expression, experiences with floor bathrooms, interactions with hall staff members, community of support, campus resources available outside of Housing, language used for transgender students, and suggested accommodations for transgender students.

Issues with Roommates

For most students—transgender or otherwise—entering the residence halls for the first time, one area of potential apprehension is living with a person they have never met before. As Oliver, one of the interview participants, said:

The difficult thing most of the time, at least as a freshmen, you have to go potluck and that's usually your roughest year no matter what because you're new to college. And the experience with a roommate can make it go one way or the other most of the time.

The students interviewed revealed even higher levels of anxiety and even fear over the roommate selection process due to their gender identity. The three participants all shared a double with a roommate for at least part of one semester during the time in the residence halls, and two of them faced the possibility of getting a new roommate at some point. All participants expressed some anxiety over this possibility, as they were unsure if their new roommate would be accepting of their gender identity. Blake lived on a floor that was, at least in intention, exclusively for women, but the other floors in the building were all co-ed. After Blake's roommate changed rooms for issues related to sleep schedules, Blake had the opportunity to move to a co-ed floor. He explained:

I ended up deciding not to do that because the person that was my roommate was completely ok with me being trans* so I didn't want to take the risk of getting a new roommate and her not being ok with it.

Oliver expressed similar worries and concerns. He had a similar experience his freshman year, as his roommate moved out for a reason unrelated to his gender identity, although
he got another roommate at the start of the second semester through room consolidation. Halls consolidate roommates when they are both living alone in doubles because their original roommate left. When Oliver realized he would be returning to the residence halls his sophomore year, he originally went “potluck” to get a roommate. Thinking about the possibility of getting a roommate who would not be accepting of his transgender identity, Oliver then requested and eventually received a single. Oliver expressed the fear he felt at the time:

There are some people who are dead set: “I don’t want to have anything to do with them [members of the LGBT community], I can’t live with this type of person.” Some guys are “I can’t live with a gay guy.” [...] But it’s really hard on someone like me to be shoved into a tiny box room with someone who hates you and wants to make life miserable.

Oliver continued by elaborating on the difficulty of living with a potentially homophobic or transphobic roommate:

If it’s “I hate gay people. I hate trans* people,” you’re not going to be able to persuade them to resolve their issues. If they don’t like people like that, they’re not going to be comfortable. And trust me, I would not be comfortable living with someone who acted like that.

Darren’s situation with roommates varies from Blake’s and Oliver’s. as Darren had not begun transitioning or identifying as male while living in the residence halls. He also knew his roommate from high school, whereas the other two did not know their roommates before Housing paired them together. Still, Darren did have some experience with the fear of potentially judgmental roommates. Darren told a story of a lesbian friend of his using the roommate finder service that lets residents contact potential roommates before deciding to live together. He said, “[She] found out some people weren’t really into rooming with a lesbian […] She figured that out pretty quick.” Although this situation is specifically about potential roommates expressing homophobic attitudes,
transgender individuals could expect similar attitudes toward their gender identity. This anecdote is included in Darren’s potential recommendation for transgender students to live on campus if they can live on a co-ed floor. He explained:

The only person you’re gonna really interact with is your roommate. I would probably suggest they talk to their roommate before they move in. And that’s another thing: the whole roommate finder thing is good because then you can talk to someone.

Oliver also discussed the potential of future transgender students living in the residence halls and the issue of finding roommates. He considered the effects of the including an option of identifying as a member of the LGBT community and/or the willingness to live with someone who identified as such. He justified the possibility, especially for transgender freshman, by saying:

If there was some way of finding roommates who were accepting easier—I don’t really know if that would be a questionnaire they fill out when you apply for housing—because going potluck is really scary.

Oliver also realizes that this alone would not make for good roommate pairs:

It’s kind of hard to pair people no matter what, though. Even if you put two lesbians living together does not mean they’re gonna be best friends. Just that doesn’t make it any easier.

This method of identification also has two logistical issues that would need to be addressed: honesty of applicants and confidentiality of answers. Oliver considered both these potential problems:

I don’t know if that’s even plausible to ask because they would have to answer 100% honestly, otherwise they could end up with a roommate they didn’t want. Even if they had something on there, it would be optional: people don’t have to answer it. I think that could be helpful. I don’t know who sees the form; that could have a lot to with who sees the form. If it’s just actual staff of the university, like not students, then it would probably be safer, but you have the whole issue of if you’re out about it and how many people you’d want to know.
In addition to the discussion of finding roommates, Blake and Oliver also discussed their thoughts on the process of revealing their gender identity to a roommate. Blake disclosed his identification as a man to his roommate while they shared a room. He recounted his thoughts: “Looking back on it, I was so scared of telling my roommate, but now she doesn’t even care and it doesn’t bother her at all.” When asked if his gender identity influenced his decision to live off-campus after living in the residence halls, Blake responded:

Considering I won’t be able to change my gender marker to “male” until I have surgery done, I would be stuck living in female accommodations—like having a female roommate, use a female bathroom, and by the time school would be starting next year I’m going to physically look male and I don’t feel like I should have to “out” myself just to live in the residence halls because it’s no one else’s business if I’m transgender.

Oliver mentioned a similar attitude in answering the same question. He said:

Wanting a single, a lot of that had to do with the awkwardness of explaining it to a roommate. Like the first year [I thought,] “I don’t care where I end up, I just want to live by myself because I don’t know who my roommate’s gonna be and that’s kind of freaks me out a little bit because having to explain everything.

Obviously the main cause of concern in situations involving roommates or potential roommates is the fear of transphobia, which the participants all discussed in further detail in other answers in their interviews.

Transphobia and Transgender Unawareness

Despite Blake and Oliver discussing the risk of being paired with a transphobic roommate, the participants shared only a few personal experiences with transphobia from other people living in the residence halls. Oliver suffered the clearest incidence of harassment about his gender identity, which he explained:
There were a couple of times where people would write things on the board on my door. I don’t know who it was by any means. I had gay slurs of “fag” and that kind of stuff, which I reported to my RA [residence assistant]... First, I was like, “You know what? That could just be a coincidence.” People are stupid, they’re dumb, they drink, they are just writing stupid stuff. Well it continued to happen, so I was like, “Ok I’m gonna tell my RA.” And so she took the right precautions.

Despite the initial issue, Oliver felt his RA handled the situation appropriately after he realized the slurs were targeted at him, although the person or people writing the slurs were never discovered. Still, Oliver did not report any further instances after the meeting that RA held about harassment.

In addition to this direct episode of transphobic behavior, Oliver also reported a general discomfort toward him from other people in his hallway. He summarized his experience living in the residence halls, saying, “Most of the challenges I faced were having to come out to people, my neighbor, or everybody on the floor, and having to deal with the few harassmental times.” Oliver notes that most of these uncomfortable instances came from interactions in and around bathrooms. For his first two years, Oliver lived on floors that were intended to be “all-girls floors” that had community bathrooms. Oliver described some of these experiences:

But the first two years where I had to use community bathrooms it was a lot more difficult and awkward like locker rooms are. They’re kind of like, “Oh my God, you’re gonna stare at me.” That kind of reaction [...] My sophomore year was more of an issue. People would quickly get out of the bathroom if I had gone into the bathroom.

