

BEYOND THE BINARY: SERVING THE TRANSGENDER STUDENT,
IMPROVING THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

By

ELEANOR FORD FINGER

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of
ELEANOR FORD FINGER find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Kelly A. Ward, Ph.D., Chair

Pamela J. Bettis, Ph.D.

Dawn M. Shiness, Ph.D.

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BEYOND THE BINARY: SERVING THE TRANSGENDER STUDENT,
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Abstract

by Eleanor Ford Finger, Ph.D.
Washington State University
December 2010

Chair: Kelly A. Ward

This research study examines transgender (trans) identity, how it is manifested in trans students, the college and university experiences of these individuals, and how organizational systems hinder, enhance, expand, and redefine trans student success. This study provides a greater understanding of a population that is often misunderstood by fellow students, university administrators, faculty, and staff. Literature and research about trans students are extremely limited within higher education, and knowledge is needed to understand how to better serve trans students as members of the campus community. This study provides insight into how trans students make sense of their gender identity and how it influences all other aspects of their lives. Additionally, it offers guidance for better ways to serve contemporary trans students on campuses today with a sense of inclusion and welcome.

The study is based on eighteen interviews with trans students from across the country. A poststructural - feminist theoretical framework guides this study and explores the following themes: Language, subjectivity and the personal daily experience, social processes, institutions, gender differences in organizational structures, and power.

As a result of these interviews, knowledge of trans identity is expanded to include more diverse variations of presentation and definition, an understanding of the negative impacts of binary and hetero normative thinking and doing, and the celebration of socially constructed representations of fluid gender, sexuality and sex. This research captures the complex, provocative nature of gender - nonconforming identities and specifically recognizes ways that higher education can improve the trans student experience.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated, in loving memory, to my father,

Frank Whitney Finger

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE CONTEXT: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Beyond the Binary: Serving the Transgender Student, Improving the College Experience

Introduction

Leigh

Leigh is a 23 year old male to female (MTF) transgender (trans) college student that I have come to know well over a two year period of time. While in school, she was pursuing a psychology degree. Originally from a metropolitan area, she came to a rural, research institution to escape an unsupportive home life with her biological family and childhood friends. Leigh wanted to find a place that would enable her to pursue her education and her own journey toward a more clear and aligned gender identity.

Her goals have been to pursue her college degree as well as her long awaited transition from her male born sex to the woman who has been hidden within. Leigh was eager to discover her voice and her power as a woman who is redefining her self-concept. She is a strong but gentle, determined yet subtle, balanced but complex woman who wants to be known, cared about, and understood as a human being. When asked to describe herself, Leigh stated that she was, “relatively shy, especially around new people, really easy-going, a go-with-the-flow type, not the one that has to make decisions, more of a follower than a leader.” She further shared that she tries to be very open minded about cultural, gender and sexual differences and pretty much identifies as “queer.” Leigh views queer as an overlay of many aspects of her identity including, but not limited to, gender, sex, and sexual orientation. This identity represents a liminal space, an in-between experience that is fluid, sometimes chaotic and often political. This liminal space

can sometimes be captured and described by the term queer. Gamson (2003) writes about this nomenclature:

Queer has been a more vexed, conflict-ridden and confusing term, both as identity and disciplinary marker. Although it has sometimes been used as a “people of color” - like shorthand for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, a politically volatile expansion of the identity category to include all sorts of sex and gender outsiders, I use it here in its more distinctive sense, as a marker of the instability of identity. Queer marks an identity that defined as it is by a deviation from sex and gender norms, either by the self inside or by specific behaviors, is always in flux. (p.543)

Leigh’s life exemplifies the complexity of trans identity as well as the flux. To live as transgendered can mean different things for different people. Wilchins (2002) suggests that the term transgender is now commonly used both as a descriptive adjective as well as an identity. The notion of identity faces the same question as gender itself. While many transsexuals consider it to describe who they are, Butler (1990) suggests gender is something they do and stated:

Gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a ‘masculine’ man or a ‘feminine’ woman. Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. If you like, it is not that an identity ‘does’ discourse or language, but the other way around—language and discourse ‘do’ gender. There is no ‘I’ outside language since identity is a signifying practice, and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings. (p.145)

These diversions of thought create an interesting tension between theorists who understand gender as a constructed doing versus the transsexual activists who claim it as a way of being. This study will further examine the experience of gender in college students today. Leigh is still searching to make meaning of her trans identity in the university setting.

Colleges and universities operate in an increasingly diverse milieu with most campus communities wanting to find ways to be inclusive. With regard to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, ability and sexual orientation, postsecondary institutions are often on the forefront of progressive thinking and open-mindedness toward diverse constituencies. Even to the most well-meaning campus, transgender students present a complex challenge given the very “trans” of their experience. Trans students do not neatly fit into the usual descriptions of demographic diversity which can leave them overlooked and misunderstood on campus. When considering the description of the transsexual journey, Bornstein (1994) states:

To some transsexuals, the state of transsexuality itself is seen as transitory – a cocoon. In goes one gender, out comes the other. So there’s a pre-change and post-change transsexual. Through its insistence and fierce maintenance of the man/woman dichotomy, the culture puts the pre-change transsexual in the position of needing to say a permanent goodbye to one gender, and then, and only then, say hello to another. While that good-bye/hello is certainly an option, this culture is making it the *only* option. A viable solution to such a “choice” is to disentangle oneself long enough from the culture or individual presenting the two alternatives, so that you can explore some other options. (p.120)

This is very much how Leigh described her reasoning for pursuing her education away from home. It was a neutral, anonymous space that could enable her to transition away from her

former gender identity and all of the values, assumptions and stereotypes that family and friends associated to her biological sex.

From an anthropological lens, Turner's (1967) work examines rites of transition, or a liminal rite, suggesting a process of transformation, a becoming by someone who is in a temporary and unique cultural stance of being "betwixt and between." Leigh described feeling betwixt and between the gender binary of male and female. She was temporarily in the middle but in the process of becoming. College was the place for her to start her journey of transformation. Lees (1998) states that college is often the first place for transgender students to challenge their gender role assigned at birth. It also is the place where students begin to integrate transgenderness into their lives as young adults. That said, Lees (1998) cautions that the transition process can interfere with a student's education (sometimes to a disastrous extent) if support and help are not available. With trans students enrolling on college campuses, how can institutions of higher learning offer help and best serve these individuals? It is important to understand the different manifestations of transgender identity in order to create resources and support to address what is needed.

For some, trans identity entails living in the desired gender without the use of hormones or surgery while for others trans identity includes a combination of hormone therapy as well as surgery. Others still define their trans identity as a gender- nonconforming social construct that opposes traditional binary assumptions of genders male and female while examining systems of power and oppression. There are a variety of labels that are associated with these diverse interpretations of identity which include, but are not limited to, transgender, transsexual, cross dresser, queer, genderqueer, and cisgender. These many variations of trans identity still do not encompass all ways that students experience their daily lives nor does it include all of the

language variations used to identify this group of individuals. It does, however, showcase one commonality recognized among many and that is the preferred experience of living beyond a binary frame of reference.

Given that many colleges and universities strive to be inclusive, the culture and environment of higher education must make room for trans students and communicate a sense of welcome. Leigh managed to successfully get involved in the campus while simultaneously navigating her own gender identity transformation. Having resources and information are important for student success but even more fundamental is the need for language that names and supports trans students in the campus community on a daily basis. In order to recognize some of the challenges faced by trans students, consider the definitions so commonly attached to gender. Many assume the binary system of male or female would suffice in daily life, but to the transgender person, having only two qualifiers is limiting. It is not uncommon for trans individuals, like Leigh, to claim “queer” or “genderqueer” as their socially constructed identity. These labels allow for diverse interpretations and expressions to be a part of their process and challenge hetero-normative and gendered thinking.

Wilchins (2002) recognizes the connection to binaries and states:

What is it about binaries that so captivates our thinking: Men/women, gay/straight, M-to-F/F-to-M, white/black, real/artificial, male/female, lesbian/feminist... If there are more than two genders, it's a cinch that, with our bifocal glasses, we'll never see them. Two-ness is not something that is “out there” but a product of the way we see. We look for that two-ness. Our categories assure us that we see it. That's why no matter what gender I do, the only question is “Are you a man or a woman?” because that exhausts all the available possibilities. When we pick up the complex things like desire and gender with primitive

mental tools like binaries, we lose nuance, and multiplicity... What is the meaning of masculinity? Mannish, not feminine, right? What about being straight? That means not gay. To say that I'm still really a man is only meaningful in terms of my not being a woman. I am feminine only to the exact degree that I am... not masculine... As a form of thinking, binaries, prevent other kinds of information from emerging... Binaries are about power, a form of doing politics through language. Binaries create the smallest possible hierarchy of one thing over another. (p.46)

Wilchins's recognition of both the limitations, and the power, exercised in binaries are important. The limitations refer to how people in western society are socialized to see only, in most cases, two options. This "two-ness" vision is short sighted when considering the various aspects of gender presentation and identity among trans students. It also suggests the inability to conceptualize multiple aspects of identity that influence gender interpretation such as race, ethnicity, age, religion, class, sexual orientation as well as desire. With this experience of language, and the limitations of binaries, where does the trans person, who is neither one nor the other, or possibly identifies as a more fluid part of both, fit? How is trans identity manifested beyond the binary? What does this experience look like for trans students, such as Leigh, in higher education?

While still a small population, trans students pursue degrees and aim to have a comprehensive college experience just like their gender-normative peers. As they develop skills and knowledge within a major, these individuals are also pursuing a very personal and empowering transformation as their gender identity becomes more deeply embodied and understood. As mentioned before, for some, these transformations come through hormone treatment and sex - reassignment surgery, while for others it could mean hormones and lifestyle

changes. Regardless of the specifics, trans students must examine their gender identities and their relationships with the rest of the world in a way that is uniquely their own.

Background: Trans Definitions and Language

Given the many different ways transgender identity is manifested and described, it is necessary to establish a common nomenclature for a consistent frame of reference. Consider the words sex and gender, for example. For the purpose of this research, sex is defined as the biological anatomy assigned to a person at birth, be it either male or female. In contrast, gender refers to how we tell people apart and how one lives his or her life day- to- day. Bornstein (1998) suggests that appearance, roles, and mannerisms all contribute to how people categorize gender. In this way, gender typically matches one's biological sex. In the case of a transgender person, the sex and gender do not easily align.

According to the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc., “the term ‘transsexual’ emerged into professional and public usage in the 1950s as a means of designating a person who aspired to, or actually lived in, the anatomically contrary gender role, whether or not hormones had been administered or surgery had been performed” (Levine, Brown, Coleman, Cohen-Kettenis, Hage, Van Maasdam, Petersen, Pflafflin, & Schaefer, 1998). “The diagnosis of Transsexualism was introduced in the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, volume III (DSM-III) in 1980 for gender dysphoric individuals who demonstrated at least two years of continuous interest in removing their sexual anatomy and transforming their bodies and social roles” (Levine et al, 1998, p.10). A revision of the DSM-III to volume IV went on to replace transsexualism with the term Gender Identity Disorder (GID). “Those with a strong and persistent cross-gender identification and a persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex were to be diagnosed as

Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood (302.6), Adolescence, or Adulthood (302.85)” (Levine et al, 1998, p. 11). This is not to be confused with intersex individuals who are born with biological characteristics of both male and female sexes. Between the publications of the DSM-III and the DSM-IV, the term ‘transgender’ started to gain traction as a description that makes room for a more expansive definition of gender identity without the direct assumption of psychopathology.

While this evolution from transsexual to gender identity disorder to transgender appears to be progressive, the DSM-IV remains a common resource for mental health professionals as part of a medical model. A diagnosis of “GID” is still a possible outcome for trans individuals in therapy, and as such, perpetuates the reference to, and reliance upon, this model for some individuals. It is understandable that transsexuals view the medical model as one necessary gatekeeper for the transition process. They must have a diagnosis by a therapist in order to be eligible for hormones and sex reassignment surgery which are typical considerations, and often desired aspects, of transition. Having language and practices that assist trans identified individuals to feel more comfortable in, and with, their bodies, in whatever way they identify, are helpful. Understanding this aspect of the transsexual trans experience provides context when conducting research on gender identity.

Many often assume that gender identity and sexuality are linked, one in the same, with trans people. Early research focused on trans identity more as a scientific dilemma that sought to find a cure for such “deviant” behavior. “Although there has been a long-standing stream of social science research on sexuality, there has been an even stronger, well-founded suspicion that positivist sciences, and some scientific professions, have been at odds with the interests of self-defining homosexuals- pathologizing, stigmatizing, seeking the ‘cause’ of deviant sexualities and, by implication, their cure” (Gamson, 2003, p.542). While transgender research is still

unfolding, it is important to note that the stigma associated with gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) identity also falls on trans people given their assumed, as well as chosen, affiliation with the GLB community. However, not all transgender individuals identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Some identify as “straight” presenting a stereotypically hetero normative gender role, also referred to as cisgender.

There are other words that associate with this topic such as gender, gender identity, sexuality, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, and more that fall into an alphabet soup of acronyms. While sex refers to biological anatomy, and gender is portrayed through appearance, roles, and mannerisms, they are not completely unrelated entities. Sex and gender are often interchangeably used but they are not the same. “Gender is generally considered to be cultural, and sex, biological (though contemporary theories posit sex as a cultural category as well.) The words man and woman refer to gender. No one is born a woman or man- rather this aspect of identity evolves through a complex process of socialization” (Stryker, 2008, p.11). Stryker goes on to highlight that there have been many different systems of organizing people into genders crossculturally and historically including Native American cultures where three or four social genders have been celebrated. Some social genders are changed based on dreams and visions while others still modify gender with medical intervention. Most importantly, Stryker states that gender is historical and changes through time; is contingent upon different, and seemingly unrelated, things coming together; and varies culture to culture and place-to-place. This leads to one of the core themes of transgender politics which is “the sex of the body does not bear any necessary or deterministic relationship to the social category in which the body lives. This assertion, drawn from the observation of human social variability, is political precisely because it

contradicts the common belief that whether a person is a man or a woman in the social sense is fundamentally determined by the sex of the body” (Stryker, 2008, p. 11).

Gender identity is described as a “subjective sense of fit with a particular gender category” (Stryker, 2008, p.13). There is a personal sense of alignment to this category of man or woman and life experiences shape how the gender identity is developed over time. Transgender people suggest that their experiences are not this clearly defined. There is a feeling of being outside of the gender assigned, a gender incongruence. Stryker (2008) also states that this is hard to explain or define to gender-normative individuals and refers to semantics and the use of pronouns for how some fit while others do not.

Language, especially pronouns, becomes charged when considering how words like “male” and “female” influence normative thinking about gender and how “he” and “she” when inappropriately directed to a trans person can be disabling and disempowering. For example, Leigh described being in a classroom where the teacher needed to assign two groups by gender and the professor continually used the wrong pronoun for Leigh when assigning her to a group. She was placed in the men’s group which was embarrassing, painful and hard to explain to questioning peers. Leigh’s example presents the marginalization that can occur as a direct result of language. While this is one lens of the power exercised through language, it is possible to identify opportunities to create new interpretations of language that are validating for trans people. Gender neutral pronouns of “ze” and “hir” are a new construction of language that reject the binary discourse. Language also provides an avenue for multiple interpretations of meaning and relationships between symbols and words. As gender identity evolves, sexuality is closely intertwined, and language contributes to the experiences of both.

“Sexuality is analytically distinct from gender but intimately bound with it” (Stryker, 2008, p.16). The most common terminology used to label desire depends on how the person of interest defines gender. Heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual are most common sexual identities. One can also include asexual as well as auto-sexual which are typical of the trans person’s experience given they do not easily fit into other people’s sexual orientation categories. Sexual identity falls into a binary system too. Are you gay or straight? Straight is the dominant, privileged identity with a higher percent of the population claiming to be heterosexual. A major privilege that heterosexuals have been given is the undisputed right to marry. Power over sexual minorities is prevalent with heterosexism. Friend (1993) states that heterosexism is “the belief that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual,” and goes on to say:

Based on the assumption of universal heterosexuality... a systematic set of institutional and cultural arrangements exist that reward and privilege people for being or appearing to be heterosexual, and establish potential punishments, or lack of privilege, for being or appearing to be homosexual. Heterosexism is prejudice against homosexuality which is maintained by a pervasive set of societal institutions that sanction and promote this ideology. (p.211)

His definition of heterosexual is defined as a woman being romantically and/or sexually involved with a man and similarly a man being romantically and/or sexually involved with a woman.

Transsexual is a term that was popularized by Harry Benjamin in the 1950s. This was a result of the widely publicized sex change of Christine Jorgensen, a film editor and former photographer. Stryker (2008) identifies the complexity of this gender identity by saying:

Historically, the practice of transsexuality has involved surgical modification of the reproductive organs and chest, hormone use to change secondary sex characteristics, and

permanent removal of facial and body hair for individuals moving from male embodiment toward social womanhood...More recently, people who don't consider themselves to be transsexual have increasingly started using these same body modifications practices and they may do so without trying to change their legal gender...The result of such practices is another layer of human-generated complexity added on top of already complicated biological sex differences and cultural gender categories. (p. 18)

These complex and diverse components of experiencing gender are constructed by each individual and overlap in provocative ways. While some relationships might be recognized through language and experience, no two transgender individuals are alike.

There are a variety of interpretations of the term transgender. It encompasses a wide range of behaviors, appearances, and identities that blur, or cross, traditionally perceived gender lines. Included within this umbrella term are cross-dressers (formerly called transvestites), who wear clothing items usually associated with the "opposite" gender; transsexuals who, all of the time or at least some of the time, live in a sex different from their biological sex; genderqueers, who identify beyond sex systems or binary gender; as well as drag kings and queens, who cross dress within a performance context (Beemyn, 2005).

