

## ***Supporting Success for LGBTQ+ Students: Tools for Inclusive Campus Practice*** by Cindy Ann Kilgo

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Cindy Ann Kilgo's *Supporting Success for LGBTQ+ Students: Tools for Inclusive Campus Practice* contains a preface and six chapters. Following an introductory chapter and a purported update to Renn's 2010 article, *LGBT and Queer Research in Higher Education: The State and Status of the Field*, the next three chapters take a positivist and linear student involvement model (Astin 1993) as an organizing framework. In the final chapter, the author provides some concluding thoughts about creating change in higher education for LGBTQ+ student inclusion.

We imagine, for institutions just beginning a journey towards queer and trans inclusivity, this book might serve as an initial touchstone, at least more contemporary than *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education* (Sanlo et al. 2002). Within these pages they will find some literature to do their own research, which could springboard them into more critical thinking about the policies and practices of inclusion. In this way, the text offers a place to begin for institutions that have yet to take any steps, or significant steps, towards queer and trans inclusivity. Kilgo (2020, ix) offers that the text is meant “to serve as a one-stop resource for faculty and staff in higher education settings who are seeking to enhance their campus climate and systems of support for LGBTQ+ student success.” From the onset, Kilgo intends to offer applicability for various institutional types with an investment in LGBTQ+ inclusion with limited knowledge.

Structurally, the book uses an organizing model composed of three elements (input-environment-outcomes). *Input* refers to students’ demographic information (assumed known, measurable, and static), as well as their pre-college experiences (assumed to be high school). *Environment* is meant to account for students’ collegiate experiences (assumed to be linear, neutral, and contained), while *outcomes* point to who students become and their knowledge and belief system post-graduation (altogether pointing to “traditional” students’ trajectories). This is a traditional approach to share content with an audience with an assumed variety of knowledge levels. At the same time, this approach frames queer and trans student experience through normative assumptions: a white, middle or upper income, abled, nonimmigrant, and documented one. The book offers surface-level change suggestions (e.g., database management) that will be a helpful initiative for institutions without adequate options for student self-identification. The bullets at the ends of the chapters offering opportunities to bolster reader reflection are too amorphous and decontextualized to provoke nuanced thinking for more complex institutional changes. Absent from the text is content that would engage readers in their advancement of their thinking about conceptual and theoretical dynamics of gendered language, investment in whiteness that reify gender and sex binaries, and the historical legacies of cis- and hetero-normativities.

Kilgo references data from the Campus Pride Index (CPI), a self-reporting mechanism which institutions use to neoliberally position themselves as “LGBTQ-friendly” spaces, as evidence of rigor or valid data. Kilgo also names how CPI has significant limitations, which is an important recognition of the extreme limitations of the dataset itself. Unclear in the text is how Kilgo reconciles their notation of the CPI’s issues as a data source with their use of CPI as a data source, which could contribute to troubling educational initiatives readers may develop because of reading the book. While the book includes campus-based examples, the overall dynamic of the book does not create any synergy between those examples, ways to trouble how those practices might not fit at any other institution, or how to connect those practices to the pages that precede them. For instance, Kilgo utilized Johnson and colleagues’ (2013) research on suicide prevention to discuss ally training programs without contextualizing the relationship, which had the troubling effect of equating queer and trans identities with suicidality.

Kilgo’s efforts to compress gender/sexuality into an easily digestible list of best practices and policies are successful. Given the book seeks to “normalize [LGBTQ]

identities and experiences” (2020, 64), it seems to advocate for an assimilationist perspective instead of elucidating emancipatory possibilities. The challenge of such an approach is how it flattens out dynamics and complexity of queerness and transness and denies the work of queer and trans activists, scholars, and people to cultivate lives that move beyond—or altogether deny—easy codification or legibility from nonqueer and nontrans people. Moreover, given the ongoing reality of queer- and trans-antagonism in the United States, there is ample opportunity to recognize how movements toward normalcy have never worked.

Kilgo’s text falls in line with a paradox Duran, Blockett, and Nicolazzo (2020, 17) highlighted, namely that “the scholarship on queer and trans\* people continues to oppress those most marginalized in these communities (e.g., trans\* women of color) in favor of centering those with privileged identities (e.g., white individuals and cisgender men).” This oversight is a misreading of the literature on queer and trans students in college, especially given scholarship focused on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; e.g., Means and Jaeger 2013; Patton 2011), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs; e.g., Vega 2016), and queer and trans students of color (e.g., Duran 2021; Jourian and McCloud 2020). Furthermore, this misreading has the effect of centering whiteness as the genesis of how to engage in practice, which then means most interventions derived from this text may well not work for queer and trans people who are not white and do not attend four-year institutions. The vibrancy and incoherence of queerness and transness are absent in the text as it tries to demonstrate palatability for populations who are under assault and constant political disenfranchisement.

The aforementioned descriptions, evaluations, and critiques of Kilgo’s book led to a clarity about how reading it evoked disappointment with the genre of LGBTQ+ educational texts. We see a repetition of form (structure of the text) and function (assumed or perceived audience of cisgender and/or heterosexuals) that fails to queer thinking about campus climates and student success. We recognize that what we seek in writing about LGBTQ+ campus populations, even for those nascent in their thinking, is a more capacious and liberatory approach that offers an abundance of multitudes of transformative strategies. It bears saying that all of us who write academic scholarship make decisions about who to cite. Ahmed (2014, 2017) and McKittrick (2021) discussed these choices in terms of political leanings and epistemological orientations, respectively. However, the main critique of this genre of LGBTQ+ educational tomes is the promulgation of omissions of citation and how those omissions advanced fictions about who LGBTQ+ college students are, what we know of college environments, and how this then leads to (mis)directions for readers about how to work toward better, more inclusive college spaces.

Kilgo’s book highlights how disciplinarity limits potential connections with the multitudes of scholarship that conceptually, empirically, and practically addressed queer and trans oppression beyond the narrow focus of higher education literature (e.g., Mayo 2013; Muñoz 1999). What harm does it cause to trans and queer people with multiple marginalized identities when scholarship focuses on a desire for acceptance that reifies norms (e.g., cis, hetero, white, etc.)? Furthermore, as Gossett, Stanley, and Burton (2017) pointed out in their necessary anthology, *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, the increase in queer and trans visibility is uncomfortably situated alongside heightened threat, risk, violence, and death, especially

for trans women of color, who remain some of the most vulnerable people in broader queer and trans communities.

It also bears stating that one's holding a queer identity does not equate to one's conveying a queer epistemic orientation and/or ethic. This feels important to state because queer people are often seen as experts on queer issues, even if—as one of our own's scholarly work suggests (Catalano 2015)—we are not and/or desire not to be. So, while it is vital to recognize the author of this text as a part of the queer community, we worry that overly sanitizing our commentary about this book due to our—the author, us as reviewers, and perhaps many of the readers of this review—shared queer identities may further a form of epistemic violence to queer—and especially queer of color—ways of knowing and being in the world.

The audience for *Supporting Success for LGBTQ+ Students: Tools for Inclusive Campus Practice* will benefit from the basic ideas and practice suggestions within its pages. However, we could not help but want more from the text; in its framing, critique of normativity, and desiring and demanding the worlds queer and trans students need beyond the confining conditions they currently have. While we recognize the book's attempt at concision—this is, after all, something many authors strive for in their work—we worry that the form of the book may have curtailed elucidating vital possibilities for queer livingness, especially in this moment and place. In other words, there are unintended consequences when texts pose conciseness and readability as opposed to possibilities and complexity; while these need not be mutually exclusive, we worry their being posed as such through this text may limit its overall efficacy.

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