These “questionable looks” and avoidances made an impact on Oliver, as he explains how this made him feel:

Well my freshman year at first for the couple months everyone was kind of skittish around me. They opened up and they realized that I wasn’t gonna bother them, I wasn’t gonna mess with them in any way
or form. My sophomore year I didn’t really interact with them because they didn’t want to have anything to do with me which wasn’t just rude, it kinda hurts a little bit.

Blake and Darren experienced similar discomfort or strange looks from people living in their hallways, with some specifically involving bathrooms. Blake shared a semi-private bathroom with some women living on his floor. He explained one instance of potentially transphobic behavior he experienced in the bathrooms:

When I started dressing more masculine but wasn’t out as transgender, there was someone that would open the bathroom like when I was in there. She’d open it, see that I was in there, close the door, and leave. So I don’t really know what was up with that but I think maybe she was afraid to be in the bathroom when I was in there.

Darren was also not out as transgender while he lived in the residence halls, but he admits, “At a glance, I still looked kinda like a guy.” He did wear boxers, which made his pile of clothes identifiable when he used the showers in the female community bathrooms. This instance will be examined more closely in the next section. Darren did get some reactions from his floor mates in the bathroom, though. He said, “I feel like probably some of the girls were slightly uncomfortable with me.” Sometimes when his bathroom was being cleaned, he’d have to use a female bathroom on a different floor, putting in a situation to be examined by other people. He explained their reactions, “For awhile they were like, ‘Who is this… chick?’ They had a little eyebrow raised, but nobody ever said anything.” When asked if he would recommend the residence halls to an incoming transgender or transitioning student, one potential obstacle he felt they might face was from other people questioning gender. He said, “People might be like, ‘Hmm, I wonder if he’s a boy or girl.’ But for one, Ball State’s really accepting for the most part.”
In addition to accounts of transphobic behaviors from individuals, Darren and Oliver discussed some challenges in general of identifying as transgender, mainly that most of other people in the residence halls do not understand transgenderism. Oliver explains this difficulty:

But once I started identifying as trans* it was a little bit more awkward: How do I go about explaining this? A little bit more difficult because a lot people can’t grasp what you’re talking about, a little bit further out.

Oliver said he was “shy” about his gender identity at first, thinking “I don’t know how people will handle it.” He eventually gained confidence and began being very open about his gender identity. Oliver notes that each person’s comfortableness with his or her transgender identity relies on several factors, including “family, friends, and the community that’s available.”

Oliver told a story about how the unfamiliarity with transgender expression made him feel uncomfortable. He had a dining hall in his building for three years, so he said he went to it pretty regularly, which led several of the staff members to getting to know him. If they saw the name on his identification card did not match the name he went by, however, explaining the situation could be awkward. He says:

And most of them are really nice and they adjusted and started calling me that [his preferred name] and it was fine. Not everyone’s that friendly and it’s also uncomfortable for us to explain it. You’re around a bunch of other people, and I don’t really want to talk about my life in front of all these hundreds of other students getting food. Also depending on where you’re at in your transition, too, it can get a lot more nerve-wracking.

Darren also encountered this unawareness of transgender issues and identity to be a problem, but in a more personal way than Oliver experienced them. For Darren, his
own lack of knowledge of transgender possibilities limited his options for expression
until he came to Ball State. He recounts:

I knew like ever since I was literally a couple years old, two or three, I
was like, “Mom, I wish I was a boy” and I really meant it, but I didn’t
know I could be. So I didn’t really say much because I didn’t think it
was a possibility so it didn’t really affect me much.

At first I’ve obviously felt different than other biological females, like I
never fit in, but I didn’t know the word “transgender,” I didn’t know
what the possibilities were, and my ex just drug me, literally drug me,
to the Trans* Social. And I’m thinking, “Why is she taking me here? I
don’t want to go, this has nothing to do with me.” And obviously she
knew better.

For Darren, the popular ignorance of transgender expression left him without the ability
to express his gender identity until he was forced into being aware of it.

As previously discussed, transgender students expressed uncertainty about the
roommate assignment process and the possibility of getting a transphobic roommate. One
way that the participants found of avoiding this problem was living alone, either in a
double like Blake or in a single like Oliver. While Oliver found this to be a useful option
for transgender students, he also acknowledged the difficulties of making it a reality:

I know everyone deserves the chance to get a single but I feel like for
safety and health purposes some sort of way to accommodate for
gender variant students if that’s their best option. I’m not saying they
should have room and board free by any means, but if it was more
available somehow. I’m not really sure specifically what they could do,
but I think it could help with some of the problems they run into with
roommates. I don’t know if they want proof of that, which is difficult:
you’d have to see the counselor first and get proof from a counselor
that this is how they identify, that this is “legit.” And that’s what we
have to go through to see doctors for anything. But it doesn’t really
help a freshman, unless they’ve already seen a counselor of course.

Because of the status of transgender expression as a disorder, the option of opening up
accommodations specifically for transgender students, if possible at all, hinges on those
students receiving a diagnosis, which in itself is a long process. For example, Darren called a health firm in March of 2012 and was scheduled to have his gender legally changed in May of 2013.

Whether in terms of direct harassment or avoidance, transgender students reported issues with hall members expressing transphobia. They additionally had to deal with the complicated act of coming out as transgender, which often was accompanied by an explanation of transgender expression due to popular unawareness of transgender identity. The floor bathrooms were often the scene of such uncomfortable interactions with other people in their halls. The bathrooms were another topic that the participants talked about at length.

Experiences with Floor Bathrooms

As discussed in the previous section, residence hall bathrooms were often a source of discomfort for both transgender and cisgender students, even in the semi-private bathroom that Blake used. When asked about his experience with the residence halls in general, Blake said:

So we have semi-private bathrooms so I haven’t had as much issues with bathrooms as other transgender students do because half the time there’s no one in the bathroom when I’m there [...] I’m sure my opinion would be a lot different if we didn’t have semi-private bathrooms.

Blake assumed that his appearance also played a role in having better bathroom experiences that some other transgender students. At the time of the interview, Blake had recently started using hormones, so he still appeared predominantly feminine. He explains how appearance can affect experience with other people in the bathrooms:

Especially like transgender men that have been on hormones a significant amount of time, they’re going to look like men and it’s not a
good idea to have them using female restrooms. Like I just started testosterone a week and a few days ago, so obviously there’s no visible changes, so I don’t have any problems in the bathrooms for the most part.

When asked if he would recommend the residence halls to a transgender student starting freshman year, Blake replied:

Considering how they’re most likely going to be stuck in LaFollette or Johnson or any other one of the dorms that have communal bathrooms, no. Unless, of course, their gender was legally the gender that they are.

Like Blake, Darren did not have an overall problem with his bathroom situation while living in the residence halls, because he had not started transitioning while living there. Darren explains his experience with the community bathroom on his floor:

It wasn’t a big deal then, but now it would be a big deal because bathroom-wise—unless like with [Oliver], he lived in Baker, one of the ones where he had a suite mate so he had semi-private bathrooms so it didn’t matter for him. But if I had started [transitioning] like halfway through the semester through last year, it probably would have been a problem because I lived on a girls floor, so the bathroom would have been interesting.