The label "transgender" is not a diagnosis, rather a term to reference gender identity. The complexity of gender, as it relates to identity, is influenced by power systems and heteronormative assumptions. People recognize gender as either male or female. It is more emotionally and socially comfortable to box people in to one or the other. Leigh put it best when she said, "Messing with gender really skews the line for the boxes that we put ourselves in. A lot of

people get scared when they can't put a direct identity, or title on someone and it doesn't just affect transsexuals but also the inter-sexed as well.”

In the practices of everyday life we see normative gender everywhere, so much so that it is an intuitive part of our knowing rather than a forced distinction. It is pervasive and serves to interpret situations around us by providing context from what we have been taught and socialized to believe as everything male or everything female. Trans students, by virtue of their nonnormative presentation, disrupt this sense of knowing. The very essence and nature of trans identity confuses hetero-normative assumptions practiced by those who identify in traditional gender and sex normative roles. The intent of this research project is to give voice to the various images and definitions of trans identity and recognize ways to support the success of these students in the university setting.

Interest in Trans Students

The topic of transgender student experience matters to me because I want to create positive, engaging learning environments for this population, and I believe it can be done through increased knowledge and awareness. As a Director of Residence Life, there have been occasions when trans students requested a specific kind of housing space in order to meet their needs. While able to provide them with a single room and private bath, these students were placed in an upperclassmen hall. For incoming freshmen, who envision their college lives to be filled with constant social connections and easy access to resources, the housing I provided was isolating. In working with these students, I have also recognized limitations in administrative services based on policies and practices that could be improved.

From a personal lens, I supported a trans man through his transition while he was in college and witnessed the personal and academic challenges he faced while attempting to

complete his degree in an environment that was not prepared to serve or support him. Most significantly, I saw the emotional toll of his isolation. He avoided extra-curricular and social opportunities that his peers were enjoying in order to protect his transition process and distanced himself to avoid awkward questions. Loneliness, self-doubt, and fear of safety were consequences he was willing to endure in order to realize his gender identity. I want to affect change so that trans students can dive into their college experience with excitement and wonder, fully embracing their academic pursuits as well as the comprehensive education they can receive through their involvement and exchanges with others. It is with this perspective that I come to this research.

Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this dissertation study is to understand the many manifestations of the transgender student's gender identity with the intention of increasing awareness of trans identity and the issues these students face. As colleges and universities grapple with creating inclusive environments for transgender students, institutions need to think about macroscopic level issues such as the complexity of identity within the walls of a modern learning environment as well as micro level issues related to basic services and facilities. The intent of the study is to provide detail about the experiences of trans students, deepen understanding through the application of a theoretical framework, and offer institutions innovative ways to employ best practices that can create truly inclusive and diverse student bodies.

College and university trans populations are typically small. They lack a firm footing in the campus community because they are not recognized as a strong subculture. Over time they have come to be affiliated with the gay, lesbian, bisexual and ally (GLBA) student groups so more recently, these groups have included the "T" for transgender. In many instances, trans

students do claim a gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer sexual identity. However, not all trans individuals identify as GLBQ so this association can ultimately be isolating to straight trans folk. While times are changing, transgender students, along with their GLBQ counterparts, still have concerns about safety, isolation and judgment. The journey of living as a gender-nonconforming person is not an easy path and is influenced by fear of safety, rejection by loved ones, and uncertainty of what the future holds. Trans individuals are in the process of becoming, not unlike other college students who are learning and growing in preparation for their futures.

With increased presence in mainstream society, GLBT visibility on college campuses has expanded (Rhoades, 1997). In light of this elevated presence, are colleges and universities prepared to exercise best practices to support the success of these students? In order to better understand the trans student's relationship between self and society, and self and the campus community, it is important to consider questions that reveal how trans identity is realized day-to-day and what provides meaning in their lives while engaging on campus.

Research Methods

There are four overarching research questions that guide this study. These have been established as a general framework for what I want to learn through participant perspectives. Both the individual definitions, as well as the campus experiences, will offer a textured understanding of what it means to be transgender in the college and university environment today.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this inquiry:

- What does it mean to be transgender?
- What are the many manifestations of the transgender identity?

- What is the experience of the transgender student in the college or university setting?
- What organizational structures hinder or enhance the transgender college experience?

A qualitative approach relying on interviews, in addition to policy and document analysis, was used to address these questions. Having trans students define their gender identity and describe their college experiences brings a necessary human quality to this research. It is important that real people, with wants and desires, successes, needs, and shortcomings, are the prominent voice in this study in order to shape new ways of thinking about trans students.

Interviews

The primary mechanism of data collection for the study was interviews with a sample of 18 students who are currently enrolled or recent graduates, within the past five years, at predominantly four - year, residential colleges or universities throughout the country. Participants were identified through snowball sampling and contacts affiliated with GLBT campus programs as well as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrator's (NASPA) Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues Knowledge Community. Six, of the eighteen interviews, were conducted face- to- face in the Pacific Northwest and twelve interviews were conducted over the phone with participants from across the country. Interviews lasted, on average, one hour forty-five minutes, with the shortest interview lasting ninety minutes and the longest interviews extending to two hours fifteen minutes. Interview questions addressed definitions of transgender identity, the college experience, issues associated with attending college, perspectives about campus initiatives and policy (e.g., Safe Zone campaigns, nondiscrimination clauses), campus resources, and organizational practices that hindered and/or supported the student experience. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed for common themes. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking and peer debriefing

were incorporated into the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Each participant received a copy of the transcription with the request to communicate any questions or changes they would like to see implemented. Any questions or changes were addressed and implemented as noted by the participants.

Policy and Document Analysis

The data collection also included a review of campus- nondiscrimination clauses from participants' campuses and identified how language included and recognized this population, as part of the university environment, or rendered them invisible. The goal of this policy and document analysis was to more fully understand the campus culture and context in which the student operates. These clauses also suggested, by each institution, what groups were considered a protected class on campus and enabled me to quantify this number among participant institutions that were represented. The documents were reviewed to identify common language.

Theoretical Perspectives

An important element of good research is identifying theoretical perspectives that can provide a framework for understanding the research topic. This study is grounded in a poststructural-feminist perspective. Feminist poststructuralism “is a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change” (Weedon, 1997). Feminist poststructuralism focuses on understanding gender and gender differences in relation to organizational structures. This is a particularly apt framework for this study because it takes into account personal experiences. A poststructural perspective provides a way to consider change on college campuses to be more supportive of transgender students and is useful in describing students who operate outside of traditional gender systems.

Significance of the Study for Theory and Practice

As colleges and universities grapple with creating inclusive environments for transgender students, institutions need to think about macro level issues such as the complexity of identity and the confines of a modern learning environment still influenced by dominant discourses and entrenched frameworks as well as micro level issues related to basic services and facilities. The intent of the study is to provide detail about the experiences of transgender students and, with theory, offer institutions innovative ways to employ best practices that can create truly inclusive and diverse student bodies. The next chapter highlights the related literature followed by a detailed description of the methodology that was used.

CHAPTER TWO

FRAMING THE TRANS EXPERIENCE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature addressing transgender identity has been present in the fields of psychology and sociology for quite some time. This review utilizes resources from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, history, political science, and education as well as trans activists outside of the academy to better understand the shaping of the transgender experience. Feinberg (1992, 1998) and Bornstein (1994), two gender-variant activists who began to dialogue about gender nonconformance and the social and political implications of the binary are referenced often when considering trans in society. Authors Stryker (2008) and Currah (2006) provide insight from a historical and political science lens from within the academy. Sanlo (1998), Lees (1998), and Rhoades (1998), to name a few, began to include transgender students in their writing as an identified population needing attention on college and university campuses from a higher education perspective. Most recently, it appears a slow, but steady, rise in trans literature has been growing from both outside and within the academy. That said, the literature is extremely limited with regard to transgender students on campus. Authors such as Wilchins (2002), Gould (2004), Beemyn (2005), Halberstam (2005), and Stryker (2006, 2008) are among some of the current leading scholars on this subject. As a practitioner in higher education, I attribute part of the recent contributions to the literature to the highly publicized murder of Matthew Sheppard, a gay college student attending the University of Wyoming in 1998. His death was the result of a hate crime due to his sexual identity and immediately activated colleges and universities, across the country, to review and improve their support resources for their GLBTQ students. Sexual orientation became a prominent topic of discussion in higher education organizations, and

student affairs professionals were motivated to raise awareness and improve services for this student population. While Matthew did not identify as trans, the common affiliation of transgender students to their GLBQ peers, campus groups, and community centers have served as an impetus to expand the literature in this area and mark trans students as an equally vulnerable population.

This literature review examines trans in society as well as the transgender student in college. Themes relating to the trans experience in society include a historical view as well as transgender rights and legal issues. When considering higher education specifically, there are five themes that are prominent in the literature. These are identity formation, facilities, safety, the influence of policy, college records, and documents, as well as programs within the university environment.

Trans in Society

Long before college students were coming out as transgender, trans individuals in society were out in force trying to find their way amidst traditionally gendered social systems that fully expected compliance to hetero-normative binaries. Some individuals took a path of political activism seeking social justice and a voice, not unlike Feinberg (1992, 1998) and Bornstein (1994). Feinberg (1998) recognizes the deeply entrenched gender coding that occurs at birth with pink and blue infant outfits assigned to little girls and boys as well as their gender coded toys. Feinberg asserts that those who step over these arbitrary lines are punished severely. Feinberg (1998) goes on to explain the opposition ze¹ experienced as a gender non conforming person:

¹ Gender neutral pronouns are preferred by some transgender people. “Ze” (pronounced ‘zee’) replaces she/he and “hir” (pronounced ‘here’) replaces her/his.

No one knows how many trans lives have been lost to police brutality and street-corner bashings. The lives of trans people are so depreciated in this society that many murders go unreported. And those of us who have survived are deeply scarred by daily run-ins with hate, discrimination, and violence. Trans people are literally social outlaws. And that's why I am willing at times, publicly, to reduce the totality of my self-expression to descriptions like masculine female, butch, bulldagger, drag king, cross-dresser. These terms describe outlaw status. And I hold my head up proudly in that police lineup. The word outlaw is not hyperbolic. I have been locked up in a jail by cops because I was wearing a suit and tie. Was my clothing really a crime? Is it a "man's" suit if I am wearing it? At what point – from field to rack – is fiber assigned a sex. (pp.10-11)

Trans activists have grown in numbers over time but not without struggle and a long history of marginalization to hurl them into action.

Historical View

There are two aspects to understanding historical perspectives regarding transgender people. Medically, individuals have sought help from doctors for treatment approval, hormone prescriptions and administration, and sex reassignment surgeries. The second aspect is cultural and reflects how society has experienced trans as a gender aesthetic as well as how trans people have experienced real or perceived acceptance with concerns regarding safety. The details in these next few sections will provide context for both the medical and cultural perspectives.

As part of a historical view, it is important to recognize individuals who directly impacted trans lives creating a rich, but sordid, past that lead to activism. Hirschfeld, born in 1892 in Prussia, was said to be a pioneering advocate for transgender people. He offered a theoretical concept of "sexual intermediaries" suggesting every human being had a unique

combination of culturally acquired habits and practices, sex characteristics, secondary sex-linked traits, and psychological inclination. In 1897, he co-founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee which was the first organization to focus on sexual minorities and was a founding member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society with Sigmund Freud in 1908. Hirschfeld was becoming a primary resource with the international network of transgender people and among the progressive medical experts when he founded the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin in 1919. Trans people staffed the institute and it was there that Dora Richter underwent the first documented surgery for male to female genital transformation in 1931. Hirschfeld, a gay sociologist, was denounced by Hitler as one of the most dangerous Jews in Germany. Fearing for his life, he left the country and conducted an around-the-world lecture tour where he shared his views on politically progressive sexual science. The Hirschfeld Institute in Berlin was destroyed and the library of materials was burned by Nazis. Unable to return to Germany, Hirschfeld retired in Nice, France where he died at 67 in 1935. These events spurred the momentum for the post World War II transgender movement.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Langley Porter Clinic, directed by the former president of the American Psychiatric Association, Karl Bowman, focused research on homosexuality in the military. The subjects of this research were men whose sexuality was discovered while serving in uniform so they were incarcerated in a military psychiatric prison in San Francisco Bay. It was during this time that Bowman became acquainted with some transsexuals living in the city who were requesting medical treatment for their conditions. One of the transgender people in contact with Bowman was Louise Lawrence, a biological male who had been living as a female since 1942. Lawrence had developed an extensive network of transgender people from around the world by writing to individuals who had been previously arrested. She also made contact

through ads placed in magazines. “Lawrence’s connections to Bowman, and through him to other sex researchers such as the famed Alfred Kinsey, functioned as a crucial interface between medical researchers and transgender social networks” (Stryker, 2008, p.44).

Transsexual medical pioneer, Harry Benjamin, knew both Kinsey and Bowman and worked with them for a time on a legal case involving one of Lawrence’s friends. Born in Berlin in 1885, Benjamin went on to pursue his medical doctorate in 1912 at the University of Tubigen. Benjamin and Hirschfeld met through a mutual friend in 1907 and he would accompany Hirschfeld to transvestite nightclubs. Little did he know, at the time, that these experiences would redirect his career entirely. Soon thereafter Benjamin began his research and training in endocrinology in Berlin and Vienna with Hirschfeld and Eugen Steinach, Austrian pioneer in the field. With the rise of Hitler in 1933, Benjamin refused to travel to Germany and instead opted to conduct a medical practice in San Francisco. His expertise in endocrinology brought Benjamin into contact with Bowman, Lawrence, and her friends again marking the beginning of his career in transsexual medicine.

Sometime later, a young and dignified Christine Jorgensen received significant media attention when she came out as having had a “sex change” in Europe in 1952. The procedure had been done numerous times in Copenhagen but for the United States, her story gained front page attention. “In a year when hydrogen bombs were being tested in the Pacific, war was raging in Korea, England crowned a new queen, and Jonas Salk invented the polio vaccine, Jorgensen was the most written-about topic in the media. Her story demonstrates yet again how historically contingent attention to transgender phenomena really is” (Stryker, 2008, p. 47).

Trans in society became more visible due to the sudden proliferation of gender styles that dismissed the rigid codes of the 1960s. Something as simple as dress influenced attitudes and

actions surrounding the presentation of gender. In the context of western society, men with long hair were suspicious and women wearing pants also received a raised eyebrow because their appearances did not match the socially constructed stereotypes for men and women of the times. As unisex fashions became more common, women were wearing more masculine clothing with less critique although the same license was not true for men in more effeminate attire. Gender bending style, akin to rocker David Bowie and the Andy Warhol's superstars Candy Darling and Holly Woodlawn, started the infusion of early punk, glitz and glam into the music scene which situated the notion of gender variance on the cultural fringe (Stryker, 2008). From a historical perspective, Stryker (2008) points out:

For the first time in U.S. history, what could be described as a "transgender aesthetic," a new relationship between gendered appearance and biological sex, was becoming hip and cool for mass audiences. But these stylistic innovations did little to alter institutionalized forms of sexism and social oppression based on gender. Even as transgender styles began inching toward the cultural mainstream, people who lived transgender lives from day to day began to experience a profound backlash against the recent gains their community had made. (pp.91-92)

Trans folk were not alone in experiencing political backlash. Stryker (2008) goes on to explain that the reactionary tactics of the government in the 1970s abruptly ceased any countercultural expressions that had emerged the previous decade. Antiwar activism against Vietnam and racial unrest across the country left many feeling fearful and angry. During this same period of time in cultural history, San Francisco was also trying to stop a genital-mutilating serial killer who was targeting transgender sex workers in the city. Members of the trans community suspected the killer(s) to be affiliated with the police vice squad which further

elevated the lack of trust for law enforcement by those identifying as gender variant. The 1970s were a time of national turmoil and civil unrest.

Ironically, some university-based research was being conducted on transgender identification during the late 1960s and early 1970s which illustrates how complex the cultural politics of trans issues were at this historical time. Trans research and support initiatives were building on University of California, Los Angeles's research in the 1950s, the Gender Identity Research Clinic (established in 1962), and the publication of Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966. These accomplishments served as a watershed for access and investigation. The first medical program to combine the biology and psychology of gender with scientific research opened at Johns Hopkins University and provided evaluation for transgender individuals interested in genital surgery as well as hormone treatment. Other programs, including, but not limited to, the University of Texas's medical campus at Galveston, University of Minnesota, and Stanford University followed suit with similar research agendas. As a result of these programs, this time marks what many refer to as the "Big Science" period in transgender history (Stryker, 2008).

Before this heightened attention of the trans culture, individuals seeking to change their sex had to pursue medical services outside of the United States. The university programs made sex changes possible in the U.S. and also, for those that qualified as research participants, this was at no personal cost. Stryker (2008) noted:

Trans people seeking surgery and hormones quickly discovered the new university-based scientific research programs were far more concerned with stabilizing the gender system, which seemed to be mutating all around them in bizarre and threatening directions, than they were helping that cultural revolution along by further exploding mandatory

relationships between sex embodiment, psychological gender identity, and social gender role. Access to transsexual medical services thus became entangled with a socially conservative attempt to maintain traditional gender, in which changing sex grudgingly permitted for the few of those seeking to do so, to the extent that the practice did not trouble the gender binary for the many. (p.94)

Transsexuals and transgender individuals challenged these attitudes about gender and united against the oppression they felt, creating a strong force in the 1970s which contributed to the trans liberation movement.

Virginia Prince, an advocate for freedom of gender expression, began using the word transgender in the 1980s to refer to individuals, like herself, whose identities fell on a spectrum between “transvestite,” a term introduced by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910, and “transsexual,” a term referenced by Dr. Harry Benjamin in the 1950s. Stryker (2006) noted:

If a transvestite was somebody who episodically changed into the clothes of the so called ‘other sex,’ and a transsexual was somebody who permanently changed genitals in order to claim membership in a gender other than the one assigned at birth, then a transgender was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation. (p.4)

Stryker (2008) identified Leslie Feinberg as being responsible for the more current interpretation of the word transgender. Included in her book, *Transgender History*, Stryker (2008) noted Feinberg’s (1992) influential pamphlet entitled, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come* which called for political alliance between all who had been marginalized or oppressed due to their gendered embodiment differing from the social norm. In this interpretation, transgender became an umbrella term for gender-variant individuals including

transsexuals, drag queens, masculine women, effeminate men, tomboys, butches, cross dressers, intersex, and others who felt compelled to mobilize. This outreach supported the transgender movement and won new human and civil rights for transgender people over time serving as a powerful example of the influence of language. Both Prince and Feinberg are pioneers in shaping how gender embodiment and gender variance have been constructed and understood.

The trans movement spurred the start of transgender studies in the early 1990s at the same time that queer studies were getting underway. As part of this new knowledge, Stryker (as cited in Roen, 1996, p.658) defines transgender as, “an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries. The term includes, but is not limited to, transsexuality, heterosexual transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native American berdache or the Indian Hijra.” She continues by referencing transgender heritage:

Transgender studies renarrates this considerable intellectual heritage. It calls attention to ‘transgender effects,’ those deconstructive moments when foreground and background seem to flip and reverse, and the spectacle of an unexpected gender phenomena illuminates the production of gender normativity in a startling new way. In doing so the field begins to tell new stories about things many of us thought we already knew.

(Stryker, 2006, p. 13)

Gender definitions can stretch beyond previous boundaries and assume new meaning when examining the history of language over time. Stryker (2006) also noted that there is great cultural impact with an increase in trans issues occurring at the end of a century. Felski, author of *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989), *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), and *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (2000), suggested

that it can be viewed as a time of death and rebirth, a redefining period that fosters collective thinking about gender identity in the twenty first century. Not unlike Bornstein's (1994) goodbye/hello, or Turner's (1967) illumination of "betwixt and between," the trans experience then marks a shift in cultural response to the social construction of gender over time.

Trans Rights and Legal Issues

Other aspects of trans in society include transgender rights and legal issues. The privilege of access and recognition, often associated with hetero-normative, cisgender people who biologically align with their gender identification, is not equally extended to gender nonconforming individuals suggesting social deviance and misconduct. When considering transgender rights, Greenberg (2006) states that the psychological and medical communities have, for decades, attempted to resolve the issue of how a person's sex should be determined. He continued by saying that the law presumes a binary sex model despite anthropological and medical studies that could support the contrary. Flynn (2006) also notes this dilemma:

At the core of the law's power over trans women and men is its ability to pronounce individuals legally female or male, regardless of their gender identity or expression. The majority of courts disregard abundant evidence demonstrating that gender identity is the paramount consideration in determining sex – testimony from experts, any physical transition to one's identified sex, and an individual's negotiations through the world as male or female. You can be a husband, a father, and even have male-pattern baldness, yet a court can declare, nonetheless, that you are female. When a court subordinates these realities to the orthodoxy of 'sex-as-genitalia,' it enforces a social and legal paradigm in which trans women and men have no place. (p.46)

This is not the only area of impact. Currah (2006) noted that schools adhering to gender-based dress codes reinforce the hegemonic cultural norms, and sex-based discrimination claims have little leg to stand on with the absence of legislative definitions of gender and sex in most nondiscrimination laws.

To complicate matters further, transgender family law faces many contradictions and oppressive jurisprudence. “We live in a highly gendered society where sex distinctions affect issues including whom you can marry, whether you can inherit your spouse’s estate, or whether you provide an ‘appropriate’ role model for your children” (Flynn, 2006, p.33). Flynn explains that trans individuals must face incredibly intrusive inquiries about their bodies, sex lives, and medical history. They are rarely able to object to the request for the sake of protecting privacy because the court can overrule. The system then strips the litigant of all dignity to protect the most sacred and personal aspects of their lives. Flynn continues by identifying other areas of impact such as the erasure of marriage and the unmaking of parents. While not every court is this conservative, trans individuals face great opposition and exposure where these deeply personal topics are concerned. As a gender-normative person, I clearly see my privilege and power through this example.

Establishing a common language with trans identity can be challenging because of the many ways that trans individuals construct their gender and interpret their experiences. Transgender identity and experience do not align with normative gender definitions. The discourse of law is structured around a binary framework so navigating the legal system is challenging for the trans population especially when wanting a fair and just process. Trans people do not fit into the binary systems so the language itself can create barriers to access and understanding.

Moving beyond binary descriptors and gender-normative thinking, trans people can rely on their history to unite on common ground as gender outlaws. This history serves as a springboard for advocacy work toward the freedom of gender expression and policies that support safety and inclusion. It also serves as a reference point for the progress that has been made and aids in identifying where more work is needed. Higher education is one area that needs to become more trans aware and trans responsive. A traditional system founded on binary assumptions of operation, enrollment, and student engagement, the academy has an opportunity to become the progressive leader in offering quality education in trans affirming and supportive spaces.

Transgender Students in Higher Education

Many students explore different aspects of identity as young adults while in college. For trans students, this time away from home is often the first opportunity they have had to challenge the gender role they were assigned at birth. The college years are formative ones. On campus, students are in an environment that enables them to play with gender, question what fits for their authentic selves, and integrate transgenerness into their lives as adults (Lees, 1998). When considering education and learning, student identity development is a significant aspect of the college and university experience. Not only are students pursuing a degree but they are evolving as individuals. Student development is such a central part of the college experience that it would be easy to assume universities are formally responsible for this aspect of their growth. Practitioners learn to apply psychosocial models such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Chickering's vectors of psychosocial development, or even Cass's model of homosexual identity formation to understand the student experience. These psychosocial frameworks encourage a

progression, of sorts, toward an accomplished, more aware and self actualized state. They reflect a binary model that stays entrenched in the dominant discourse.

Parallels exist between these frameworks and the academy when defining success such as passing each class to accomplish a major and progress toward a degree. I acknowledge these similarities between the organization and the individual to note the binary discourse that they represent. With some transgender students, the steps are less clear and the path suggests more fluidity than distinction. Trans in particular, are challenged to fit in to an environment that adheres rigidly to gender-normative constructs.

The literature related to these college students, while limited, has some components in common. They are identity formation; facility concerns such as restrooms, locker rooms and housing that offer secured privacy; safety; administrative systems; policies, college records, and documents; and programs that can offer support such as safe zones or GLBT centers.

Identity Formation

Today's college students are coming to campus with increasingly more complex and diverse developmental issues and needs than ever before in the history of higher education. While the literature is growing in this area, it is not concentrated within a specific discipline so no single theoretical framework guides student affairs professionals. Instead, university administrators often utilize a variety of student development theories to offer insight into student behavior and their emotional and cognitive reactions. Three of these theories, in particular, relate to the trans student from a student affairs perspective. These are Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Chickering's seven vectors of identity formation, and Cass's model of homosexual identity formation (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DeBrito, 1998).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs emphasizes the importance of home and sense of security which is one of its basic premises (Evans et al., 1998). It is a five level pyramid growing from physiological needs up to self-actualization. The stages are: Physiological basic needs (breathing, food, water, sex, sleep homeostasis, excretion), safety/security (security of body, employment, resources, family, health, morality, property), psychological needs (love and belonging through friendship, family, sexual intimacy), self-esteem (confidence, achievement, respect for others, respect by others), and self-actualization (self-sufficiency, authenticity, creativity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts.) When students go off to college, often it is the first time they are away from family, friends and all things familiar. Colleges and universities need to consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs when students transition to campus so that staff can be intentional about offering support, comfort, and a sense of mattering. During the first few weeks of school students are most at risk because they have not established their peer group yet. They have a roof over their heads and food to eat in the dining centers but interpersonally it can be very isolating at college without the help and the caring outreach of resident advisors (RAs) or other staff. If basic needs are met, such as food, shelter, and support, then a sense of security and safety are established with the student trusting the institution and feeling motivated to stay. This sense builds on itself as relationships unfold with friends, faculty, and staff to establish a feeling of belonging and institutional affiliation. Trans students, who are self-conscious or still unclear about their gender identity and are betwixt and between, could isolate themselves as a defense mechanism so institutions need to be intentional about the outreach and welcome that are extended to gender-variant students.

For trans students, this sense of home and security is two-fold. When they come out as trans to their parents, their sense of home and security can be threatened. Many have been

kicked out of their homes and rejected by family members. These students have a very real need for a secure and supportive space on campus if home life is no longer a nurturing environment. The second aspect of home and security is captured when trans students have housing and a personal space that physically meets their needs. Typical questions trans students ask are: Is it secure and private? Are the staff caring and open? Would they be approachable if the truth came out and a trans student had an emergent need? How can they feel safe and encouraged in this physical space that is now their home away from home? Living in the residence halls on campus offers great amenities for the college trans student. RAs are caring peers who have knowledge about university resources and offer emotional encouragement without judgement. The RA is also working to foster a sense of safety and security in the living environment so students can thrive and focus on academic success. The facilities are as much about the literal space and feeling safe and secure as they are about the emotional and psychological connections students establish in communities where they feel welcomed and included.

Chickering's seven vectors of identity formation are becoming competent, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing mature relationships, developing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity which are all connected to the college student experience. Trans students work on these areas just like their peers and, depending on the stability of their ego strength and gender identity, will learn how to further solidify their identity formation while relating to friends and loved ones. Mastery of an academic discipline, forging new relationships, considering different perspectives and being engaged in a comprehensive college experience force students to reflect and deepen their self awareness and life skills which fine tune Chickering's vectors of identity (Evans et al., 1998).

Trans students, along with their peers, get to practice these skills through their interpersonal relationships and the responsibilities that come with being on their own while pursuing a degree. Learning to live with a roommate is a perfect example of how students can learn to manage their emotions, develop mature relationships, and develop integrity. Peer pressure and wanting to fit in, two typical aspects of student adjustment, can be further exaggerated by students questioning their gender identity.

Finally, Cass's model of homosexual identity formation (Evans et al., 1998) has influence on the ways students accept and understand their sexual identities. While sexuality and gender are not the same thing, they are closely intertwined and are often assumed to be integrated for the trans person especially while in young adulthood. The stages of this model include identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and finally, identity synthesis which, in many ways, parallels the experience of some trans individual's realization that their gender does not align with their body or, for a more political lens, that they do not wish to align with a gender-normative definition of male or female. Utilizing these theories in order to better understand the trans experience highlights where additional help and support are needed for student success. The university environment is a prime location for students to reflect on, and explore, their gender identity and how it relates to those around them.

Identity theories are often used to describe overall experiences and sometimes trans students struggle to make sense of these in relation to their gender identities. When these struggles occur, university counseling centers are an excellent resource where trained professionals offer support in an open and nonjudgemental way. Counseling can provide a culturally-appropriate safe space for students to explore their identities and address the typical college related issues that occur according to Gould (2004, as cited in Beemyn, 2005). While

trans students share similar experiences with nontransgender students, they have a host of culturally specific issues related to their gender identity development that add additional layers of complexity to the emotional work they do on a daily basis. These include coming out to themselves as well as their friends and families, deciding whether or not to transition, navigating gendered environments such as the residence halls and bathrooms, negotiating intimate relationships that fall outside of traditional female and male identities, seeking health care services, surviving discrimination and harassment and adjusting to a new social identity (Beemyn, 2005). Student identity development is a prominent aspect of growth and maturity during the college years and it is important that the environment is conducive to this personal examination and learning. The nature of the physical landscape of facilities also plays a vital role in how trans students successfully navigate their campus experience and their campus community.

Facilities

The literature talks about facilities on campus in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this study, emphasis is placed on restrooms in academic and administrative buildings, housing that offers privacy and/or a sense of welcome to gender-nonconforming students, as well as locker rooms that can provide a single, secure unit for showering and self-care. Bathrooms, as well as housing, are often stuck within the traditional binary construct of male or female designation which stifles trans students and limits their options.

Residential housing is a stimulating part of the campus experience that can truly enhance the quality of life for students. Supportive staff members reach out to residents and help them transition to college. They provide opportunities for students to connect formally and informally, and residents are encouraged to get involved and forge lasting friendships.

Additionally, campus housing is in close proximity to classes and campus resources. The challenge with these environments is their strict adherence to binary descriptors for room assignments and bathroom designation. Institutions need to modify their policies and practices to be more welcoming to trans students. Gender neutral housing has been discussed in the literature and while not always a possibility, it is an option schools are starting to consider. Typically, rooms are assigned as male or female with no other alternatives. This practice continues to be the dominant model emphasizing male and female assigned spaces. Housing applications still, for the most part, limit the categories of gender to male and female which marginalizes those individuals who do not identify as such.

If college administrators want to continue to meet student needs, they must create inclusive practices that recognize diverse gender identities and offer a variety of options. For those institutions that have policies banning discrimination on the basis of gender identity and/or expression, this is both a legal requirement as well as a professional obligation (Beemyn, 2005). Some colleges and universities are changing the sex designation on their housing contracts to better identify and assist trans students (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2005, as cited in Beemyn, 2005). Asking if someone is male or female not only fails to recognize the full complexity of gender identity, but also provides insufficient information for roommate assignments. More appropriate alternatives to binary boxes are simple fill in the blank options, “Your gender is: _____,” or the multiple choices of “Male,” “Female,” “Self-Identity: _____” (Beemyn, 2005, p. 52). Residence life departments are well-positioned to follow-up with these individual students as a way to establish a supportive relationship and also to identify how best to meet the student needs within a community building context. Demonstrating understanding of,

and sensitivity toward, transgender experiences help to create a welcoming environment where students can assess the best housing fit for their individual circumstances (Beemyn, 2005).

Student affairs professionals must be aware of their housing options if they are determined to establish policies that support the trans experience. Most residential campuses have traditional style housing which commonly means bedrooms that run along a corridor with a large shared bathroom, limiting individual privacy. By knowing what is available, residence life staff can help the transgender student to identify a housing option most suited to individual needs on a case by case basis (Curtis & Tubbs, 2004). In order to offer this help, housing systems need to provide access for students to self identify as trans and be willing to explore living options that welcome gender-nonconforming students into community.

Private restrooms and showers are preferred for transgender students for safety reasons. Gender-neutral bathrooms should be noted by staff in halls where less privacy is offered as well as the availability of lockable stalls verses the shower curtain barriers. Additionally, determining the cost variation of these options should be reviewed and considered if they suggest a higher cost burden on a trans student to ensure safety (Beemyn, 2005). The interest in gender-neutral restrooms is high for gender-variant students and their allies but not everyone is in favor of this kind of facility's support for trans students. At Boise State (BSU), the BSU College Republicans called for clarification indicating that they did not want transgender bathrooms to be labeled as such on campus (Huckabee, 2007). Insiders on campus are not necessarily supportive of their gender-nonconforming peers or any accommodations being made on their behalves.

While facilities are not the only way to place value on the college experience, when it comes to meeting basic needs with restroom comfort and housing privacy, it can dramatically impact student satisfaction and retention. Trans students face limited options with very little

room for accommodation. Institutions have to value the need for their facilities to become more gender-variant friendly and implement necessary upgrades and changes that serve not only the trans student population but many others as well. Just like Maslow's hierarchy of needs focuses on a sense of safety and security, facilities can hinder or help create a safe and supportive space for learning. Safety is defined emotionally, psychologically and physically and impacts students' abilities to learn and grow when not provided in a responsive and caring way. This next section will provide more specific detail on this theme.

Safety

There are a number of things to consider regarding safety of trans students on campus. The physical landscape of facilities is an obvious and important component; however, there are psychological and physical safety concerns plaguing our trans students on college and university campuses today. Plevitz (2005) notes the following observations about bullying:

Over the last decade in Australia there has been a growing awareness of verbal bullying as a 'serious, and insidious, form of violence that plagues the school system.' Bullying has always existed; it demonstrates dominant behavior and reinforces group cohesion. The victims of bullying are afraid to complain for fear of reprisals; the bullying usually only comes to light when the student refuses to go to school, does not achieve their academic potential, or, in tragic cases, is driven to suicide. (p.1)

The United States (U.S.) also faces these concerns of verbal harassment, physical violence and the reality of suicide. Just recently, the U.S. had extensive media coverage following six suicide deaths that occurred within a month's time involving GLBT teenagers. Two of these individuals were college students and all were the result of teasing, taunting,

bullying, and in one instance a posting of a sexually intimate video of one of the college students by his roommate on the internet (LGBTQnation, 2010; UCSB, 2010; Servantez, 2010).

While these tragedies did not involve a transgender student, they easily could have as trans students are often the targets of similar verbal taunts, harassment and violence. Bullying and meanness creates a hostile environment that hinders student learning and success. In 2003, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force conducted a survey of 1600 GLBT students, faculty, and administrators from 14 campuses. The findings were documented in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2003) stating, “More than one-third of the respondents said they had experienced harassment within the past year. Twenty percent said they feared for their safety because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, and 51 percent said they sometimes concealed their sexual identity to avoid intimidation (p. A36).” Having a sense of safety is as much a concern about the psychological wellbeing of trans students as it is about the physical environment supporting their engagement. This survey shows that trans are not the only subculture on campus who are fearful of negative repercussions as a result of their nonnormative gender and sexual identities.