Darren’s building did have a gender-neutral bathroom, but it was inconveniently located and did not have a shower. He explains, “There’s a gender-neutral bathroom downstairs outside of the [security] doors. If there was one anywhere inside the door it would be better […] even for people in general” (emphasis in original). Even though he had not begun transitioning yet, Darren still found the bathrooms to be one of the more uncomfortable aspects of living in the residence halls. He said:

I would just say the bathroom was kind of awkward, but it’s always been awkward for me in public […] But it’s always been awkward because at a glance I still looked kinda like a guy, like I would get weird looks from high school till whenever. Before, in high school, it was just going to the bathroom, getting out. But now it’s showering and stuff, too. I think the most awkward was showering because I wear like
Oliver expressed similar sentiments about the functions of bathrooms in residence halls. Of the participants interviewed, Oliver is unique in using both community and semi-private bathrooms in the various halls in which he lived. His first two years he used a community bathroom, which led to some discomfort for and from his floormates, as discussed in the previous section. His last three years he lived in a single with an attached semi-private bathroom. He had this to say about that arrangement:

I only shared a bathroom with one other person which was my neighbor and I never had any issues. My RA helped me talk to them and they were like “Oh yeah, sure, whatever. That’s fine.” I could think it could be due to the fact that you’re not in the bathroom at the same time, and it’s like you’re at home, you share your bathroom with your family. You go in, you do your business, and you leave, and you don’t share it other than that. Which it’s a wonderful option for people who identify as transgender or gender variant.

Oliver had this same kind of “in and out” mentality when he was using community bathrooms. He explained:

But the first two years where I had to use community bathrooms it was a lot more difficult and awkward, like locker rooms are. They’re kind of like, “Oh my God, you’re gonna stare at me.” That kind of reaction, but I don’t. I go in, I use the bathroom, I shower. I’m not there to bother anybody.

Darren also expressed discomfort at using locker rooms, although his story involved his physical wellness class, an academic issue rather than a residential one. While Oliver may have felt that singles with semi-private bathrooms being a “wonderful option” for transgender students, he also realized that there is variation in the style of semi-private bathrooms. When asked about accommodations for transgender students that he would like to see, Oliver answered:
As they've been building the new residence halls, they're implementing the co-ed floors, which is helpful. But they're also doing that you have to walk out of your bedroom to get to your bathroom with what? Six to eight people share a bathroom? So it's less than an entire floor, but you share it with more than I did. That is helpful, but at the same time you can still run into questionable looks from your neighbors.

I've never been in Kinghorn, but being in Park and Noyer— Kripple and Baker— how those bathrooms are set up is a little more private because you have a bathroom that you share with your roommate and your two neighbors that’s right between your room. And I know in Park you have to go outside your room and it’s in the middle and you share it with several other people. But you can go in, shut the door, take a shower, so you don’t have that awkward— you don’t just a curtain when you’re taking a shower and anyone has access to that bathroom. Because I think the even the bathrooms lock in Park. I’m not really sure because I never lived there. I don’t think that’s a bad option.

Darren’s answer also expressed a potential challenge to gender-neutral bathrooms: even though fewer people use them, there is still a potential that a person who also uses that bathroom could be transphobic. When discussing transitioning, Darren recounted that even after he began identifying as male and taking hormones that made him appear more masculine, he still felt some discomfort using male restrooms. He said:

And the first couple of months I didn’t use the guys bathroom anyway because I still knew I looked a little feminine and I was like, “Eh, kind of awkward.” And honestly, too, I think I would have felt more awkward more than other people.

Even if a transgender student did have a semi-private bathroom, if they were in the process of transitioning, they may not feel comfortable using the bathroom as they begin to appear less like the people with whom they share it, leading to some of the “questionable looks” Oliver mentioned.

While the participants expressed negative feelings about roommate selection, instances of transphobia from other residents in their halls, and experiences with the
bathroom facilities, the interviewees had generally positive remarks about their interactions with members of the hall staff.

**Interactions with Hall Staff Members**

All three participants reported mostly positive interactions with members of the residence hall staff, including resident assistants (RAs), hall directors, and even desk staff workers. Blake, who was in his first year of living in the residents halls, never conversed with his hall director in person, but Blake acknowledges that his hall director offered to move him from the all-girls floor to a co-ed floor if he wanted. Blake described the process of potentially changing floors:

> My RA was the main person I talked to. I never actually had a conversation with the hall director. It was mostly through my RA and she's been very approachable.

Blake also had an unexpectedly positive interaction with a desk worker. He said:

> I've had the person in charge of sorting mail, he came and—I guess he saw I changed my name on Facebook or something—and asked me if I preferred going by [Blake] now. He actually came up and asked me what I prefer to go by and that's really awesome that someone would do that.

The mail worker did not have to call Blake by his preferred name for his job, but in doing so he obviously left a positive impression on one student about the Housing staff. Darren and Oliver's responses show this is not a lone incident.

Darren mentioned a couple of people who made an impact for the better on his time in the residence halls. The first was his RA. He had this to say about her:

> Like my old RA was pretty awesome. She always had this open door policy, and even now that I've left I have her number. Like I've been through tough times with exes and just going through different things, and she's always been there to listen.
Darren credits his RA with keeping negative comments about his gender identity from reaching him. When asked if anyone on his floor said anything about being uncomfortable around him, Darren replied:

Not that I know of, but [my RA] had a way of keeping people in check, so I don’t think I would have heard about it anyway. So I’m almost certain that if someone had said something I wouldn’t have known.

Darren described himself as social and friendly on the floor, and that included his RA and the hall director of the building. He explained:

I was always giving [my RA] a very hard time. I mean… being a great floor mate, so I got really close with her pretty quickly, me and my roommate. So if anything was going on I’d go talk to her or whatever, and [my hall director] always left her door open, so I’d pop in “Hey” and go talk to her. So I got pretty close to both of them, so if there’s anything on my mind I’d just be like “Hey got a minute?”

Darren, like Blake, had a desk staff worker demonstrate extra courtesy and concern by helping him understand transgender expression more. This desk worker was Oliver.

Darren had this to say about getting to know Oliver:

But I met him at a “Trans* Social,” as they called it, by Spectrum. And so I saw him at the desk one day and was like, “I’ve seen you” but I didn’t realize I’d seen him before, so we were talking about some things because I just called Howard Brown, this health center in Chicago to start hormones and stuff.

Like Blake and Darren, Oliver had very pleasant things to say about most of the hall staff with whom he interacted in his five years living in the residence halls. As previously mentioned, he once felt targeted by homophobic and transphobic slurs written on his board. He accounted the actions after he reported it:

The RA was really great about it. I took a picture of it and I showed her and she went to the hall directors […] And so she took the right precautions and an email was sent out. I think we even had a meeting about it.
Oliver’s RA was not an exception to the rule of helpful RAs, though. He explains how being on good terms with RAs is beneficial for social acceptance:

It also helped that most of the RAs were friendly with me and I would always talk to them. So I think that helped some people see “hey this person’s a good person; they’re having fun” kind of thing.

Once he felt confident in identifying as transgender, Oliver began disclosing his gender identity to hall staff members. He explains this process:

I talked to my RA and sometimes even talking to hall directors. It’d be a one-on-one small, little meeting, “Hey legally I am this, but I identify as [Oliver]” and begin to address if it’s a problem and if there’s anything I should do. And usually they took it just fine, “We’ll do what we can for you.” Basically they respect you, which is totally fine, “If you have any problems with anybody, you can come to me” kind of thing. Aside from that sophomore year, everybody was extremely helpful and open about it and it wasn’t extremely awkward. Well, not as awkward as it could be. Getting that one-on-one time, talking to them. I think sometimes if they send out a letter introducing themselves as your RA and provided an email address, so I emailed one of them about it, one year, before I met them.