The notion of passing is another important aspect of trans student safety. One’s ability to pass successfully impacts bathroom culture and the restroom experience. Individual gender presentation challenges society’s expectation that someone is either female and feminine or male and masculine. When not easily recognized within the normative binary of female or male, trans students can become vulnerable to harassment and violence. Some of the most dangerous places on many campuses for transgender students are restrooms and locker rooms designated for “women” or “men.” Anecdotal and research evidence suggest that transgender people often face verbal and physical assault and risk being questioned or even arrested by the police when they

use gender-specific facilities (Beemyn, 2005, p.55). When considering the real and possible threat, it is not surprising that transgender students would experience extensive anxiety around the use of bathrooms and locker rooms on college campuses. The dangers are so real that many will travel well out of their way to use a private restroom or, they will avoid using any facilities at the expense of their own comfort and health (Beemyn, 2005).

The more colleges and universities can consider the needs of transgender students and offer facilities that accommodate privacy, safety, and gender-inclusive language, the higher the likelihood that trans students will be retained in the campus community. Another way to assist in this validation is through inclusion in policies, college records and systems and by providing seamless and easy ways to alter records pertaining to identity when needed.

Policies, Records, and Systems

Transgender students, who aim to transition from one gender to another, typically seek to also change their name and sex on university records and documents. This enables them to create a congruent link between their desired gender identity and their legal relationship with the institution. Students face varying degrees of challenge with this process depending on the state where they are attending school. “Not only does having the appropriate name and gender reflect and validate their identities, but it may also prevent transgender students from being placed into an uncomfortable and dangerous situation where they would have to explain why they use a name different from their birth name and why their appearance does not match the photo or gender designation on an identification card” (Beemyn, 2005, p.58).

College campuses can be more trans friendly and supportive. The question lies in whether or not universities and colleges have the resources and willingness to offer such a process to their students. “Besides being a matter of fairness and respect, an accurate gender designation in

college files is critical to avoid outing transgender students and to help protect them from discrimination when they apply for jobs, seek admission to graduate and professional schools, and at any other time they must show a college document” (Beemyn, 2005, p.118). The University of Maryland is one school that allows students to change their name and gender on the university records if they provide a letter of support from a mental health professional. Ohio State University provides transgender students, who legally change their names, with the ability to change both their name and gender on their official college records. These changes are primarily housed in the Registrar’s office and no one outside of this office would have any knowledge that the student’s records had been altered. These universities are not the norm but are paving the way for more institutions to see how to better serve this population (Beemyn, 2005). By offering these processes, trans students can officially be recognized by their preferred name and gender and the institution then becomes a support vehicle instead of a roadblock to student retention and success.

Another area that potentially offers a sense of inclusion and welcome resides in the university’s nondiscrimination policy. Institutionally, the policy’s intent is to identify those community members whose identity is protected however this suggests some have security while others do not. These policies reflect a binary that privileges those named. Nondiscrimination clauses often include sex and occasionally sexual orientation as protected categories but, depending on how the trans student, faculty or staff member identifies, these may not apply to the individual. Adding the words “gender, gender identity, and/or gender expression” to a nondiscrimination clause can alleviate some of these shortcomings and establish a trans person’s ability to pursue legal recourse if it were warranted. For example, The University of Iowa implemented this change in 1996. Going one step further by adding “gender expression” enables

there to be recognition of the variety of ways gender is presented or performed which suggests a contemporary approach to validating this portion of the campus community realizing gender construction is unique to each person. Other colleges and universities have moved forward with similar recommendations by enacting policies that prohibit discrimination against gender-variant people such as Brown University, DePauw College, University of Washington, and Knox College to name a few (Beemyn, 2005). Michigan State University (MSU) recently presented a report that focused a great deal on terminology about trans identity, what it is, and how they believe trans identities to be on a continuum of restrictive gender binaries that they can enact. The MSU report went on to say that there needs to be an openness and fluidity to the language and that as much as a clear definition is desired, they were not going to provide one. Adding trans-inclusive language to nondiscrimination policies not only announces that gender-variant people are recognized as members of the campus community and are a protected class. It is interesting to consider the notion of naming and its implications. There is power in being recognized as part of the community.

Programs

As the trans population becomes increasingly more visible on college and university campuses, it is important to have knowledgeable staff and relevant programs that address the needs and concerns of gender-variant students. Providing informative trainings, supporting a campus GLBTA center or community space, as well as offering Safe Zones programs and sensitivity trainings are all ways to educate the campus community and foster a trans-positive culture. Beemyn (2005) suggests that the intent of these trainings should be to increase knowledge and raise awareness about trans identity and lifestyles and to also offer skills that can be found in a good ally on campus. Ideally these trainings would then lead to action steps that

participants are willing to employ to improve the workplace environment for people of all genders. These educational experiences should be provided across all levels of university personnel including, but not limited to, senior administrators, health workers, counseling professionals, public safety officials and campus police, Residence Life staff, custodial staff, campus religious leaders, and clerical support.

Providing an office or center enables the university to offer programs and services to transgender, gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, faculty and staff in ways that uniquely address their experiences and concerns. Such institutional support validates GLBT student presence on campus as valued community members and offers a visible location for ongoing education and advocacy (Beemyn, 2005). This is also true of programs like Safe Zones or Safe Spaces where educational outreach is utilized as a vehicle for raising awareness about the GLBT experiences on the college campus and to create visible allies among faculty, staff, and administrators. While helpful, Safe Zone programs have historically focused more information on gay, lesbian and bisexual identity so work needs to be done to insure that trans-specific and trans-inclusive materials are shared and added in meaningful ways (Beemyn, 2005).

There are curricular dimensions to validating the transgender experience. Transgender studies have created an avenue for discussion, a new discourse and advocacy. Limited research has been published on trans students but does indicate that this population is subject to higher rates of harassment, discrimination and marginalization than nontransgender students (Rankin, 2003, as cited in Beemyn et al, 2005). Many transgender students experience rejection from their families, violence, isolation and harassment which often lead to social and economic stresses. These, in turn, can become more extensive mental health concerns such as adjustment disorders,

posttraumatic stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, self-harm and substance abuse (Dean, 2000).

Simultaneously, it is necessary to extend these educational outreach initiatives to the larger academic community as a way to model both inclusion and a commitment to raising awareness and diversity. This also ensures that visibly normative-presenting trans students have an avenue of connection to the GLBT resources as well.

Summary

With a review of the literature, it is clear that transgender individuals are making strides to create a place within society. This has been done through many years of political action, advocacy, and research. That said, transgender rights are still compromised and there is a need for change to ensure more equitable access and support are available. Trans college students are increasing in numbers. Administrators, faculty, and staff have an opportunity to expand their knowledge as well as the quality of their outreach in meaningful ways if willing to learn about this population. Universities have the ability to step beyond the confines of traditional frameworks and create access and support if motivated to build a welcoming and inclusive campus community through the development of resource centers, trainings, policy, and programs. By listening to trans students' experiences, this research will offer authentic voices as the guide for establishing positive change. A poststructural-feminist theoretical lens, described in the next chapter, examines the influence of language, the power of difference, deconstructs binary and institutional systems of oppression, and shapes arguments for supporting the individual construction of gender.

Reading the literature available in the field helps to identify the gaps in practice as well as the prominent needs of this student population. The most common themes addressing the

transgender student experience emphasized the need for seamless and easy access to name and gender changes on university records and systems, safety, the need for privacy, support from knowledgeable and informed administrators and faculty, and the desire to be a part of a welcoming campus community from a higher education perspective as a named stakeholder. Literature addressing how trans identity is, in fact, manifested by the students within their communities from an emotional and psychological perspective, was lacking. Articles were more readily available from a research, cultural, theoretical, or political stance, whereas the literature on trans students within higher education remains limited. The research in this dissertation is an important vehicle for raising awareness and expanding knowledge regarding how best to serve trans students on college and university campuses today.

This awareness will enable administrators, faculty, and staff to offer more specific and helpful support. Ideally, it will aid in shifting the campus culture so trans students are not an afterthought when it comes to services and organizational systems, such as the name-change process, being provided. A door is opened for easier engagement when people feel informed and confident to know how to respond. It matters that there is sensitivity accompanying this awareness because, as some of the participants described, there are moments when students, or others, inadvertently or intentionally reveal very private matters. In those moments, are university officials able to respond with respect and dignity toward the trans student involved?

A review of the literature offered an interesting past that recognizes the struggle and opposition faced by transgender people in society and on college campuses. It also acknowledges the tremendous strides made over time with the help of brave advocates, dedicated scientists, and medical professionals. Transgender students face adversity on college and university campuses. Trans students remain vulnerable to hate, harassment, violence and suicide

when bullying and disrespect are allowed. It is time to explore better ways to understand and serve transgender students on campus. This next chapter will provide an overview of the research methods for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

CONDUCTING RESEARCH: METHODOLOGY, THEORY and DATA

Introduction

Trans students are an underserved population whose college experience could vastly improve if administrators and faculty successfully met the needs of gender-variant students and provided a sense of worth and welcome with services to support them in an open and affirming way. This study is about the lives of eighteen transgender students, more specifically how they define their gender identities and navigate the campus culture and experience. Creswell (2003) suggests the need for a research design to act as a framework for the work that lies ahead. He identifies four components of this design which are epistemological stance, theoretical framework, methodology, and method. This chapter is organized with these components in mind.

Epistemological Stance

For this study, the epistemological stance is critical, assuming that language, relationships, and lived experiences are socially constructed according to each individual's emotions, context, historical knowledge and perspectives. Lincoln (1997) offers the understanding that there are many intersecting opportunities, selves, and contexts to identity. Utilizing a critical epistemological stance creates an open research environment that recognizes multiple aspects of identity as being important and unique to each participant. Learning how trans students construct their experience and express their identities has the potential to create greater understanding of the ways in which they have formed their gender identity in the higher education context. This knowledge can offer insight about the ways that constructing individual identities expands beyond the binary of male and female. This epistemological stance is

important because it values individual interpretation and personal expression. As part of this study, it offers a framework for making sense of participant experiences that legitimize their approach to relating in their environments through their gender identity.

Theoretical Framework

A poststructural-feminist theoretical lens provides a framework for analysis and deeper understanding to guide the research in this study. “In feminist research, the goals are to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative” (Creswell, 1998, pg. 83). Lather (1991) suggests that feminist researchers identify gender as a basic organizing principle that influences and shapes lives while Fox-Keller (1995) is more of the opinion that gender provides a lens to focus on certain questions. When considering the transgender student, gender interpretation and presentation are central in shaping identity and consciousness. Not unlike Lather’s (1991) aim of feminist researchers to work to correct the distortion and invisibility of women’s unequal social position, poststructural-feminist research can aid in liberating trans students from the constraints of gender-normative society.

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2008) talk about the roles of choice and discourse as part of a poststructural-feminist framework and examine gender and gender differences as they relate to societal structures. They reference Weedon’s (1997) definition of poststructural feminism as a viable working model for deeper understanding in the context of higher education. Weedon defines poststructural feminism as “a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructural theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change” (p.40). Derrida (as cited in Barker, 2000) deconstructs power relations most commonly observed in binary oppositions. In particular

this involves dismantling systems such as nature/culture, reality/appearance, man/woman, white/black which exclude the perceived inferior part of the binary. When I consider this deconstruction, I am able to recognize those halves of the binaries that are awarded more power: Man, straight, white and the list goes on. Interestingly enough, trans individuals are completely removed from the binary unless presenting as normative females or males. “Poststructuralism rejects the idea of an underlying stable structure that finds meaning through fixed binary pairs. . . rather, meaning is unstable, being always deferred and in process” (Barker, 2000, p.17). I propose that meaning, for the transgender student, is defined exactly as the relationship between what is known and understood to be female and what is known and understood to be male, on their individual terms and through their unique interpretations. This includes, but is not limited to, betwixt and between space, the flux filled, questioning, exploring, dabbling, multisensory, culturally and socially influenced gender space that celebrates many small truths which suggest every and all things are possible and will be understood in many diverse and unique ways. Poststructural-feminist theory supports trans identity by naming it and placing value on its unspecified, creative, individually subjective and socially constructed, open experience.

Language directly impacts the trans student experience because it is not often representative or inclusive of these students’ realities. The gender binary of male and female is a perfect example as there are limited, if any, words that offer additional options for gender identity in dominant western culture. Each trans identity is subjective, personally defined, and unique, dismissing social rules of order, presentation, and distinction. Trans students, in all of the ways that they define their identity, are counter culture when considering established gender binaries. Social processes suggest the unspoken rules of acceptance, access, and affiliation. Trans students push the limits when interpreting these rules. They are also the ones to be

ostracized when found outside of the social norm. Higher education, despite its modern structure, perpetuates positions of power, privilege, and oppression through its rigid adherence to traditional policies and practices that do not meet the current needs of underrepresented groups. The academy attempts to name and offer inclusive opportunities but still relies heavily on entrenched thinking, doing, and saying. Language is constantly used to reinforce the power systems reflected in old traditions.

Not only does poststructural feminism focus on language, meaning, power, difference, and subjectivity (Allan, Estler & Iverson, 2004; Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Scott, 1988; Weedon, 1997) but change is another central element which questions the status quo. Trans students, by virtue of their identity, play with systems of power and struggle to find their place. The poststructural feminist perspective will help to change the face and work of higher education by relating to trans students' needs and identities in an informed and compassionate way. In this study, a poststructural-feminist perspective is used to examine how trans students have experienced language and power systems within the university setting and how it influences their comfort level, sense of safety and place, as well as support.

When considering this theoretical framework, feminist-poststructural perspective is appropriate given the influence of language on the trans experience. It is important to note what is said, but equally relevant to observe what is not mentioned. "Derrida pointed out that Western thought has always overvalued or privileged language – so much so that we mistake language for the Real. What is named is real, and what is not has no existence...The privileging of language as the arbiter of reality has been especially hard on gender. As we've seen most nonnormative experiences of gender are excluded from language, and what little language we have for gender transcendence is defamatory" (Wilchins, 2002, pp. 38-39). An interesting example of the

privilege of language is being named in a nondiscrimination clause, but as many trans students were able to verify, this naming is rare, if at all, and as such, leaves them with no formal or institutionally valued recognition on campus. Another example of the power and exclusion of language is obviously reflected in the naming of bathrooms as “women’s” or “men’s” where transgender individuals are expected to fit but rarely align with the social assumptions and rules of access in these distinct spaces. As defeating as these examples suggest, many trans students are finding ways to be recognized and engaged on their college campuses through activism and personal outreach but it is not without frustration, disappointment and the ongoing arduous task of self-promotion. Their initiative is motivated by the desire to be an officially recognized part of their campus communities and to feel safe and welcome.

In the environment of higher education, language binds us to certain assumptions that define progress and student success such as the variation in grades, the programs of study that direct your coursework, progression of classes toward a specific degree and graduation. Many of these assumptions are rooted in a binary framework. But it is in these absolute binaries that there is no place for the trans student given the nature of their gender identity. Best and Kellner (1995) continue to reference Derrida’s position as:

The binary oppositions of governing Western philosophy and culture (subject/object, appearance/reality, speech/writing, and so on) work to construct a far from innocent hierarchy of values which attempts not only to guarantee truth, but also serve to exclude and devalue allegedly inferior terms or positions. This binary metaphysics thus works to positively position reality over appearance, speech over writing, men over women, or reason over nature, thus positioning negatively the supposedly inferior term. (p.527)

I would argue that this binary structure alienates trans students because gender normativity of male and female does not allow for alternative gender reflections. When considering the deconstruction of this thinking, Bloland (1995, p.527) suggests that hidden inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities within academia can then be pointed out showing how much hierarchy is based on what appear to be arbitrary exclusions that place people and ideas on the margin or exclude them entirely. “Poststructuralism does not allow us to place blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice” (St. Pierre, 2000, p.484). This study reveals these exclusions through the transgender student’s experience and demands each person has responsibility in creating open and affirming learning environments.

The irony rests in the fact that higher education, the place where knowledge is continually generated and expansive thinking is encouraged, for all that it offers and aspires to be, is seemingly ignorant and limiting. Higher education touts inclusion and comprehensive learning but practices marginalization in its very definition of progress. Higher education is composed of hierarchies whereby some are named as valued and protected members of the community and others are not. The disciplines within the academy are arranged in a loose hierarchy of discourses with preference extended to the arts and sciences over education and the physical sciences over the humanities and social sciences. Research takes precedence over teaching, a doctoral degree is weighted over a master’s which has prominence over a bachelor’s which takes priority over an associate’s degree, and so on (Bloland, 1995). Transgender students are not in a category that situates them to be named within the hierarchy of recognized and protected classes. A goal of this research is to identify how some colleges and universities are ill-prepared to support and encourage student success with trans populations as a result of

organizational systems but there is the potential to effect positive change. This knowledge influences this study by recognizing the binary systems, and deconstructing the dominant discourses. Linking back to the research questions, if systems are identified that enhance or hinder student success, then measures can be taken to continue them or dismantle the service.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative and primarily relies on interviews and artifact/document analysis as data collection methods. Personal stories provide insights about the lived experiences of transgender students and also identify where the university environment is, and is not, meeting their needs. The artifact analysis addresses the roles, if any, played by the nondiscrimination clauses of the participants' institutions as well as the influence of Safe Zone programs on campus culture. The research questions, for this study, explored what it means to be transgender, the ways trans identity is manifested, the experiences of the trans student on campus, and the organizational structures that hinder or enhance the transgender college experience. To address these questions, qualitative techniques were most fitting given the desire to capture and understand the unique experiences of the participants. Establishing access, getting informed consent, directly involving the study participants through interviews, artifact analysis, data analysis, trustworthiness, and research limitations were all necessary elements of this qualitative research.