Despite mostly good interactions, Oliver did have negative stories about hall staff that he shared. As mentioned in the previous quote, Oliver’s sophomore year RA was not very helpful. He explains:

And an RA that I had was, I guess she wasn’t as friendly or open as my RA the year before, so I kind of just secluded myself away from everyone on that floor and just go as I need, but didn’t really try to know anybody.

For Oliver the friendliness of the RA translated to comfortableness as a member of the floor community. He did have a few other interactions with RAs that were not that great, about which he said:

I do know some RAs—they weren’t my personal RAs—but I ran into some where they weren’t very friendly, didn’t want to do their jobs and weren’t very open-minded, which I think is a problem if you’re gonna
be an RA because you’re gonna run into a bunch of people, have to deal with people and you have to be friendly obviously […] But if you can’t be open with your residents you can’t do your job. That’s just my personal opinion. Same thing with the hall directors. Most of the hall directors I met were very friendly, very open. Of course you get one every once in a while you get one who is more stern, whether or not nice I can’t tell, but they’re most professional I guess.

As briefly mentioned earlier, Oliver was a desk staff worker, which gave him increased opportunities to interact with his hall staff and even other hall directors. He describes that experience:

I feel like hall directors at least are doing something about it [transgender issues]. I had some of them coming to me, I worked under a couple of them for two years. Just getting to know them kind of helped. Actually I worked for [my hall director], so getting to know her, her getting to know me were beneficial for both of us.

Oliver and the hall directors used these connections to build a transgender support network, with Oliver serving as a mentor for other students like he did for Darren. He said:

Especially in my last year in school, because I had been there five years, I had a lot of hall directors coming to me about some of their residents who identified as transgender and having a hard time and asking if I’d be willing to help them. I was like, “Sure you can give them my email, my phone number. I will do what I can.”

These hall directors, resident assistants, and desk workers were just some of the people who the participants included in their support network.

Community of Support

All of the participants told stories of peers, faculty, and staff members who supported them before and after the transitioning process as well as in general. The previous section demonstrated hall staff involvement, but often these support networks included people beyond the reach of Housing.
Blake, who had been in the residence halls the shortest amount of time of all the participants, found community in Spectrum, Ball State’s LGBT and ally organization. While this was one element of community, Blake noted that it did have some limitations:

I mean there’s Spectrum, but there’s probably, including myself, there’s four trans* people there. I’m sure that there’s more trans* people here judging by things that I kind of get the feeling of [from] the Health Center and the Counseling Center. But I don’t know them, I don’t know who they are. Spectrum’s ok, but there’s a difference between being gay and being transgender [...] I know Jay Zimmerman [at the Counseling Center] does a lot with transgender students which is why I think there’s definitely more than four transgender students on campus.

Darren seemed to disagree with Blake’s sentiments about Spectrum, although he did acknowledge that transgender people are typically underrepresented in LGBT and ally organizations. Darren had this to say about the community of support available at Spectrum:

Yeah I think there’s a good support group there. Like Spectrum’s good, because it’s not just— a lot of Spectrum-like clubs, I guess, at other universities and high schools and stuff, it’s mostly gays and lesbians, so it’s like there’s not really a transgender part of that community, it kind of gets cut out. And there’s always a few bisexuals, but like I said most the time there’s no transgender people or people that are gender queer or anything like that. It’s mostly focused on sexual orientation instead of anybody with gender identity issues, so that was nice. There’s a couple of people there that I met, mainly like [Oliver] just because he was already in Noyer. And then Ball State’s just really open, so you kinda see what’s out in Muncie.

Oliver also found similar trends with transgender representation in Spectrum, but he also used that as an opportunity to build relationships to strengthen that aspect of the community. Coming in to college, Oliver wondered, “Am I going to be the only one like I am here in my small hometown?” Oliver then went on to discuss the transgender support community on campus:
There definitely aren’t as many transgender people as there are gay and lesbian students, but there more than most people are even aware of. But I think a lot of times where that community is found is through Spectrum or through people in the gay community. You just kind of start to know everyone and it’s like, “Oh hey I know someone who identifies that way.” Sometimes you can actually become friends with them, sometimes depending on where they’re at in transitioning they can be kind of scared, not know how to approach it, or not really know where to go with it. But you feel like there is definitely a community there. At Ball State, if everyone connects to that, I can’t say that they do. I’d say from the rest of campus, it could more seem more difficult to find that community, but you have to be open about it, open about transitioning.

Oliver explains how being the only transgender person at Spectrum inspired him to increase the transgender support network:

As far as anyone knew I was the only trans* person at Spectrum. I was the only one so I sort of slowly became the go-to person. I did end up meeting someone else who would advise me and knew a lot more. And we became the two who you would say would be more of the role models for the younger ones as they came in because we were doing more at school for safety and including gender identification in the discrimination clause.

One way Oliver helped expand the support network was through connections with hall directors, as discussed in the previous section.

Oliver and Darren also noted that people who were not transgender or even gay, lesbian, or bisexual had provided support for him. Oliver said:

I’d say they helped me through a whole lot of rough patches [...] They being the community on campus, whoever: Spectrum or people I had met enough when I realized I identified, several other female-to-male students.

Darren described his support network:

I think that the most important thing and one that Ball State offers a lot is like a safe place to talk about things, because the majority of issues you are talking about your transition to your family, talking about who
you are currently and who you used to be with people you meet now that didn’t know you.

I feel like there’s plenty of people here that are just open— they may not be transgender or anything like that, but they’re just really open and you know that you can always go to them, like [my hall director]. And obviously I’ve had talks with [my hall director] before about things. But like Spectrum, too, is a safe place to be and talk about things, so you can figure out from other people similar experiences, how to do things, what worked for them, what didn’t […] It’s not necessarily people that are in the LGBT community even.

Oliver also expressed appreciation for the sense of acceptance he found with most of the people at Ball State.

Oliver and Darren also expressed how this sense of community and support could transfer to and be strengthened by a residence hall with gender-neutral accommodations.

When asked his thoughts about gender-neutral housing, Oliver replied:

I feel like you’re segregating yourself and you’re gonna open up a couple issues there. I don’t think it would be if it were an ally community or if it was a floor were allies could live with people of the LGBT community, would have the option to choose that, say, “Hey I want to be around these people- they’re great!” Or, “I identify as one and feel comfortable.”

Darren’s response to the same question also demonstrates the view that a gender-neutral floor or building could increase the community of support available to transgender students. He said:

A lot of people there either are going through transition or something or they’re just very open so I feel like that would be a little community of itself, a place where you’d be safe to talk about different things.

Obviously finding a community of support is especially important for transgender students, and two of the participants felt like they had a solid community of support including other transgender students, members of the LBG community, Housing employees, and even other people who are simply open and willing to listen. This
community of support is an unofficial resource that Ball State offers to transgender students, but the participants shared some of the resources they used to increase their comfortableness on campus. The advice Oliver would give to an incoming transgender student summarizes this concept:

I would also tell that that there are chances that something could happen, but use your resources: go to a counselor, go to an RA, go to your hall director, seek out community, go to Spectrum, meet other people, don’t exclude yourself. I’d want them to know there are other people are like you or at least support you in your decision.

Campus Resources

In addition to relying on individuals and communities for support, two of the participants also discussed resources they used to help them feel comfortable at Ball State. Darren, the interviewee who did not discuss campus resources, did not attend Ball State while he was transitioning. Blake, although only living on campus for one year, had taken advantage of some of the resources available to him. He explained:

The Health Center’s great, because I was able to diagnosed and I was able to start hormones without it costing anything except for my tuition and obviously the cost of the prescription.

The Counseling Center was great. I was able to see a counselor every two weeks, three weeks, however much I needed to see him. I know Jay Zimmerman does a lot with transgender students.

For Oliver, the resources available on campus were important even when he was looking for colleges. He said:

And once I figured out where I was really applying, I looked into what they had: options in counseling, did they group? Am I going to be the only one like I am here in my small hometown? Just [that] type of situation. But it was probably my second reason.

Once he got on campus, Oliver realized the full value of the Counseling Center. He describes all the services they provide transgender students:
I would say the Counseling Center is a great resource on campus, whether it’s just because you need to try to figure it out, what’s going on, because sometimes it’s difficult for people. Or if it’s “Yes, this is what I’m doing.” I want to move forward and I know I need counseling in order to get there.” And it’s also helpful if that’s what you want to do but you’re having issues with it, whether it’s family or friends or classes or something it’s good to just be able to talk about these problems. And I know Dr. Jay Zimmerman had a lot to do with the SafeZone training and Trans SafeZone training that they just recently started. And he figured big in backing that kind of support for the Counseling Center.

The SafeZone training that Oliver mentions is a program designed for people who want to become allies of and advocates for the LGBT community, with Trans SafeZone focusing solely on becoming transgender allies and advocates. Oliver also shared that some of his RAs took SafeZone training to improve their understanding of transgender issues. Oliver would recommend it as required training for all RAs, saying:

1 don’t know if SafeZone training is a requirement or an option [for RAs], but it helps. Which I don’t think it would be a bad thing to require, just so you know how to handle that situation. I know at one point it was optional. I think it’s a good thing, whether or not you’re comfortable with it or not, it’s good to know because there’s a good chance you could run into that problem. I kind of see it as 1) to educate, and 2) prepare them, I feel. Because it’s good material.

Although most of the topics discussed so far have been mostly positive, the interview participants did have one area that was fairly consistently an area of improvement: language used to refer to transgender students.

*Language Used for Transgender Students*

All three participants go by a different name than they were given at birth that reflects their gender identity. Additionally, all three preferred being addressed with masculine pronouns. In the residence halls, they have run into some issues with names, pronoun usage, or language in general that they feel does not acknowledge their gender
identity or even their presence. Further, it seems that academic resources in place make language more of an issue in the residence halls.

Blake reported that he found terminology for his floor troubling. As mentioned previously, Blake was not on a co-ed floor, which led to him hearing—and even saying things—that erased his presence on the “all-girls floor.” He explains:

The people on our floor were nice, but every once in a while I would hear people say, “Oh there’s no guys on this floor” or “This is an all-girls floor.” And it’s like, I’m not a girl, I don’t like hearing that.

Most people have been pretty accepting, like the people that I actually talk to. Usually the only time I hear someone say, “Oh there’s no guys on this floor” is someone I’ve never met. Which I don’t know about half the people who live on my floor.

Blake also had problems with people not using the correct pronouns for him, even after discussing the issue with them. He said:

And generally people that do know, that I have talked to, are really accepting, like “Oh, ok, I’ll call you [Blake] and use male pronouns.” And they’ve been really good at using male pronouns, which is kind of surprising because it’s hard to change pronoun usage. Even then, I’ll tell people my name is [Blake] and then they’ll start using female pronouns, even though I told them my name is [Blake] and that is a definitively masculine name.

Oliver also went by a name different than his legal name while living in the residence halls, and also faced similar issues, although he did legally change his name before his last year. Oliver recounts his experience:

My freshman year I started identifying as male, I started going by [Oliver], so I implemented more the name change and stuff in the dorm to the best that I could.

When he lived on mixed gender floors, Oliver had terms for both genders addressed at him. He reported:
And that was a time I would get mixed—whether on campus or in public—mix of “sir” and “ma’am.” So I always felt I might get that with my neighbors sometime, but most of the ones I interacted with didn’t know or at least didn’t care.

Oliver informed people of his preferred name by contacting them before he met them if he could. In a section previously quoted, he discussed emailing an RA before moving in introducing himself. She reacted to the news so well that when he moved in, his door decoration matched his preferred name rather than the one on her list. Even if he was proactive in contacting people, Oliver found it better just to introduce himself when there was no expectation of his name. He explains:

If I just walked up to someone and said, “Hey I’m [Oliver],” they’d just think that I was a gay guy or I was some girl with a weird name. That’d be their business. I wouldn’t have to explain my life to them. But when you hear “girl’s name but I go by guy’s name,” it’s kind of confusing. “What?” Everybody’s kind of “I don’t understand.” And people kind of look at you differently for a while. But either way you’re going to run into something uncomfortable or awkward.

Whereas Blake had a mail sorter be extra aware of his preferred name, Oliver expressed some issues with getting mail because of his preferred name. He also sees this as part of a larger issue for transgender students. Oliver described the problem:

The only time I ever ran into any issues sometimes was with desk staff whenever I get my mail, like packages, before I changed my name, because most of the people there know me as [Oliver] but packages and my student ID did not line up with I identified. I think they’re in the process—at least I thought they were—of trying to make it an option for trans* students to get an ID that matches with how they identify, which that would help in the residence halls when you go to the dining halls, you swipe your card, or like I said when you go to get packages in the residence halls.

As with previous suggested accommodations, Oliver also realized this would have some logistical issues, but he offers some suggestions to overcome these issues:

Their theory behind it, “Well then anybody can change their name on their ID and go by something else.” But you have a note from a
counselor saying, “This is how they identify.” I feel like that should trump, “Oh I just want to change my name on my ID.”

Oliver also sees an accommodation from Banner, the academic registration system, helping in the process of changing names on identification cards. With the system implemented after Oliver graduated, students can change their name as it appears on their professors’ rosters, which has its own benefits that will be discussed in depth momentarily. Oliver explains how this can assist in the name-change process for IDs:

All you have to do is print one out, and if it’s on record elsewhere, I don’t see what the big deal is. I think that might help with some interactions within the residence halls because dining is within the residence halls.

Oliver’s discomfort with explaining the discrepancy in names in front of strangers in dining has already been discussed.

Returning to the topic of changing names on rosters: all three participants mentioned this and the positive impact it made on their experience in the classroom.

Blake discussed how being able to change his name on rosters has made it easier for professors to use correct language for him, without even realizing it sometimes. He said:

In the classroom, on Banner you can change your name to whatever you want, so on the rosters and everything for class it just says [Blake]. It doesn’t say my birth name at all. So teachers are really good at pronoun use, using the right pronouns and somehow I’ve had people not know that I’m trans*.

Darren, who experienced classes before and after the implementation of the Banner system, also found the ability to change his name to be very useful for not drawing unwanted attention to his gender identity. He explains his experience in the classroom:

I didn’t know that you could change your preferred name and it would show up on the roster. So the first semester, teachers me by [my legal name] the first day, and so I was like, “Eh, no.” They were like, “Do you prefer something else?” “[Darren].” And one of my teachers was
like, "Where did [legal name] come from?" So told him and he was like, "Oh, ok, that's fine" [...] And so a lot of them just scratched it off, changed the name, and I don't even think they know what my name was, some of them. But this semester I had it changed already so some of my teachers don't know and I think besides like band because they're the same every semester.