Establishing Access

Approval was granted through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study with a rationale provided for why the research was important and necessary. The rationale emphasized that this study was necessary because the literature on transgender students in higher education is extremely limited and desperately needed. In order to better serve this population,

more knowledge is needed to inform how students define their trans identity, what the college experience is like, and what they need in order to be successful. With IRB approval and the population identified, it was important to consider who the appropriate students were for the study. Seidman (1998) cautions against those participants who were simply easy access, had outside relationships with the researcher, or were friends because of the potential for discomfort. He also suggests that pursuing participants who had similar power status as opposed to above or below could better insure the demand for equity. All communication with participants attempted to model respect and the desire to establish a trusting relationship through clear research guidelines and frequent communication. Additionally, every effort was made to accommodate their schedules and to be flexible where needed. Discussing the informed consent, either verbally or in person, was another way to insure that all who were involved were willing participants.

When conducting the interviews, each student expressed verbal support for the study and said that not enough research was being done in this area. While each of their lived experiences represented a unique and individual identity, they had similar themes that were of importance to them. These similarities were reflected in both a physical, tangible sense related to their experiences but also on an emotional level when considering how deeply personal and complex identity is and how they grappled with the emotional and psychological realities of their transgender selves.

The main vehicles for establishing access were personal and professional contacts. Bertaux (1981) states that snowball sampling enables one participant to lead to another via word-of-mouth or through related list serves and other networks within the community. I reached out to colleagues working in GLBT centers as well as to professionals connected through NASPA's GLBT Knowledge Community with an email describing my study and requesting their help in

identifying participants. I was particularly interested in pursuing a snowball sample because it would reach students from across the country and from different institutional types ultimately capturing diverse representations of trans identity as well as campus cultures. In the case of this study, more word-of-mouth was extended from predominantly gender-normative, non trans administrators who forwarded my email to individuals that they had worked with, and those students contacted me directly.

My goal, originally, was to interview 12-15 people. Through a “last push” for participants sent via an email reminder about the study, I acquired three more, for a total of 18 students. Of those interviewed, 14 participants volunteered because of having received my email from a mentor, professor, or friend. Two students volunteered through encouragement from one of the participants via a Facebook trans-man group. One, of the two, wanted to take an extra measure of precaution and requested to communicate with the trans man that I supported previously to ensure that I was trustworthy. This contact was provided and communication encouraged, and the student decided to move forward as a participant. Finally, I made direct contact with two students who I knew previously through my work. Using a snowball sample was an extremely successful way to pursue participants for this study and once identified, the interviews proceeded as planned.

Six interviews were conducted face-to-face in the Pacific Northwest and the remaining 12 were digitally recorded over the phone with participants from across the United States. Interviews lasted on average for one hour and forty five minutes. The shortest interview was ninety minutes, and the longest two interviews were two hours and fifteen minutes. The questions from the interviews focused on definitions of transgender identity, the college experience, issues associated with attending college, perspectives about campus initiatives and

policy, campus resources, and organizational practices that hindered or enhanced student success.

Every interview, while using the same questions, took on its own personality directly influenced by the rapport established between the researcher and participant. The interviews varied in time but followed the protocol plan. When I did not understand something, I would ask for clarification and the participants would provide more detail. With practice the interviews grew more comfortable and more efficient.

Saturation and sufficiency indicate a meaningful number of participants. Saturation is often discussed, among qualitative researchers, as being that point in the study where no new learning is occurring; interviewers are hearing the same things from the participants so the knowledge is essentially saturated (Douglas, 1976; Glaser & Strauss, 1967. Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Sufficiency enabled me to select enough participants to span the variety of experiences so that outsiders could relate to the stories and there is a sense of representation. For this reason, it was important to diversify the participant pool in this study to include trans students who differ from one another demographically, institutionally, as well as in how they define their gender identity. Interviewing 18 students aided in reaching the point of saturation. Saturation was achieved fairly quickly and sufficiency was also accomplished with the 18 interviews.

Study Participants

The sample of this study involved 18 participants who identify as transgender and are either currently enrolled or have graduated within the past five years from primarily four-year, residential institutions across the country. Personal interviews were the primary focus and artifact analysis offered insights regarding each participant's campus culture as an organization.

Of the eighteen individuals who participated in the study, five students were currently enrolled in, or nearing completion of, graduate programs, three of whom were Ph.D. students in the areas of Psychology, Physics, and Social Work. Nine students were pursuing undergraduate degrees in a variety of majors including, but not limited to, Women's Studies, Spanish, Massage Therapy, Counseling, Anthropology and Linguistics. Four individuals had graduated. Of these, two were employed, one of whom was not working within his major, one was in a job-search pursuing an administrative position in higher education, and one was applying to graduate school in higher education with an interest in teaching as well as conducting research on trans-related issues. Two participants self-identified as being biracial, a third participant claimed "rainbow" as her race, and the rest identified as white. Four considered themselves to be nontraditional students with ages ranging from early 30s to late 50s. Two, of the eighteen participants, were fraternal twins, two were parents, and the majority of individuals interviewed were raised in Christian households.

Table 1 offers basic demographic information for each participant. The categories in the table include: Pseudonyms used to maintain participant anonymity, biological sex at birth, current age, age of gender variance which is the age that participants first recalled recognizing being different with regard to their gender identity. The gender identity category represents the words and identities that each participant claimed and the pronoun preference identifies what they are most comfortable using for themselves. Sexual orientation, race, and religion were included because most, at some point or another, were referred to by the students. Finally, I included family with the consideration of siblings and parent roles as well as where they were raised to recognize the locations of their upbringings. This list is not exhaustive however it provides basic demographic data on each student's identity.

(See Table 1)

Table 1

Respondent Demographics

Name	Bio. Sex at Birth	Current Age	Age of Gender Variance	Gender Identity	Pronoun Pref.	Sexual Orient	Race	Religion	Family/Raised
Chance	F	21	13-15	Fluid	Male	Fun Fluid	White	Spiritual	Div. Parents/ 1 sis; NJ/CA
Sylvie	M	40	6/39	Fluid	Female	Fluid	White	Daoist	Father, 1ygr sis, 1 ygr bro; rural MI
Kael	F	22	___	Transgender	Male	___	Bi-racial	Christ.	Parents, 1ygr sis, 1 ygr bro; Seattle, WA
Judy	M	58	___	Female, Post-op Lesbian	Female	Lesbian	White	Born Again Christ.	Father, 1 sis; Texas
Morgan	F	25	___	Trans	Neutral	Queer	White	___	1odr bro, 1 ygr bro; Midwest
Antonio	F/ Intersex	22	___	Gender queer	Male	Gay	Bi-racial	South. Baptist	No sibs; Atlanta, GA
Kathy	M	21	3-4	Gender Queer; Trans Feminine	Neutral	___	White	South. Baptist	Father, 1odr bro, 1odr sis, 1 ygr bro; Rural VA
Twyla	F	25	9-10	Queer gender	Neutral	Queer	White	___	___

				queer						
Andrew	F	20	15	Trans guy	Male	Queer/ straight	White	Christian	Parents, twin bro,1 ygr sis;	
Erin	M	26	10	Non binary trans. Female ident. Spec.; gender queer	prefers no pronoun; if used, prefers Neutral	Gender queer	White	Catholic	1 ygr bro; rural PA	
Bruce	F	48	8	FtM, Trans man; Trans gender	Male	Gay	White	Christian	1odr bro, 1 ygr sis & bro; AZ/ WA	
Alex	F	30	8	Trans/ Queer	Male	Queer	White	Baptist	Los Angeles County	
Kat	Male	28	9	Hetero sexual Trans gender Woman	Female	Straight	White	Atheist	1 ygr bro; Dripping Springs, TX	
James	Female	34	2-3	FtM trans sexual, Trans gender	Male	Straight/ Married	White	Catholic	Detroit, MI	
Marek	Female	27	13/25	Trans gender/ Bigender	Male	Lesbian/ Trans	White	Polish Catholic	Mother, grandma ;	
Michael	Female	25	8-9	Trans guy; Trans gender	Male	Straight/ Married	White	Mormon	Parents, 1 bro, 1 sis; Eastern WA	
Edward	Female	28	—	Trans man	Male	Queer/ Married	White	United Methodi	1 twin bro; Seattle	

								st	WA
Kayd	Female	22	6	Trans Gender/ gender queer	All ok	Queer/ prefers girls	Rainbow	Mix: Buddism Christ. Judaism	2 ygr bro; Yakima WA

Note. Age of gender variance defines the age when participants first recognized their gender identity was non normative. Some descriptive words are abbreviated under gender identity and include: Female ident. Spec=female identified spectrum and FtM=female to male. Also, there are abbreviations for older (odr) and younger (ygr) siblings. Dashes represent Information that was not identified directly by student participant.

Informed Consent

Once participants were identified, a significant effort was made to communicate clear expectations about the research process, and to express support and appreciation of their contributions. As individual stories were unfolded, “a measure of intimacy developed between interviewer and participant that lead the participants to share aspects of their lives that, if misused, could have left them extremely vulnerable” (Seidman, 1998, p.49). Knowing the potential for this vulnerability to exist, measures were taken to provide a sense of support for each participant through open communication and by defining each aspect of the research process. The consent forms explained what they would be asked to do as well as identified possible risks and vulnerabilities that could surface. These forms were generated for signature, reviewed in an email as well as discussed orally in the case of long distance phone interviews. Participants were able to decline further involvement if they no longer wished to participate.

Interviews

Seidman (1998) identifies important interviewing techniques to keep in mind while conducting this research. These include, but are not limited to, listening more than talking, asking clarifying and open-ended questions, following up on participant comments, tolerating silence, and exploring laughter as participants share their stories. These principles were used in

the study and helped build rapport. The research was flexible in order to be able to follow hunches during the interviews if they arose and loosely followed an interview protocol. This process validated the researcher as the tool and fostered an interview experience that celebrated the representation of multiple voices. For trans students, who have often been silent, their stories can finally be told.

The interview protocol was comprised of eight sections with a series of questions in each area. The areas included, basic demographics, meaning of transgender, what are the manifestations of transgender identity to the participant, experiences of the trans student in college, student success, organizational structures that hinder/enhance experience, policies, and what will come next in their lives. This protocol was extensive, and I found some participants answering multiple questions at once. The interview experience provided a springboard for exploring areas not originally targeted for questioning such as participants unprompted insights, researcher hunches, as well as student comments in response to researcher observations, particularly in face-to-face interviews. (See interview protocol in Appendix B).

Qualitative research, specifically the interviews, creates a more intimate avenue of engagement. My research questions seek to understand the human, day-to-day life experiences of trans students and how their gender identity interacts with other aspects of their lives on campus. Through the conversation, I started to learn who they are, how they feel, and what their circumstance have been like. These interviews were personal. This research needs to be personal in order to truly understand trans students on campus. Identifying organizational systems that hinder their success can inform new ways of building the campus community. These interviews helped to portray, on a multisensory level, what matters and can make a difference for transgender students in college. Participants shared their thoughts and feelings

about their life circumstances and opened up in ways that provided detailed insights. The trans-student experience will become more visible and clear through the participants stories in Chapter Four creating a more comprehensive understanding of what it is like to live, and study, on campus as a member of an underrepresented group.

Artifact Analysis

The artifacts that were collected and analyzed were mostly nondiscrimination clauses from participants' institutions as well as Safe Zone campaign materials and resources where available. These artifacts influence the trans experience on multiple levels. The nondiscrimination clause identified whether gender, gender identity and gender expression were named as protective classes. While I suspected most college students did not research this topic per se, faculty and staff who would be looking for new employment in a diverse and inclusive community might. I found that less than a third of the participants were aware of their institution's nondiscrimination clause prior to attending their campus and that after arrival, approximately half were either aware of or also engaged in changing policy to add gender descriptors. Safe Zone programs, where established and visible, suggested a greater level of support for GLBT identified students, faculty and staff. Additionally, they provided a way for participants to get involved, most often through speaker's panels. That said, these were understated programs that seemed to cater to the GLBT community and allies rather than the university system at large. The goal of the artifact analysis was to understand the institutional setting where the research participants were attending school.

Depending on their influence of the research topic and participants, these artifacts can further refine and shape theory. Just as Denzin (1989) noted, "Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above personal biases that stem

from single methodologies” so too can multiple artifacts. Both the interviews and artifact analysis helped to make meaning of the research questions and identify areas where additional perspectives or experiences could be considered. For some participants, the nondiscrimination clause was a prominent focus of their attention especially as they were advocating to have more gender-inclusive language added from the administration. Of the eighteen students interviewed, gender-neutral housing contracts, preferred name change process, and education/awareness trainings were discussed most often and could be excellent artifacts in future research. It would be interesting to review the syllabi for gender identity, queer theory and counseling classes, as well as resident advisor (RA) training. As the primary focus for information resides with the interviews, exploring the overt and subtle ways that these artifacts influence personal experience will serve to generate recommendations for best practices.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Huberman and Miles (1994), and Wolcott (1994b) all subscribe to similar data-analysis strategies in the analytic phase of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). Data was collected via the researcher’s hand-written notes on the interview protocols as well as through the digitally recorded interviews and typed transcriptions. Copies of every participant’s school(s) nondiscrimination policies were compiled to a master list and three-ring notebooks stored the materials in a secured location. This research process followed similar steps to their strategies by: Sketching ideas and summarizing protocol notes, incorporating feedback on ideas from peer debriefs as well as comments from participants, identifying codes, working with words through possible metaphors, reducing information by observing patterns, and relating categories between, and among, the participant’s stories. The use of pseudonyms and symbols were helpful tools to maintain student anonymity in the study and also to identify

common themes between participants. These themes were chunked into two overarching areas - the personal and the organizational/political - and comments were pulled from different students' interviews to represent each of the themes.

Applying a theoretical framework to the data helped to identify how trans students experience language and power on campus, but it did more than that. Poststructural feminism validates and normalizes the ways in which gender identity is manifested for each trans student. "Poststructuralism rejects the idea of an underlying stable structure that finds meaning through fixed binary pairs. Rather, meaning is unstable, being always deferred in process. Meaning cannot be confined to single words, sentences or particular texts but is the outcome of relationships between texts, that is, intertextuality" (Barker, 2000, p.17). Poststructuralism offers a framework for making sense of this identity in a counterintuitive environment such as higher education. When analyzing the interviews and artifacts, it was helpful to refer to the research questions as well as poststructural-feminist theory as a way to grapple with the data and seek meaning. Theory served as a guide to identify connections among the trans students' experiences and forced a critical examination of both the seen and said as well as the unseen. An examination of these connections revealed possible implications in the higher education environment. The findings from this analysis are presented in the next section and in Chapters Four through Six.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) share that member checking contributes to credibility and trustworthiness of the report by soliciting participant views on the accuracy of the findings. The interviews were transcribed and emailed to the participants in order to confirm that the spirit of their thoughts had been captured accurately (Seidman, 1998). A colleague served as the peer

debriefers for this study and offered feedback and support. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the peer debriefer as a devil's advocate, an individual who keeps the researcher honest. Asking hard questions, the peer debriefer examined interpretations, meanings and methods while offering a sympathetic ear during times of stress. This external check provided objective insights aimed to enhance the study. In this role, she offered comments that clarified my thoughts and identified ways to reorganize content to improve my writing. While my chair provided considerable guidance and feedback, it was helpful to have another trusted person to whom I could expose my questions and insecurities regarding the process. The peer debriefer offered ongoing support, reassurance that my work was meaningful and, from someone who also works in the field, the belief that this study could be transformational in higher education. This study has provided an opportunity for new knowledge and a deeper understanding of transgender students. It has also provided an opportunity to examine my positionality as a researcher.

Research Limitations

All research studies have limitations. Some of the constraints associated with this particular study include:

- Researcher bias could filter how findings are interpreted.
- Researcher communication style could distract from participant voices.
- Researcher desire to advocate could influence or impact ability to present findings in an objective manner.
- Sample size could be small given the specific population.
- Students might feel hesitant to participate if not "out" or concerned about confidentiality or researcher trustworthiness.

- Some institutions could be less attractive to trans students given their limited resources that address trans needs so might not be represented in the study.
- While the research could validate concerns and the need for change, funding and institutional support might not be available to move the research findings to action and implementation.
- Using a snowball sample might limit the number of participants given the reliance on word-of-mouth contacts and the researcher is unknown to participants.

These limitations, if not guarded against, have the potential to affect the study. While the process of research has its own rhythm, I am learning that the researcher can still, even with the best of intentions, interject value judgments unintentionally. The participants' voices are most powerful if left to speak for themselves so that the readers may draw their own conclusions based on the evidence provided. When considering this study's research limitations, many of them never materialized. Beyond the researcher's role, the sample size ended up exceeding the original goal of 12-15 participants. One student wanted to confirm researcher trustworthiness, a variety of institutional types were represented, and limited information was available regarding the reasoning behind the students' school selections. Utilizing the GLBT and NASPA contacts with outreach to students was helpful.

It is my hope that resources will be available to implement new initiatives for trans students based on the study findings but the current national budget crisis is a sobering reminder of the need to do more with less. While resources are limited, increased awareness and understanding about trans students on campus can begin to shift culture. In the following section, an overview of the findings provides highlights of common themes that frame part of the study analysis.

Interview Findings

At the conclusion of the interviews, I identified ten themes that could be organized into two overarching dimensions related to transgender identity and the trans-student experience. These were the “personal” and the “organizational/political.” The ten themes represented overlaps between participants and I determined their titles based on the stories that were being shared. First, trans students, themselves, volunteered to be interviewed. Individual profiles, including basic demographic information, were generated revealing provocative, rich, and heartfelt stories of their lives as transgender people. The students’ stories were so compelling that I felt it necessary to recognize their identities in their own chapter. This would enable me to acknowledge the significance of each profile while identifying the group as a whole.