Even Oliver, who graduated before the implementation of the Banner system and the ability to change his name on rosters, was able to avoid the awkwardness on the first day of class by contacting the professor before the class started. Oliver said:

What's the most awkward was probably dealing with class because at first I wasn't emailing my professors. Whenever they would call my name out on the first day of classes I'd be like, "I go by [Oliver]," that's kind of awkward and people are like, "What?" But most of the time the professor's like, "Ok." And now I email them ahead to let them know, "This is my name legally, this is what's on your roster, but I go by this and I identify as this." And it became easier. Professors knew about it and I had this really awkward moments in public around others students. Because in the residence halls you can choose who you interact with and if you tell them or not. They don't need to know your business.

Oliver, like Blake and Darren, all felt that discussing their preferred name, and sometimes their gender identity, with their professors or RAs prevented them from having uncomfortable situations where they explain their gender identity to strangers.

The opportunity to change their name before classes started proved to be useful in academic settings. While "Preferred Name" is included in Housing registration and hall rosters, none of the participants mentioned knowing this, which suggests that it is not as effective as its academic equivalent. That being said, Oliver said that he felt more comfortable directly telling a member of hall staff than a professor. He said:

I think that [contacting a professor directly] was probably more awkward than talking to an RA or hall director because you don't know how the professor's gonna handle it because the professor might be, "No you can't" or they might also judge you for identifying that way.
**Accommodations of Transgender Students**

Throughout the previous sections, various accommodations have been discussed to help transgender students have a safer and more comfortable stay in the residence halls. These include: a better way to match transgender residents with ally roommates, increased access to singles and semi-private bathrooms for documented transgender students, gender-neutral bathrooms inside the security doors, showers with doors that lock, a gender-neutral living community that could increase the transgender network, required Trans* Safezone training for RAs, and IDs that match a students’ preferred name, among others. Still, the participants mentioned other accommodations that would benefit transgender students living in the residence halls. As with the ones previously mentioned, each suggestion carries logistical challenges that would need to be handled before implementation, if they are feasible at all.

Blake suggested that transgender students should have the opportunity to choose the gender with whom they would like to live. When asked if he could think of any accommodations, Blake answered:

> In terms of transgender students, you would think that letting them choose what gender they want to room with would really help. Especially like with transgender men that have been on hormones a significant amount of time, they’re going to look like men and it’s not a good idea to have them using female restrooms.

Oliver demonstrates a problem with possibility, though:

> You have the whole legality system of what your legal gender is so I could have a guy friend, my best friend, and we get along just fine and we could live together, but there’s legality that says, “Well, you can’t.” And the same thing for male become female couldn’t live with another girl because of the legalities. It’s kind of hard to find when you’re gender variant, someone who is female and is ok with you living as a male.
For Oliver, his accommodation recommendations revolved around increasing the accessibility of singles for transgender students. He had a lot of positive experiences living in a single room, but commented that they’re “more expensive and more difficult to access because of the way Housing’s system is set up to get your room choices.”

Oliver explained his efforts in this area and the obstacles he ran into:

I had tried to talk to Housing and my RA about scholarships because I wanted a single because I felt safer than wanting to find a roommate by going potluck. Scholarship-wise it was a no-go, there was nothing for anything of the LGBT community [...] Housing wasn’t really helpful except, “We can put you on a waitlist for a single.” I was like, “Oh well I’ll do that.” But there really wasn’t much help with that at all. I know everyone deserves the chance to get a single, but I feel like for safety and health purposes some sort way to accommodate for gender-variant students if that’s their best option. I’m not saying they should have room and board for free by any means, but if it was more available somehow. I’m not really sure specifically what they could do, but I think it could help with some of the problems they run into with roommates.

But I do like the fact that they’re making [new buildings] co-ed so it’s a little less awkward. I just wonder if there’s some sort of resource to have singles more accessible somehow. Like I said, I don’t really know if that is doable because they do cost more or if there’s some way if they can potluck people better than they do now.

Darren expressed similar sentiments about increasing the accessibility of single rooms for transgender students. He said:

I feel like the suites they offer are really good, maybe if they had a place on the application so I can be like, “I am transgender.” They have like a section at the bottom of the form— don’t they?— that’s like, “Anything else?” [...] Maybe make it known that there’s an option, I guess, so people write that down and they can make sure. Because I’m sure if I was transitioning and I was living on the floor I was before, that’d be very awkward.
Whether by increased control of the roommate selection process, or by increasing access to rooms without a roommate, all three participants suggested some way to improve their living experiences.

The interviewees were all asked about their thoughts on gender-neutral housing after it was briefly described to them as “A style of housing where gender is not considered when allowing roommate pairs.” They all supported the idea, in some sort of form, and had additional thoughts about the implementation and feasibility of this style of housing at Ball State. Blake replied:

It’s perfectly acceptable. I understand someone might want to live in a non-gender-neutral housing, but I personally don’t see the point of it. If Ball State did have a gender-neutral dorm, I’m sure they wouldn’t have a problem filling it. They should probably give preference to trans* students to live in the gender-neutral dorm, but I’m sure there are other people who aren’t trans* or aren’t gender variant that would want to live in it as well.

Darren answered the question similarly, stating that he thinks that style of living would be a success. He did have some logistical questions, though. Darren shared his thoughts on gender-neutral housing:

My first one would probably be, “How in the world would that work?” Like physical building-wise, I guess. Like I feel like the majority of people who would want to live in that would make it possible, I mean cooperation would make it pretty easy thing to run. I feel like the building-wise, where would that go? Would they have to build something separately? Because obviously there’s plenty of people on campus who would prefer it, I guess, and would be able to fill it up that it wouldn’t be a problem. Obviously Ball State’s gonna be worried about their students, but also money-wise, if we build something new or make space for something new, would it be worth it? So I feel like it would make a lot of people more comfortable.

Darren also predicted that a gender-neutral community would serve to increase the sense of transgender community on campus, as previously discussed.
Oliver’s thoughts on gender-neutral housing are similar to the other two participants’ answers. Oliver said:

Obviously if you don’t have the option to do it, I wouldn’t want to be shoved into that situation. But if people are like, “Yeah I want to do it,” hopefully it’s for the right reasons of living with other people who don’t care. I think that’s a grand idea. Of course you might run into some things possibly, but you always have that chance of, “Oh this boyfriend and girlfriend want to live together” type of thing, which could be an issue. I don’t know. I know two gay guys: they were dating and they lived in a dorm but that was legal because they’re both men and no one would know their relationship status in a dorm room. I don’t think it’s an awful idea.

Additionally, Oliver also discussed the possibility of having some sort of LGBT and ally floor community. He explained how this conversation came about and potential problems:

I know over the past few years people were always talking how we have the SURF [Students United to Remain Free] floor and the 21 and over floors and floors for various majors, and they’re like, “Why don’t we have a gay floor?” I don’t really think we want to have a gay floor. I was like, “I really don’t think that’d go over.” I feel like you’re kind of segregating yourself and you’re gonna open up a couple of issues there. I don’t think it would be if it were an ally community or if it was a floor were allies could live with people of the LGBT community, would have the option to choose that, say, “Hey I want to be around these people- they’re great!” Or, “I identify as one and feel comfortable.” You wouldn’t just want to shove anybody in there because that might not go over so well.