The themes that connect to the overarching dimension of “the personal” (identity, language, binaries, visibility, safety, self-care, and relationships) will be introduced in this section, and greater detail will be provided in Chapter Five. The student voices, in the overarching dimension of “the organizational/political,” examine how the academy’s systems of operation impact and influence the trans student experience. There were many different ways that the participants defined their communities. Similarly they had a variety of examples to share regarding policies, records, and systems as well as their advocacy work. The details of these findings are the focus of Chapter Six.

As I begin to introduce participants and share about their lives, protecting their identity is a priority. In order to maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym for privacy. Most participants chose to use gender-normative names while some preferred names that could be associated with either male or female descriptors. When analyzing the data from

the interviews, the ten themes emerged as a way to more intimately connect to the trans reality. A brief overview of these themes follows.

Identity

While transgender focuses on gender identity, it is often intimately connected to, and occasionally intertwined with, sexual orientation. Many participants could intellectually state that gender and sexual orientation were two separate things but in defining how they interact and overlap with each other in the lived experience suggests a far more intimate connection and relationship. Identity includes the gender that they claim and touches on how their gender is presented to the world. Identity also touches on sexuality for those participants who connected their gender and sexuality as a fluid state.

Language

When discussing language, each participant shared a variety of words that they claimed as part of their trans identity that describe who they are. This theme peeled apart interpretations of things said, and not said, in the context of gender expression. Language recognized experiences of hurt and survival from verbal harassment and physical assault as well as the celebration of being comfortable in their own skin as a result of their trans identity. The labeling of gender-neutral bathrooms and other titles for neutralizing restroom space across campus were discussed as well as the ways in which colleges and universities limit language on applications, in policy, and in systems.

Binaries

Binaries, while very much a part of language, are included as their own theme. Emphasis was given to the ways binaries influenced participants' experiences regarding early messages around gender as well as how gender and sexuality have been defined in ways that personally

affect trans student lives on campus. Binaries also reveal the power and privilege associated with hetero-normative male and female gender designations leaving little acknowledgement of anyone identifying as neither or both or somewhere in the middle. Binaries reject trans-student gender identity as being legitimate and valuable.

Visibility

Visibility recognizes how each participant's trans-identity was physically manifested and literally described. It also included the notion of presentation from a "passing" perspective and the experiences associated with both a normative or non normative presentation.

Safety

Real and perceived safety was noted frequently and included physical, mental, spiritual, psychological, and relational aspects of security. Bathroom culture was an ongoing discussion and a common thread among participants highlighting the psychological experience of navigating new terrain and the rules of engagement in that space. Specific references were made to bathroom cleanliness, privacy, security, visibility, and access on campus. Safety took a different turn when talking about the coming-out process for participants. Who, on campus, was a safe ally if ever there was an emergency? Some trans students asked the following questions: Would I be given a hard time at the doctor's office? When was it the right time to share this about myself? How "out" was comfortable on campus... not at all or beaming as the homecoming queen? Yet another angle of safety was being outed through on-line teaching tools such as YouLearn and Angel and the awkward explanations that would follow. Unfortunately, there were instances of discrimination and violence experienced by some of the participants as a direct result of their trans identity. These are included in this study.

Self-Care

This theme came as a pleasant surprise and was defined most prominently by how participants honored their feelings and experiences internally as well as in how they took initiative to communicate their needs, most frequently, with faculty. Self-care included action taken to maximize mental health and wellness as well as the importance of supportive relationships both personally and academically where participants identified their partners/spouses, family members, friends, and special “go-to” allies on campus. Self-care was also identified as one thing that can be overlooked as a priority.

Relationships

Relationships play a significant role in all of the participants’ stories whether they were with partners, family, faculty, or the administration; every student was able to identify someone of significance that offered support and refuge. Some students also described circumstances that did not align with feeling valued by faculty, staff and the institution.

Community

Community was defined in multiple ways. It was affiliation with other transgender, queer, or gender-nonconforming individuals both on campus as well as out in the local or regional community. It was represented in online social networks and list serves as well as in the classroom. Community was further described through family (biological or chosen) as well as church connections.

Policies, Records and Systems

While nondiscrimination clauses were reviewed directly, and assumed to be a telling artifact, students were most vocal about the name-change process on campus. Participants also

acknowledged the limitations of binary descriptors of male and female on applications, the difficulty in acquiring a preferred name that connects to email, and the lack of understanding from office staff. That said this was an area where some participants were making great progress with their institutions. A number of students were advocating that gender identity/expression be added to the nondiscrimination clause, and a preferred name system be established to safeguard email and participation in online classroom assignments.

Advocacy

The majority of students interviewed were participating in advocacy work either on campus, out in the community, or at the regional level. Their willingness to participate in this study was indicative of all of their interests in wanting to make a difference by expanding knowledge in this area. Examples of their social justice work were modeled in the following ways: Pursuing gender-affirming language in institutional nondiscrimination clauses, requesting gender-neutral bathrooms across campus and in all new construction, pursuing gender-neutral housing and name/sex change processes that recognize the student's preferred name in the university system(s), coming out in Queer Studies/Gender Politics classes, participating in Day of Silence festivities and on speaker panels, facilitating trans education programs, serving as a campus resource, promoting policy changes for GLBT initiatives at the state level and many more.

The level of political engagement and activism were also some of the most exciting discoveries when talking with the participants. All of the students had things that they were doing, both big and small, in order to raise awareness and to deepen understanding of trans identity in a positive light which was powerful to hear. After examining these themes, and a thorough review of my theoretical framework, I analyzed the personal and the

organizational/political. More detailed information about these concepts are provided in Chapters Five and Six. Additionally, theoretical considerations are integrated throughout.

Summary

The interviews served as the cornerstones for this research and helped to provide context for greater understanding about trans individuals on campus. The artifact analysis, specifically examining the nondiscrimination clauses of the participants' institutions, helped illuminate how the university culture views the trans population and whether or not they are included as a protected class. Was gender identity/expression named or was this group invisible? It was helpful to know if participants considered the university nondiscrimination clauses as part of their college selection process (most did not). This was interesting as all of them were advocating for inclusive-language revisions as students now. Finally, Safe Zone programs were investigated at each campus as well as their influence, if any, on the trans student's college experience. Collectively, the data and subsequent analysis provide insight into how colleges and universities are impacting trans student success.

When I consider the trans student experience, I assumed that it would be important that they be named and visible as members of the campus community and not as spectacles to be questioned. Dr. Enrique Murillo, co-author of *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity* (personal communication, 2010), stated, "How do we become visible in the world? Everybody wants to be visible; nobody wants to be the window to the exotic." Currently, gender-variant students are considered to be on the cultural fringe but by whose standards? Are they outsiders because they refuse to conform to a limiting gender construction influenced by traditional binary frameworks? Transgender individuals force us to examine what is assumed about gender as normative females and males, and leaps beyond the binary to explore

a more expansive gender-identity experience. One could say, trans are the vehicles for making the familiar strange, forcing a different thinking, knowing and doing of gender in order to arrive at a more enlightened and inclusive way of constructing gender in society. An article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, authored by a professor who was describing his experience of facing his own prejudices in order to support his transgender child, shared revelations from his son about the evolution of gender and stated:

This generation believes that earlier activists, while challenging various kinds of gender abuses, still clung to the notion of the criticality of gender per se. First-wave feminists never doubted that being a woman was essential to their mission. Likewise, although gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals challenged the mandated or “normal” sexual preference, they saw their identity as defined by a ratio of one’s gender to one’s sexual choice. That is, a lesbian could only be defined as a woman who chose another woman as a sexual partner. Even some conservative, post-operative transsexuals cling to the gender binary, saying, “I was born the wrong gender, and now I’ve become the right one.” Members of the fourth wave, who like to call themselves, “trannies” (perhaps in solidarity with the 60’s “hippies”) see challenging the fixity of gender as their most important goal. My son reported to me that gender is so complex that there are 100 genders, and that we can morph through 20 of them in a single morning. (Davis, 2000)

Trans identity is complex not only in the ways that it breaks from the gender-normative binary but also from a multigenerational lens, in how gender activism is motivated and understood by trans college students today. This research forces the consideration of expanding socially-constructed gender spaces and illuminates trans identity as a window to a deeper personal

knowing of these students. I now turn to the introduction of eighteen participants that made this study possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANS VOICES: THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

Eighteen transgender students offered to share their stories and experiences as a way to increase knowledge and contribute to learning about gender identity and expression. Their trans identity, socially constructed from life experiences and influenced by language and social processes, provides examples of meaning from each person. It was a privilege to be in their company as my awareness and knowledge have expanded as a result. This chapter offers an overview of each participant with detailed description about their identities. Acknowledging and understanding who these individuals were before their gender identity formed as transgender provided insight into how they learn from their experiences and life journeys today.

The Participant Profiles

Erin is a 26-year-old, originally from rural Pennsylvania, and currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Nuclear Physics at an internship site on the East coast. Erin has a younger brother and says they get along fine. Coming from an Italian and Polish family heritage, Erin was raised Catholic but is not sure about her religion anymore. As early as fifth grade, Erin can recall a different connection to gender than most other kids the same age and believes this awareness was present even earlier but does not have the memories to verify. Born a biological male, Erin's self-defined gender identity is, "nonbinary identified, trans female spectrum." Erin prefers that creative grammar be used in place of pronouns. Second to this, Erin prefers gender-neutral pronouns "ze" and "hir" followed by "she" and "her" and finally, she promised not to yell at anyone for using male pronouns. Ze stated, "I'm kind of in a weird middle space, third space, I don't know... I've worked to use 'gender-queer' and it's really good short term, but I find it

much easier to describe what I'm not than what I am because what I am is an incredibly complex organism with a wide variety of different viewpoints, roles, mechanisms, ways that I work, and there are as different a variety in describing what it is I am than what it is I am not." Erin described college as thrilling because ze discovered other trans for the first time in hir life and saw that their lives didn't end up in horrible ways. Ze was especially relieved to discover that there are professional options for trans people other than that of sex workers. Ze went on to share that being in a hard science was very isolating as a trans-identified person with literally no resources available, so ze has taken the initiative to create resources and an online support group for other trans in isolating professions.

Andrew presents himself as an upbeat, friendly and engaging person. He is 20 years old, born a biological female in Earlysville, Virginia, has a twin brother and a younger sister and is white. Growing up, he was very close with his father and described them as best friends saying that his dad was funny and lenient. His parents dressed his brother and him in blue and pink clothes that stereotypically indicated a boy and a girl however they grew up doing basically the same things; there were no forced gender-roles that Andrew can recall until he was forced to wear a dress for the family picture from a cruise they took with his grandparents. Andrew came out to his parents by indicating he was dating a girl in 10th grade but did not refer to himself as a lesbian. The word just didn't fit but he did not know why. Andrew started using the word queer to address how he was feeling, associating his identity more to his romantic interests and less to his gender. Through his involvement with the Gay Student Alliance (GSA) in high school, he learned about transgender identity and immediately claimed it for himself in high school so when the second cruise occurred after graduation, he came out to his mom, saying that a suit was more appropriate and that he wasn't trying to be annoying but that this was his identity now. The way

he identifies transgender is that his body doesn't match his sex and that female is not a good definition; he sits more on the male binary side or the male side of the binary.

Andrew grew up going to church until he was about five and hasn't been back until recently as an adult. He is dating a woman who is Catholic and is exploring his spirituality. They attend the same small, liberal arts college in Virginia where Andrew is extremely involved in the GSA and is pushing for gender-neutral housing as well as to have gender identity/expression added to their nondiscrimination clause as a student advocate. He is the first "out" trans student on campus and is willing to help others learn about trans identity by answering questions and sharing his experience in an open, affirming way. Andrew knew it was the school for him from the first day he and his dad visited. There was a campus-wide program going on for National Day of Silence celebrating GLBT people and from that moment on, he felt at home. Andrew has described college as, "an essential time for self development and for me this was especially true. My first semester served as a transition period for gender presentation and seeing how a male identity fit me. In April of my sophomore year, I started hormones and began my medical transition smoothly with the aid of not only my friends but also the support of my school. I wish that all transgender students could have so many allies on their campuses that could help. However, even with my university there is a lot of work that needs to be done to help make campuses more transgender friendly."

Bruce is a 48 year old, gay, female-to-male (FtM), trans man with a long lesbian history. He identifies as white, European American, upper-middle class, and grew up in a politically-conservative home with an older brother, a younger sister and younger brother. They originally were raised in Phoenix, Arizona but Bruce moved to Seattle with his mom and siblings when his parents divorced half way through his high school years. At eight years of age, people were

questioning whether Bruce was in the right restroom so he pushed the edges of what was acceptable even then for how girls were suppose to behave. Early messages growing up were very hetero-gender- normative. Bruce's parents had clear expectations of their oldest daughter to finish high school, go to college, and get married. Little did they know that he was wrestling with his sexual identity in silence? Bruce's father died when he was 19. This was significant because Bruce, and his family, learned that his father was gay only at his funeral when they met his partner of the previous 16 years for the first time. Seeing how his family reacted to his father's sexual orientation forced him to remain closeted about his own sexuality for approximately five years more. Ironically, when Bruce came out as a lesbian, his family was the last to know but when he came out as transgender at 37, they were the first people to know. Bruce's story about his identity has evolved over time and led him to ultimately pursue a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. He is a highly-educated individual and has completed two masters, one in Recreation and Leisure Studies and the other in Applied Behavioral Science. Currently, he faces the final internship before his degree will be awarded.

Bruce described college as: "a privilege that many people are not afforded the opportunity to attend. It can be challenging, or not, and it is what you make of it. I usually put my whole self into what I do and college has been no exception. This will be my last college experience. I have been to college as a woman, I transitioned at another college, and now I am at a college that has only known me as a male. I am not sure how different those experiences have been. I first attended college in 1979, so certainly I have matured over the years. Reflecting back on how I was treated as a woman 30+ years is not at all comparable to how I am treated now as a male-identified person. I do recall during my undergraduate years finding myself atop my soapbox trying to get some respect for women. That hasn't changed enough. Lastly, college,

as a student, is almost behind me, ten months and counting until graduation. (In case you wondered it is 296 days until graduation!) There is certainly a light at the end of the tunnel! And at this point, I am certain that it isn't an oncoming train!"

Sylvie is 40 years old, Caucasian, 80-percent German, and grew up on a farm in rural Michigan with her parents and sister that is a year and a half her junior. She identifies as Daoist and currently resides in rural Ohio where she is working on an associate's degree in massage therapy from a community college in preparation for an acupuncture program. Sylvie has only just realized, within the past nine months, that she is transgender. This epiphany came through working with a therapist immediately following the death of her grandfather who was very special to her. Up until this time, she had squelched memories of gender difference but was starting to examine these aspects of her gender-identity formation. Sylvie, born into a biologically-male body, now recalls playing house with her sister the way girls play house together and knows that she recognized that she was different as early as six years of age. In recalling her fond memories of summers with grandpa, she explained that she hid all hints of this gender-nonconformance and was a total boy, doing all boy things so as to be able to continue to spend time with him. She described her grandfather as being very traditional, and so she conformed to be accepted by him. In the 80s, Sylvie got deeply into punk and the social edge culture wearing skirts, hose, and Goth makeup. Working with her therapist, she was able to explore her appeal to this scene and the access it provided for her to express feminine gender in a socially acceptable way through the music culture. Nine months in therapy have enabled Sylvie to get to know what she considers to be her most authentic self and what she has discovered is that her gender is fluid. "Some days I am masculine, some days I am feminine, some days I am just kind of in the middle and neither. So I don't actually get to fit into a category. I am all of the

categories. For most people, transgender is assumed to mean a mismatch with gender and the biological body a person is born into and there is a drive to “fix” it. For Sophie transgender is, “I am this today or even right now because I have had it change within ten minutes and that is always fun. You wake up mostly feminine, go through classes and something weird happens, and, boom, I am a boy and I am like what the hell? So, for me, transgender is the fact that no matter what I look like whether I transition to become externally feminine or whether I stay externally masculine or fall somewhere in the middle. I am never going to match that. Well maybe once a week.” Sylvie described college as being wonderful stating, “I have had only a single bad experience with an instructor (which was honestly about other things as well). Each instructor I’ve shared my situation with has been not only accepting, but interested in helping me in whichever way I felt would be best, or most useful. My anatomy teacher did a special lecture segment on how the pelvic floor develops in the fetus so I would have an idea of what would be done with the surgery if I decide to go that route. My Chinese teacher picked a Chinese name for me that was both genders. My English teacher let me write essays about transgender topics in class. I have several friends now that I hang out with as girls, and we dish on guys and talk about how bad they are. I can dress however I wish (currently in women’s slacks and top with varying levels of makeup, and don’t get hassled by it much, save for a couple of guys in the men’s restroom being very confused at first). I’ve also gotten the other side of things, as they have had questions of me as well. So I get to help them if they have other students in the future. So really, wonderful, it’s been a huge help in my decision as to what direction I need to go!”

Morgan is 25, white, agnostic, 6’0 tall, and a first-generation college student who just graduated from a large research institution in the Midwest with a master’s degree in Higher Education. Raised by his father, Morgan was the middle child of three and has two brothers.

Morgan's undergraduate degree was in General Studies with minors in Sociology and Women's Studies. Morgan wrestles with pronouns and language related to hir gender identity and currently prefers gender neutral pronouns if people are willing to use them. Ze came out as a lesbian when ze was 18 which hir dad and step mom seemed ok about. However, when Morgan found ze was more comfortable in men's clothes and cut hir hair short, they grew uncomfortable and hir father threatened to kick hir out. When thinking about labels and words, Morgan initially referred to hirself as genderqueer but received more negative reactions with that wording. Ze relates to transgender but does not want to transition. Morgan identifies as: "not a girl, not a boy, but more in the middle." Morgan described college as: "a time where I learned a great deal about myself, as well as experienced a very strenuous journey discovering my nonbinary gender identity. All along I was dealing with other individual's homophobia, transphobia and questions while trying to figure it all out (learning about transgender issues, reflecting on how I feel inside about my gender identity, dealing with my own emotions and how to navigate trans issues in a higher education system as well as in the job search.)" In hir interview Morgan added that ze expected college to be more liberal, open and accepting with more GLBT individuals on campus. College did not meet hir expectations.