Oliver then suggested a way that this lesbian and gay community could serve as more of an open community that included more members of the LGBT community as well as allies, as well as an opportunity to educate people about LGBT issues. He discusses this system:

You wouldn’t just want to shove anybody in there because that might not go over so well. But I was like you might be able to approach that in a more open manner than just a gay/lesbian area. I don’t think that would be a bad idea then, especially if you did a living-learning
community, educating people of the community in general, is very viable and very helpful to those around you, if they’re open to learning, of course.

Obviously the residence halls have some improvements to make in terms of transgender accommodations, and the participants have suggested several potential starting points.

**Discussion and Implications for Practice**

While two of the interview participants would recommend living in the residence halls to an incoming transgender or transitioning student, these recommendations came with caveats and limitations. The third interviewee strongly would recommend that such a student should not live in the halls. From these, and other comments, it seems that the residence hall system is not providing the best experience for transgender students, in both accommodations and interactions with other residents. The participants provided some suggestions for improvements, and the literature on transgender students provide further suggestions. With all these suggested accommodations, Ball State has several possibilities for improving the living experiences for transgender students in the residence halls.

In terms of facilities, the residence halls have various accommodations that transgender students found to be more comfortable or safe than traditional rooms. These include semi-private bathrooms shared with one person or single rooms where they do not have to worry about transphobic roommates, and mixed-gender floors that allowed transgender students to blend in more easily. Transgender students, however, were not always able to access these accommodations, especially as freshman. Further, transgender students are not always aware of these accommodations, making accessing them even more difficult.
Even when transgender students take advantage of the accommodations, the limitations of their legal gender still puts them in a position to be potentially uncomfortable. Housing's current system of assigning roommate pairs and bathroom assignments based on legal gender limits the choices available to transgender students' living options. Adopting a gender-neutral approach, even in one floor or building, with semi-private bathrooms, could take the final step in providing transgender students with the best combination of all accommodations. The participants all imagine that cisgender students would also be interested in the opportunity to live with someone of a different gender, making it a potentially feasible option for Housing. Before this decision would be implemented, further research would need to be done in the specifics of accommodations, in the interest of all students of living in a gender-neutral community, and potential political reaction.

While gender-neutral accommodations are easy to describe in theory, there are many different possibilities for these accommodations in practice. Housing would need to determine the best option for room layout, floor set-up, and bathroom style, among others. For example, if Housing followed the participants' recommendation for semi-private bathrooms, they would then have to determine which style would work best: the between-room style of Baker and Klipple, the locking style of Park and other halls, or another option not yet in use at Ball State. The gender of people who share a bathroom could also impact the decision of students—both cisgender and transgender—to live in the gender-neutral accommodations. A resident may feel comfortable living in a room and sharing a bathroom with a single person of a different gender, but that does not ensure that student would want to share a bathroom with multiple people of different
genders. The between-room style currently in use in Baker and Klipple might be the best way to ensure that all residents feel comfortable in their own bathrooms, as it limits the number of people who use each bathroom. Still, a resident could be uncomfortable in this situation, so perhaps having a single bathroom for each room would be most comfortable for residents, but this could also be costly and logistically complicated. If Housing chooses to move forward with gender-neutral accommodations, they should certainly engage in conversations with universities that already have gender-neutral accommodations to learn from their experiences.

As a gender-neutral community would obviously be a break with "traditional" styles of housing at Ball State, this could have potential consequences for the support and funding of Ball State and specifically the Housing Department. Before moving forward with implementing a gender-neutral community, the University should investigate the impact of publicly supporting transgender. While gender-neutral accommodations to benefit transgender students supports Housing’s commitment to diversity and inclusivity, it could potentially cause backlash from more conservative or even transphobic donors, board members, administrators, parents, and students. This study investigated the experience of transgender residents from the perspective of the transgender students; to fully understand the complications of supporting transgender students, further research needs to be done to examine how all people—especially those with political power—would react to such an action. As acceptance of LGBT lifestyles has increased in the last few decades, this has the potential to be a non-issue, but Housing and the University should investigate the climate to ensure a helpful initiative does not turn harmful.
In addition to the physical accommodations to improve the living conditions of transgender students, Housing could also increase the climate of acceptance for transgender students. While all of the participants said they found Ball State as a whole to be accepting, they also expressed concern over revealing their gender identity. Many of them did not face overt instances of transphobic behavior, they all discussed concern of it. Additionally, the interviewees felt that coming out to people could be difficult because many people would not understand transgender expression as much as lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. Housing could potentially address both transphobia and ignorance of transgender expression at the same time by increasing programming related to gender identity. This intentional education initiative could also helped people like Darren realize the possibilities of non-normative gender expression, as the unawareness reaches even potentially transgender individuals.

The interviewees mentioned a few ways that some other residents did small things—using the correct name and pronouns, for example—that positively impacted their experience in the halls. Housing could emphasize these tactics, especially to hall directors and RAs, so that transgender students are comfortable. As Oliver suggested, Trans* SafeZone for hall staff could be a valuable resource to hall staff, although mandating it might not be necessary for the number of transgender students living in Housing. Still, an awareness of transgender issues and strategies to interact positively with transgender residents could really help hall staff feel more comfortable. Even if not mandated, Housing should continue and increase its use of the SafeZone training programs, and perhaps incorporate aspects of the program into hall staff training if it is not already.
Educating residents about transgender expression could potentially help reduce transphobia, and Oliver suggested one way that residents can actively be involved in this education: an LGBT living-learning community (LLC). He imagines this community of LGBT individuals and allies working to educate themselves and other community members about LGBT issues and identities. This seems like it would fit well with Ball State’s current LLCs, although an LGBT and Ally community would not be, by its nature, as academically focused as most of the other LLCs. The Advanced Transfer and SURF living-learning communities are also not directly academic and could serve as a model for the LGBT and Ally LLC. Several academic departments offer classes in gender studies or queer theory, and these could be great partnerships that would increase the academic focus of this potential living-learning community.

Incorporating an LGBT and Ally living-learning community into a building or floor that has gender-neutral accommodations has the double benefit of increasing education outside while building community inside. Darren discussed that if transgender students take advantage of gender-neutral accommodations, it would unite people who share similar experiences that could help build the transgender community at Ball State. That would help the transgender component of the LGBT community increase, which Gagné et al. (1997) notes as a problem for transgender individuals in general. Having other lesbian, gay, or bisexual students living in the same community could also increase the cohesiveness of the whole LGBT community, connecting those who express transgender expression with those who express a non-normative sexuality.

In addition to the solutions that the interview participants raised, the literature on transgender students in higher education provides some suggestions that could be
beneficial for Ball State's residence halls. Renn (2010) suggests that increasing visibility
of transgender issues will help develop policies and support, but the interviewees raised
an interesting complication to this policy: often they just wanted to “blend in” on their
floors. If Housing wishes to increase awareness of transgender issues and expression,
they need to ensure that in doing so they do not “out” transgender residents in the
process. Oliver, who was comfortable enough with his gender identity that he became a
mentor to Darren and other transgender students, still mentioned that to his neighbors and
others that his gender identity was not their business. While having role models and
mentors might be an effective strategy to use inside the LGBT community, that does not
necessarily ensure that this will guarantee that the same mentor feels comfortable being a
representative of the LGBT community to the normative majority.