Kael is 22, the oldest of three, has a younger sister and brother and says his parents are still happily married. He grew up outside of the Seattle area and attends a research institution in the state. Kael is one quarter Costa Rican and claims both his white as well as Hispanic heritage. He grew up going to church on a regular basis, but said that he never bought into the ideas behind religion so stopped attending especially once he realized during his high school years that he was gay and knew that the church elders were not approving of his lifestyle. Coming out as gay was described as pretty uneventful and his family adjusted well. After starting college, Kael

hung out a lot at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans Center (GLBT) on campus and loved his connection to the community there. The center was where he first learned about transgender identity and got exposed to other trans students. The new awareness was appreciated, however, he had little interest in developing friendships with the trans students due to personality differences. They were the political, in-your-face types and Kael was more laid back. Kael has since come out as transgender, although this time, family support has been a struggle particularly from his mother and sister. Desperate to go on testosterone, he states that his parents' disapproval makes this all very hard because it would be on their insurance and he's not comfortable using their insurance without their support. Kael expresses frustration about this because their insurance is one of only a few that covers everything, and yet he is unable to take advantage of the resources. Despite not having hormones or moving forward in his pre-operative process at this time, Kael passes pretty easily with his short hair and willingness to bind his chest. This is important as he works in construction during the summer months and would not feel comfortable or safe if unable to pass as a hetero-normative male. He prefers masculine pronouns and has a girlfriend who lives out of state. Kael described college as, "the time to figure out what you want from life. This applies to every aspect of your life, from career path and hobbies to relationships and personal achievements. College was an opportunity to explore options. There are so many options, so many careers, partners, and identities. College provides a space to experiment with the possibilities in a safe environment."

Judy is a seemingly intelligent, politically active male-to-female (MtF) trans woman who was born in Houston, Texas, graduated from high school in 1969, and then joined the Coast Guard. She is a Vietnam Era Veteran. Judy's father and sister are still living. She has two daughters and is the proud grandmother of four grandsons with another grandson on the way.

Judy has a strong faith identifying as a born-again Christian. She claims that she lived most of her life believing she was a cross-dresser, then lived as a cross-dresser, and then in 1999, after retiring from IBM where she worked for 30 years, discovered, with her therapist's help, that she was not a cross-dresser but rather a secondary transsexual, meaning she learned about her gender identity issues at a much later age. Judy is currently a Ph.D. student in Social Work at a large research institution in Texas and defines her gender identity as, "female, post-operative lesbian under the umbrella of transgender." She has been politically active at the local and regional level working for transgender rights and access. Judy describes college as being, "a more positive place to transition as compared to when I first started in 2001. Changes have occurred that make my university a more compatible and accommodating institution. College *was* a bit touch and go but now time has allowed for the administration to understand the need to provide accommodations for transitioning students."

James is a 34 year old, Caucasian, FtM transsexual who was raised in the suburbs of Detroit primarily by his mom. He described his mother as being supportive but also controlling when it came to his gender presentation with some days encouraging his little-boy preference and other days being angry that people they met in public assumed she had a son. This back and forth, knee jerk reaction was also coupled with verbal abuse so he described walking on egg shells often. Despite this chaotic and unpredictable upbringing, James was crystal clear about his gender. He described always feeling like a boy from as early as two to three years old even though he was born into a biologically-female body. He wanted to be a boy so badly that he chose a boy nickname at the age of five which stuck well into his college years. James identifies as straight and is legally married to his wife. He was raised Catholic but described feeling uncomfortable and sensitive about the church values, and how, as an organization, they would

exercise their power by acknowledging some people mattered while others did not. When asked when he knew his gender identity was different, he stated: “I think for me it was a continuum for my whole life of just trying to figure out how I could be who I felt that I was. And I had always felt that I was male and if I knew anything, I knew that. As little as I was, as many people that tried to convince me otherwise, it was just like core; I was fully immersed in it and I understood it. And so, for me, it was just every step of the way, every grade I was in, you know from transferring over from elementary to middle school to high school, I just felt that I was male.”

When asked what words associate best to his identity, James said, “I’ve always used transgender and I feel very comfortable with that. I’ve never really liked the term transsexual, I think there’s a stigma attached to it that I’ve never really enjoyed. You know, growing up I watched transsexuals on the Jerry Springer show; it was this dark side to a queer culture that I just feel that transsexuals still brings up that stigma.” James had a later start with college and attended two community colleges before transferring to a four-year institution where he just graduated. He is eager to continue with his education and described college by saying, “I think in one sense we all want to say that college is this great place that we’re attending and we’re going to’ change in very large ways; we go in and we come out a different person. If this semester had not happened, I would have assumed that I just don’t believe it and that it didn’t happen for me. I went into it thinking I’m an older student, there’s not much they can do for me. I’m going to play the game and I’m going to come out of there with what I want. And then last semester really changed me in so many ways. I didn’t know what I was going to do past college. I knew I wanted to be there. I was really passionate about what I was studying but I was still at a loss of what I was going to do afterwards. It cemented to me the fact that I know I want to continue my

education and I know that I want to go into researching and teaching having some affiliation with transgender identities, queer identities or abnormal anatomies.”

Antonio appears to be an upbeat, intelligent, articulate, 22-year-old from Georgia who identifies as half white, American, and southern as well as half Latino and Costa Rican. His parents got divorced when he was five and he lived with his mom who was constantly working, so recalls being raised by his maternal grandmother. Religion was important to her so he was brought up Southern Baptist. Antonio recalls his internal decision to discard his faith by approximately 13 but personally still attended church and hung around for the social aspect. He was assigned a biological female at birth but Antonio often wonders if he might also have an intersex condition. Open about his gender identity and sexuality, Antonio was able to be exposed to a lot of different examples of gayness through his involvement at the GLBT Center in his community as a teen. He is an undergraduate student studying Spanish and Women’s Studies and grew up in a mixed middle and working class background. Antonio recalls living a fairly secure financial life but knows this was due to his mom working two to three jobs, so it was not without a cost. Antonio loves his department and describes the Women’s Studies department to be really small and tight knit. His campus is a huge organization nestled between, and among, buildings in a booming metropolitan area. He enjoys the urban influence but is just as content to hang out and talk critical theory. Antonio is very well read and had the opportunity to read Foucault while in high school on the debate team as part of their preparation. He described the experience as being powerful and life changing in the way that he views the world around him now. He is an activist and identifies as a genderqueer, gay male. Antonio described college as a great place to be engaged especially with his small department of queer identified faculty.

Kat appears to be a sensitive and thoughtful individual whose two passions in life are music and languages. She is 28, white, grew up extremely poor from a small town in Texas, is atheist and describes herself as a free thinker. Kat was raised by her mom and stepfather and at 12 experienced the tragic loss of her younger brother. Following his death, her stepfather left so she and her mother relied on each other although her mom was lost in a deep depression leaving Kat essentially alone. Kat stayed until she was 17 and then moved in with her boyfriend and has never gone back.

When recalling early messages about gender, she thinks back to playing house in kindergarten and always wanting to wear the blouse and skirt from the box of dress up clothes at school. No one ever said anything to her in the class. This behavior continued when visiting at her grandmother's house as she put on her dress and pretended to have breasts. Eventually this got back to her parents. She was nine at the time and they threatened that if they ever caught her wearing a dress, they would make her wear it to school. While born a biological male, she felt more like a girl. Kat shared these inklings with her mom who responded with thoughtful questions initially. Nothing else was said until they were shopping for pants for Kat's Halloween costume. Her mom had selected a pair of boy's pants, but Kat wanted the girl's pants with foot stirrups and stated so. In that moment her mother realized that Kat's female gender identity was a recurring thing and blurted out, for everyone in the store to hear, "Do you still want to be a girl?" Kat described the total embarrassment and utter humiliation she felt. She said she felt degraded. She told her mom that she did not want to be a girl and then repressed her feelings until she was 19. From the age of nine until now, she has suffered from depression and attributes it to her silent struggles with her gender identity. Her sexuality was also a contentious topic as Kat started to find men more attractive. The thought of being gay bothered her. She explained

feeling like she was wrong and a “really bad person.” As her gender identity evolved, she came to realize that she is a heterosexual transgender female.

Kat is a junior in college studying anthropology and aspires to pursue her Ph.D. in Linguistics eventually. She described her experience in college, once her transition was complete, as being rather positive. She was passing and doing what she loved with her music. There were the occasional name hiccups on class rosters but aside from that, she described starting to find happiness.

Twyla presents himself as a cheerful, courteous and engaging person. Ze is 25, was raised mainly in Riverside, California, but spent a couple of his childhood years living in Paris, France, and claims that going to France helped him to get perspective on outsidership. Ze was raised Roman Catholic but declared his family has been on the liberal fringe and is upper-middle class. Ze is Caucasian and feels that filling out forms in certain ways, such as with gender, sex, and other categories, perpetuates artificial division. When asked about his gender identity, Twyla claimed queer as well as genderqueer for chosen vocabulary and prefers gender-neutral pronouns. At approximately ten ze recalls thinking about gender as performance stating: “I do think that I was a little girl. I am not a woman right now but I was a little girl definitely. I would stuff my bathing suit and pretend that I had breasts but I would also stuff my crotch of the bathing suit to pretend that I had external genitalia.” The feeling ze gets inside when thinking about gender does not resonate unless it is away from man or woman. Ze is in-between or, “off someplace in a different plane.” Another word that strongly associated to his gender was “ghost.” Twyla described ghost as connoting a certain amount of prominence and power, something broad and porous as opposed to small and compact, something that persists as a sense, “the gender-antenna quiver.”

Twyla has always been interested in creative things but also was fond of the sciences so ze went to college to be an astrophysicist. Realizing that ze did not have an allegiance to the truth claims that science demands, ze decided to pursue library school instead. Ze referred to hir college experience as surpassing hir expectations with all of the communities centered around GLBT issues and multiple ways to be involved with activism at hir first institution, but college is disappointing at hir current institution because of isolation and the challenge of getting hooked into groups of people who are doing serious things. Twyla is attending a large, research institution in California. Ze described college as, “COLD, fun, stressful, full of luscious opportunities to think and learn academically and informally, far too busy, full of some really wonderful people (most of whom were far too busy), lacking in ontological diversity, full of lust for a limited (sometimes fetishized) ontological diversity, a place of privilege, hilarious, constricting, liberating, a mishmash of folks with varied... to my mind... not always benevolent motives.”

Marek appears to be an intelligent, well traveled, independent, 27-year-old bi-gender trans student. Marek is Polish and would travel to Poland during the summers to visit family and to learn more about this aspect of his culture. His heritage was so important to him that at one point he daydreamed of marrying a Polish woman and practicing the language together. At times, Marek has described feeling very isolated and pressured to choose between either his ethnic identity or his transgender identity. Currently his trans identity prevails.

He is an only child and was raised by his mother and grandmother who valued education and family heritage. Marek was told early on that his father had passed away so he was completely surprised when he received a letter from his father when he turned 26. He and his dad have since reconnected and stay in touch often through Face book. Early messages about gender

focused on two things. The first was that it was important for women to become well educated in order to entertain and intellectually engage their husbands. The second message he received was that, being raised by his independent mother and grandmother, he didn't need to rely on anyone to take care of him.

The value of education has paid off as Marek is now pursuing a graduate degree at a small, predominantly commuter school in southern California, and chose the institution for its inclusive, nondiscrimination clause. Marek is a social justice advocate and is researching a GLBT-related topic. He described college as being a journey having attended two prior institutions that varied considerably from his current institution. His gender and sexual identities continue to influence how he chooses to be engaged on campus.

Kathy presents herself as a charming, intelligent, very "out" 21-year-old who is white and from a low-socioeconomic class. Ze was born and raised on the east coast and has three siblings, an older sister, an older brother and a younger brother. Ze lost hir mother to a brain aneurism at the age of 11 and has been raised by hir father in different parts of rural Virginia ever since. They are very close and have relied on a strong faith as a central part of their lives. Kathy was raised Southern Baptist and described some of the different churches ze attended as well as how hir faith practice is now changing. When describing one church ze attended and the evolution of hir faith, ze stated, "the church actually had balconies for when, during slavery, the enslaved persons would be sitting up there for segregation. Even downstairs in the congregation in the seats there was a wall right down the center of the pews to separate the men and the women. That wasn't practiced anymore but it was still there. I don't know. I guess, now after coming out in high school and coming into college I am Unitarian Universalist with a strong pagan influence. So that's kind of different."

When considering hir identity, Kathy recalls mixed messages from as early as three or four years of age. Hir favorite color was pink and ze knew that is wasn't ok because girls like pink, and ze was born a biological male. Ze played with hir sister's dolls. They were never taken away from hir nor was there a reaction to hir painted fingers and toenails courtesy of hir older sister even though ze knew it was different. When contemplating hir sexuality, Kathy believes sexuality came first as ze recalled liking boys but was into girly things and dressing up. Ze would put on dresses when no one was around and didn't worry about getting caught. Ze received stronger messages that liking boys was not okay, which outweighed messages about wearing dresses being wrong.

Reflecting on hir growth while in college, Kathy has most recently shifted to assume a transgender identity and prefers the terms genderqueer and trans-feminine as well as using gender-neutral pronouns. Kathy feels that it doesn't fully commit hir to one specific thing and likes the fluidity. Sexuality has been more theoretical than practiced as ze works to further understand hir trans-feminine identity before involving a partner. Other aspects of Kathy's college life include that ze is a rising senior at a prominent, private institution, in the state, and ze is receiving full financial aid as a result of hir family income. After hir mother's death, the family had such limited resources that insurance was not an option so hir financial award has provided resources to not only pursue hir education but to take care of some of hir medical needs as well. Kathy has been an engaged, highly involved student participating in many clubs and GLBT- related groups and was elected Homecoming Queen with support from the student body and the university administration. "I have a lot of people who are just really awesome and because of them knowing me, they can educate people and they do." Kathy described college as being, "a constant battle for my sanity and wellbeing."

Edward appears to be a friendly, articulate, and open trans man who was born and raised in the Seattle area and currently lives with his wife who he has been with for over seven years. He graduated from a local, religiously-affiliated institution and is a trans activist in the community. Edward is 28, has a twin brother, and grew up in a loving home with parents that are still together. He is Caucasian, was raised United Methodist and recalls being attracted to women as early as middle school. Initially, he shared that he always chalked up his feelings of masculinity to the fact that he was attracted to women until he realized that the two are not connected. As he met more lesbians, he began to compare their sexual identity to his and saw that he still felt more masculine than they so something was not fitting.

Dabbling with gender, he would take advantage of opportunities to dress so that he could experience what it was like to assert being male. After his freshmen year in college he began to consider the possibility of transitioning one day. This was a scary proposition once partnered because Edward feared that with transition, he might change in such a way that they might not stay together. His transition has forced his partner to evaluate her own identity as well.

Edward describes college as the place where he planned to further solidify his identity while having some independence from home. Excited to get a roommate, he ended up with a sheltered, conservative woman who was at college to find her husband. Coming from a progressive family, Edward had little patience for her and had come to college to get an education. He came out to her the third day after moving in, and classes hadn't even started yet. Edward noticed feeling depressed and stressed over not being out and didn't want to hide his identity. When he came out to her, she was beside herself and said, "Well I am not a lesbian and I am not attracted to you." He remembered thinking he wasn't even attracted to her, and that it wasn't about her. It had nothing to do with her. It was about him. She moved out two weeks

later, and he pursued busy, but rewarding, college experiences and successfully graduated with a degree in Graphic Design.

Alex is a sensitive, intelligent, politically astute, 30-year-old who grew up in Los Angeles County and is deeply interested in social-justice issues. He has a nine-year-old child that he is raising with gender neutrality in an effort to offer supportive acceptance that he feels he did not receive growing up so gender pronouns can vary and language is creative, often pluralized. Alex prefers masculine pronouns except when he's doing drag. When reflecting on early messages about gender, Alex recalls feeling like something wasn't quite right. He went to a Baptist school where the kids had to wear uniforms and girls were expected to wear skirts on Fridays for chapel. Alex didn't want to comply because he felt that this did not make any sense to him. He recalls being about eight-year-old and hearing of a kid whose circumcision had gone badly and as a result was raised as a girl. He shared this story with his mother and asked if the same had happened to him. He said his mother looked at him like he was an alien.

After a very difficult childhood, Alex pursued two years of college in Minneapolis presenting as female with skirts and makeup before coming out as trans and queer. Always somewhere on the spectrum of maleness, he allows for fluidity with some days that are closer to queer, genderqueer and hetero-normative presentations. Currently attending a small college in the Pacific Northwest known for its nontraditional curriculum model, Alex appreciates that he has a fresh start within an affirming campus community. That said, he is painfully aware of the privileged experiences of the majority of the students around him and wants to see more trans inclusive programs, services and policies.

Alex described college a, “impossible the first time I tried. I was doing really well if I got C's. This time around, life may be harder, but college is easier. I'm able to feel things like

interest in the future, and passion about what I'm studying. These make a huge amount of difference.”