While Housing is increasing the awareness of transgender expression, they should
also be ensuring that transgender students have increased access to the resources
available both within Housing and on the campus in general. The interview participants
discussed at length the benefits they have received from the Counseling Center. Housing
could certainly connect to those resources to help their residents find the services that
they need. This could also increase the opportunity for feedback between Housing and
other campus offices to ensure that transgender students are having all their needs met.
For example, if both Housing and the Counseling Center agree that having student IDs
state their preferred name, they could actively collaborate with the Office of the Registrar
to see if a solution is possible. Thus, an increase of visibility of transgender issues in one
area can lead to an increased network of transgender allies and additional
accommodations in other areas. This would also follow the advice of Abes and Kasch (2007) for educators and staff to transition from onlookers to allies for LGBT students.

Schuler et al. (2007) discuss offering LGBT scholarships as one method of increasing visibility of LGBT students. Oliver mentioned the additional sense of safety and comfort living in a single provided him, but he also mentioned the additional cost that came with it. He even began a discussion about having LGBT scholarships to help offset this cost, but was not successful. Housing, if not the university as a whole, should seriously consider implementing LGBT scholarships to encourage LGBT students to attend Ball State. If these scholarships were announced publically—dependent on the recipients' wishes—then they would also serve as a way to increase visibility of LGBT students, especially high-achieving ones (Schuler et al., 2007).

Further Research

While the literature on transgender students provides a solid foundation, Ball State University needs to investigate for itself the experience of transgender students on its campus to see what specific improvements or accommodations are most needed. This study investigated the climate and accommodations of the residence hall system, but that is only one part of the student experience. Outside of the residence hall system, Ball State University can continue to be actively engaged in improving the transgender experience. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) suggest that university presidents form a transgender task force, and Ball State University could certainly begin with this step. Some potential areas for further research—mainly related to gender-neutral housing—were discussed in the previous section. This task force would reveal other areas that could be changed to improve the comfort of transgender students. Actively attempting to solve transgender
issues could also help to close the gap in literature that Renn (2010), Gagné et al. (1997), and Bilodeau and Renn (2005) all discuss.

Additionally, the study was very limited by the small number of participants. With only three interview participants, this study could not hope to find the full range of experience for transgender students. For example, only one of the participants actively transitioned while living in the residence halls. All participants were also female-to-male individuals, and although one of them discussed a friend who was male-to-female, this study did not collect any data on that particular expression. The same is true for gender-queer individuals, and many other individuals who express identities from the spectrum of gender identity (Gagné et al., 1997). Two of the participants suggested that there are more transgender students at Ball State than most people realize, and further investigations should focus on ensuring that as many individuals are included as possible to ensure that all of the various transgender perspectives are heard.

In the course of the study, a cisgender student approached the research with a related issue: transgender guests in the residence halls. This study could not consider that issue due to time and content restraints, but this could also be the next step for investigation after the University better understands the issues of its own students. Gender-neutral accommodations could also decrease the discomfort of transgender guests, but only for guests of students living in that community. Since this mainly concerns students that do not live in the residence halls, Housing should consider other issues that more directly impact the on-campus transgender students first before considering this issue.
Conclusion

The data and findings in this study may be limited, but they can be the start of a serious conversation about the issues transgender students face living in the residence halls and the very real possibility of solving them. The interview participants and the literature both revealed the differences and difficulties that transgender students faced daily, as well as options to overcome these obstacles. While the solutions raised in this study can be the start of the improvements for transgender students, there are many other areas that are still available for examination at Ball State University. As supporting transgender students leads to further awareness of transgender issues, a small improvement in one area can lead to an increased network of support, and eventually, large-scale change. The Office of Housing and Residence Life, with its commitment to inclusion and acceptance, would be a logical place to start building a campus-wide dedication to better serve the transgender student population.
Interview Questions

1. What would you like your pseudonym to be?

2. In terms of gender, how do you personally identify yourself? When filling out forms, how do you identify yourself?

3. Which gender of pronouns do you prefer to be addressed with? What name do you prefer being addressed with?

4. Overall, what has been your experience with Ball State Housing?

5. Did the possibility of support based on your gender identity factor into your choice of university? If so, how much? Where would you rank it with other factors (ex: academic program/reputation, distance from home, etc.)?

6. Do you feel there is a transgender/gender-variant community or support network at Ball State University? Did the presence, or lack thereof, encourage your college choice?

7. What opportunities for support do you feel Ball State offers to transgender/gender-variant students? Did you feel like there were role models or mentors, either faculty or students, available to you?

8. How long did you live in the residence halls? What were your personal room (double/single, etc.) and floor arrangements (mixed gender floor, community bathrooms, etc)?

9. Did you have a roommate? Did you know or select this roommate prior to moving in? Did you discuss your gender identity with your roommate in any capacity?

10. What challenges did you face living in the residence halls? What did you enjoy about living in the residence halls?

11. (Possible follow-up if expressed discomfort): Did Ball State Housing offer or provide accommodations to make you feel more comfortable? Did you suggest any accommodations? If so, how approachable were Housing staff toward these accommodations?

12. Explain your interactions with the hall staff (ie Hall Directors, Residence Assistants, Desk Staff).

13. Did you interact with Housing administration with regards to issue arising from accommodations? If so, how accommodating were they?

14. How did other members (residents) of your hall community interact with you?

15. Are there any accommodations the Housing office could offer to create a more comfortable environment for transgender/gender-variant students?

16. What was your experience with disclosing your gender identity throughout the process of signing up for and living in a residence hall room? If so, when did this occur? Did this happen on a form or in person?
17. Gender Neutral Housing is a style of housing where gender is not considered when allowing roommate pairs. What are your thoughts on this style of housing?

18. Where are you living now in terms of on/off-campus? Did accommodations for your gender identity influence that decision?

19. Between your residential and academic experiences at Ball State, which area do you think is more affected by your gender identity? In what ways have the two experiences differed?

20. Would you recommend living in the residence halls to an incoming freshman who identifies as transgender or gender variant?

21. Do you have any final thoughts regarding this topic that we haven’t covered in our questions?
References


CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher Curriculum Completion Report  
Printed on 12/11/2012

Learner: Ethan Johnson (username: ethantjohnson)  
Institution: Ball State University  
Contact Information: Department: Honors  
Email: etjohnson2@bsu.edu

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher: Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 11/26/12 (Ref # 9071793)

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<td>Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects</td>
<td>11/26/12</td>
<td>3/5 (60%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research</td>
<td>11/26/12</td>
<td>3/3 (100%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator
CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher Curriculum Completion Report
Printed on 12/11/2012

Learner: Bethany Wall (username: bjwall)
Institution: Ball State University
Contact Information: Department: Housing & Residence Life
Email: bjwall@bsu.edu

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher: Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 11/13/12 (Ref # 9163944)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Modules</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<td>Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction</td>
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<td>2/3 (67%)</td>
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<td>Students in Research</td>
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<td>6/10 (60%)</td>
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<td>History and Ethical Principles - SBR</td>
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<td>Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR</td>
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<td>The Regulations and The Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
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<td>Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
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<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
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<td>Informed Consent - SBR</td>
<td>11/13/12</td>
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<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research with Prisoners - SBR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research with Children - SBR</td>
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<td>Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBR</td>
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<td>Research and HIPAA Privacy Protections</td>
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<td>Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ball State University</td>
<td>11/13/12</td>
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