Chance presents himself as a dynamic, high energy, white, 21-year-old who was raised in New Jersey by his mother and sister and now attends school at a research institution in the Pacific Northwest. His father lives on the west coast. Chance wasn't raised in a religious household but does claim to be a spiritual person. Initially identifying as a lesbian at 13, Chance came out as trans by 15 and reports that he would sneak off to Philadelphia to attend trans support group meetings which, admittedly, was not the safest decision but he claimed it was fun at the time. He defines transgender as, “pretty much anything that is screwing with the gender binary.” Chance described sexual-orientation as being fun. “So I am trans and there is nothing really I can't like. What does that mean? What does it mean to be gay, straight, bi? It is all kind of fluid to me.” Understanding his trans identity took some time but Chance got a lot of help through online communities and websites when looking for answers that could explain how he was feeling. When asked to define transgender, Chance provided a train metaphor where gender is a train and one day he hopped on and wherever he ended up, he ended up. Pressed further to elaborate on the train metaphor, he explained sometimes the stop represented being a lesbian. Another stop represented being a female-to-male trans. Another stop looked like a butch dating girls and thinking, “I'm a man. Grrrr” and another train stop could be reflected by walking into a theatre wearing a feather boa. “After I started getting more comfortable with myself and messing with gender then that's kind of where the train started. I jumped on it and was first going by machismo town, then the next one, it's all fluid. For me it's that fluid but I know it's not that way for everyone.” The train metaphor is interesting because two of his examples also connect to sexuality with his lesbian and butch-dating-girls references. Chance's construction of

transgender identity includes both gender and sex as unique distinctions as well as a blended combination. From a poststructural perspective, this would be a good example of how individuals socially construct their realities. Chance struggled with depression since he was about 12. When he realized his trans identity at 15, his relationship with his mom became strained so much so he went to live with his dad in California. Looking forward to this fresh start, Chance declared to his dad and step mom that he wanted to be called “Chance” instead of his previous girl name and they seemed initially cool. He took them to a trans support group once in California and in his words, they went “bonkers.” They said, “This is disgusting. These people are really gross.” Things grew worse with his father and stepmom referring to him as “the kid” and becoming emotionally abusive to the point of his becoming a nonexistent entity in the house. They threatened daily to kick him out so in his last two years of high school he worked a full-time job, despite it being illegal, to save up for the day when he would be on his own. As he was sharing these details, Chance sounded indifferent, as if they were merely statements he was rattling off from a report. I asked him what that meant, and he described the deep pain he felt in recalling the exact moments when he knew he had to give up on his dad and having a relationship with him. He shared that he even went to the police about how he was being treated at home and they acted as if he deserved it and that his parents were right for responding to him this way. It hurt and hit too close to home as he recognized his own internalized transphobia. Thankfully, college has been a brighter chapter and Chance is able to address transphobia and homophobia when he teaches Queer 101. Chance described college as a place to continue his learning and a place where he could be himself without judgment among similar minded and similarly identifying people. He expressed loving the city and the way it also was affirming for trans people.

Michael is 25, white, working class, and mixed European. He was raised in eastern Washington with his parents, a brother and a sister. His family was Mormon and somewhat conservative when he was growing up and his mom expected him to wear a dress every week to church. Early messages about gender prompted a memory of his throwing off his shirt and running through the sprinklers with the rest of the boys to his mother's embarrassment. He was eight or nine at the time and noted that he was old enough to know better. His second year in high school, Michael came out as gay realizing he liked girls. His mom cried for a week every time she would look at him, and said he wasn't allowed to tell any family members or march in any gay parades.

In college Michael began to examine his gender identity more closely realizing that he was transgender and related to being a straight trans guy. He was very involved in the GLBTA student group and called the campus GLBT center his second home. Michael cut his hair short and started to plan for his transition which began in March 2009 after his graduation from college and getting his degrees in both English and History. His partner has been by his side throughout his process, however, she identifies as a lesbian so Michael's gender identity forces her to examine her sexual identity on a regular basis.

Michael described college as an important time in his life where he met supportive people and had a campus that felt safe. He especially noted the important role of the GLBT center on campus, and how it offered a mid-day reprieve in between classes and was a great place to connect with staff and friends. "The center was my key all the way. If I needed to know who to talk to about changing my name somewhere, they knew where to go. If I needed help with how to approach a subject, the Director of the center would always invite me in to her office to talk about it."

Kayd is 22 and the oldest, of three children, in a working middle-class family from eastern Washington. Her parents divorced and remarried so she now has a brother from each set of parents, one is 20 and the other is one and a half. Kayd has a petite frame (under 5'0), was extremely sarcastic, initially starting the interview talking in an altered voice. She described her race as "rainbow," her sexual orientation as queer but preferring girls, and stated the following about her first realization of being different about gender. "First grade or it probably started in kindergarten more or less, like I have always known I was different. There was never any question about it. I didn't have any friends in elementary school because I didn't really connect with anyone outside of class. I was usually bullied because I was the smallest person in school. So yeah, I didn't really have any friends so I would often have a lot of time by myself. I was like "Gosh, I wish I was a boy. I think I was supposed to be a boy. I was born in the wrong body. I hate being a girl!" Kayd was open to the use of either pronoun when discussing language, and she grew up Christian with some influences from Buddhism and Judaism as well. Kayd's openness about pronouns, in part, is due to her attempting to sort out her identity and translate it to her family. This is a complex, daunting task that she feels could be met with resistance. For now, Kayd wants to keep things simple, focus on being a good friend to those around her, attend to her studies, and stay active on campus through the GLBT center and her work. Kayd described college as a cool place to get connected, in particular through the center.

Summary

Poststructural feminism pays particular attention to the circumstances and influences of day-to-day lives. Each student's experience is unique and deeply personal in the ways that they have, and continue to, evolve as transgendered beings. In Chapter Five, the personal themes are

reviewed with trans voices and stories. A poststructural feminist framework is used to make meaning of the trans students experiences on campus.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERSONAL: IDENTITY IN ACTION

Introduction

Some of the recurring themes that were identified as personal included: Language and binaries, identity, visibility, safety, self care and relationships. While language and binaries can also be found in organization structures, for this section, they reference the ways in which participants made sense of their experiences in their personal lives. This chapter presents findings related to the subjective daily aspects of trans identity reflecting much needed answers to the following research questions:

- What does it mean to be trans?
- What are the many manifestations of trans identity?

These questions tie to poststructural feminism because of how the answers personally reflect each individual. The multisensory experience of trans is going to vary person-to-person and this theoretical framework values that day-to-day, socially constructed reality.

Personal Themes

When I refer to personal themes, these are the areas of the trans-students' lives that are impacted most intimately every day. There were frequent overlaps for study participants. Language, binaries, visibility, safety, self-care, and relationships all tie to making meaning from sunrise to sunset. Questioning what it means to be understood through, and by, the social construction of gender was unique for each participant. Are these personal themes of their lives supported and valued by the college and university officials who engage them? It is personal because they experience the acceptance as well as the opposition of their constructed gender and are directly impacted by the power situated in these themes. When talking about

poststructuralism, Alcoff (1988) stated, “The mechanism of power referred to here is the construction of the subject by a discourse that weaves knowledge and power into a coercive structure that ‘forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way.’” The gender binary, with its explicit rules of membership, rejects expansive thought or spaces to try gender in new ways. Trans students then compare their construction of gender to the gender norm and will never measure up because their version of gender does not fit if they allow themselves to succumb to this thinking. Power lies in the traditional normative binary and while many trans do not adhere to these conceptions, some, as modeled in this study, do choose the affiliation, support and comfort of fitting in with the dominant discourse. A critical lens is needed to review these findings. Trans are assumed to be “less than” by virtue of their noncompliance. Who decided on these rules? Who made gender-normative definitions of male and female dominant and the “right” way? These assumptions come from the need to control. It aligns with the feminist argument of why men feel superior or are recognized as dominant over women.

In a day-to-day experience, trans students are learning who they are and what it means to be independent adults in the world. Daily life is personal and individual. Gender expression is as much in the way they fix their hair, in what they choose to wear, in how they interact with peers, faculty and staff, and in how they feel about themselves in an environment that engages them in learning. Something so core such as their gender identity, whether normative or “betwixt and between,” is personal and feeling “less than” or marginalized for it can grow tiresome. Ironically, gender in its normative and nonnormative presentations, is a humanist construct in and of itself whether one adheres to fitting traditional male or female identities or

expands their definition and presentation to a more fluid gender-neutral space, both look to some definition of gender as a way to define this aspect of identity. Alcoff, 1988, noted:

The subject is not a locus of authorial intentions or natural attributes or even privileged, separate consciousness. Lacan uses psychoanalysis, Derrida uses grammar, and Foucault uses the history of discourses all to attack and ‘deconstruct’ our concept of the subject as having an essential identity and an authentic core that has been repressed by society.

There is no essential core ‘natural’ to us, and so there is no repression in the humanist sense. (p.415)

If this is true, then there should be no concern with trans identity but in reality, and in living the day-to-day, trans students do experience power over and privilege beyond themselves as a result of their defined gender. It would appear that society has not caught up to this way of thinking and holds on tightly to what is presumed to be “the way.” Normative genders are no longer, nor have they ever been, “the way” for trans people. From the personal lens, in every aspect of their lives, these trans students are walking a new path and want to feel that their gender identity is equally as valid, equally as meaningful and important as any other gender expression. They are one of many variations and expressions, rather than one outside of an essential gender identity. Trans student examples of the personal follow.

Language

The language aspect of the personal is important in examining how words themselves create the experience as well as how words and language tell the story of the experience.

Language is tricky. It is often bifurcated and forces people into categories of “x” or “y.”

Depending on the category people are either in a dominant, normative position or not. These categories represent power over or under linking to binary thinking and doing. “It is the means

and medium for the generation of significance or meaning. The concept of meaning is core to the explication of culture. To investigate culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically in language as a signifying system” (Barker, 2000, p.121). Judy described her transgender identity as just that, a culture. Four dimensions follow where language presents an experience of binaries, an experience of perceptions, an experience of recognition and an assumption about passing. In all four cases, words and symbols construct individual meanings of the experience through the context of the individual. Alex was asked his opinions about binaries in reference to gender and sex and stated:

I actually feel a sort of revulsion for the binary gender system. Using the whole he, she thing feels weird to me now. Even though I prefer that people call me “he” if they relate from that system. It feels like walking into a cartoon and trying to relate within that linguistic framework. It feels like trying to operate within a cartoon context because I don’t see that as real. We are much more diverse than two pronouns can work with so I don’t even like using them for people who are cisgendered anymore. I feel like I am reducing them as a person to their gender... to a mythological supposition that is this tiny little square as opposed to the richness and depth and layers of who someone is as a person if you know them.

Alex repels the binary wording as not real yet claims it for himself and refers to a gender-neutra, third reference for his child. This is an oversimplified example of the versatility of language and how meaning is constantly shifting.

Kael wrestled with language for himself when considering the perceptions of others about his gender and said:

Well, originally it was lesbian, pretty specifically because that's what it is, you know, but I have never really liked the term lesbian and now I know why especially when defining myself. It was always something I went with because what else are you going to do? (as a biological female attracted to women) Now if I had to, I would fit into the straight male role but I don't really like the connotations that go with "straight male" because, in the queer community, a straight male is the enemy. I mean you can have straight female friends but you don't have straight male friends. I don't know why. Even if you do, it is very rare and you usually suspect they are gay. But if I were to say I am straight, who am I talking to and how are they going to take that? Most of them, or enough of them, are going to say, "bullshit," and enough will look at me funny till they think about it and then go "okay."

Kael's comments may relate to the perceptions associated with the man/woman and gay/straight binaries. Even if they are imposed externally and he rebels, the assumptions are still imposed, never affording him the opportunity to experience the multiplicity of his identity. Is he accepting his female body and associating with the lesbian persona or is he saying goodbye to her and saying hello to him, assuming the male privilege that is apparent? Maybe he is neither and chooses to acknowledge both his masculine and feminine characteristics. Straight, normative people do not care to mix or blend these aspects of their identity because they are already established within the binary, dominant discourses of sex and gender, but identity conflicts arise for trans folk when forced to choose. Michael, Edward and James would offer an understanding "okay" to Kael because they too live as hetero-normative, straight, transgender males who are attracted to, even married to, women and pass, as such, therefore receiving hetero-normative privilege where the dominant, straight aspect of this binary is imposed on them.

Antonio had some interesting thoughts to share about language and discourse:

I feel like different modes of trans identity are very invested in different things just because it is a discourse that gets used in so many different ways. Like some ways you talk about trans are very focused around medical transition and around a narrative of medically correcting either a disability about your body or just something that makes it less comfortable to live in. Other paradigms of transness are more focused on experiences of social transgression and marginalization and what comes from that, and I guess they're not really at odds with each other. I obviously have medically transitioned and I think that has been very important for living my life in a comfortable way. I also identify as male, but I don't really identify as male in a binary way. I do see myself as genderqueer though I don't get read that way, and I identify as genderqueer more as part of the way I feel. I do my gender as a queer or gay male person and less anything that has to do with being transsexual so they're not really at odds but sometimes they can be at odds with other models of transness.

Is it really at odds or is the language simply unstable and variable? Pressing on language a little bit further, Antonio was asked about his word choices in reference to how he is read in public. He refers to himself as "normatively male" instead of "passing" which was more prominent in his interview than the others. He explained that he dislikes the reference to passing because, "it sounds like trying to pass as something you're not; it's really awkward language as a mixed race person and just the implications of that, of the fact that I do mostly get read as white when I'm not, feels a lot more like passing and that's more of what that word means to me. Having certain things included, that's what passing evokes for me so I don't really like that language because that's not necessarily the way that transness functions for me." I mention

Antonio's comment because he acknowledges two aspects of identity, his race and gender.

Whether it is race, religion, class, sexual-orientation, or gender, having these many facets of self actively highlights the complexity of the social construction of identity whether identifying as transgender or not. Some of the participants compartmentalize these, but many instead have talked about fluidity particularly between sexuality and gender. There are overlaps and interwoven connections. As I consider transgender students in higher education, it is important to have awareness about these various aspects of identity, the multiplicity of identity, and to intentionally create spaces where all can be claimed instead of one named at the closeted expense of another.

Erin had an interesting lens on identity that challenged the perimeters of binaries:

Another binary I've been struggling with lately is more general identity of self... like where do I end and the environment around me begins? So for instance, I am sitting here in a chair and on a table next to me is a glass of water. I'm sitting here, I can recognize myself as separate from the glass of water, I take the glass of water and I drink it; does the water become a part of me? Is the water a part of me? Is it separate from me?

There's a binary here and they are definitely parts of it. When I use the bathroom is it still you that leaves you, or is it not? It's a lot of very complicated questions and the reason they're complicated is because we tend to see things as this distinction between one and another versus we're all just bits of matter and energy floating around in space... and if you look at it from that perspective, where you draw the line between that which is me and that which is the water is totally arbitrary.

I wonder if some of the students I interviewed would still say the water is separate, holding on to images of the restrictive, normative binary while others would say that both the water and Erin

change to something altogether new. Pillow (2002) had some interesting insights when considering feminist theory regarding gender that relate to the personal:

A basic premise of feminist theory: that is, gender matters in our everyday lives, and how we experience our everyday lives is affected by gender matters... it is also difficult to identify and see gender because we easily accept and continue to reinforce dualistic understandings of gender based on a binary of sexual identification or gender as male/female, man/woman, boy/girl. Indeed, many post-civil rights, post Roe v. Wade, post-dual-career mommies have asked, Does feminism still matter? (p.11)

Pillow (2002) recognizes that in this seemingly emancipated state of women living in a privileged, capitalistic society like the United States, oppression is more difficult to observe. I might agree with this if every person fell within the traditional binaries, and we were removing ourselves from the higher education environment which is still deeply rooted in traditional organizational systems that act with power and privilege associated to position. Pillow states that as a race of people, the ideology of anyone can do what they want to do if they work hard enough, tends to be an accepted and comfortable mindset of the times given women's abilities and access in the workforce. Where then does this situate the transgender student? Pillow (2002) acknowledges that feminism could continue to be debated, however, gender is undeniably present and a core aspect of identity that cannot be denied. Pillow noted that, "while we are born with a sex, gender positions our identity" (p.11) and likened this notion to the famous quote by Simone de Beauvoir (1952), "One is not born but made a woman." This relates to the daily lived experiences of transgender individuals which are deeply personal, gender being a constant thread woven in the tapestry of their identity formation.

An equally important reference from Pillow (2002) was made when considering gender in the school systems that are also a personal aspect of trans' students lives stating:

The hegemonic construct of gender has deep ramifications for the field of education, including educational evaluation and policy analysis. What do we accept as normal about gender in our schools, curricula, organizations, and practices? What do we accept and expect about gender in the behaviors of students, staff, teachers, and administrators? Further, knowing that gender is always differentially constructed by and through race, class, and sexuality, how do such identities remain both invisible and overproduced in school settings? (p.12)

While school is a public arena, the experience of school is personal. It is for this reason that Pillow (2002) supports the need for feminist research and theory in education and why this environment is also important and influential to trans college students. While the role of feminism can be continually explored in relation to women's position in society, power is situated and associated with the binaries that are experienced by trans students in the public and private arenas of their lives. These associations, while often assumed to be negative, given the context, are sometimes necessary.

Chance provided an example of power through language in the context of sex and stated: It's interesting because a lot of the gay men I have talked to relate to the "top" being the penetrator and the "bottom" being the penetrated but when you start messing with gender, then, who has the power? They respond by saying, 'Of course the top has the power because they are penetrating.' I disagree and say, 'Really? No they don't because power can be exercised all sorts of ways.' It's not just about those two things or at least it shouldn't be. Because you have all of this power play going on that you aren't even

looking at... you aren't even aware of. When you talk about gay male community versus kink community, "top" and "bottom" mean completely different things. There are branches off of each of them. You go way in to depth because that is how you relate to people. You have to have a label and you have to have specifics. This is how I identify and this is kind of how that plays out. That is just an example of how even though "top" and "bottom" seem so basic, just like the gender binary system seems so basic, but it's not because there are all these levels that we are not even touching on.

Finally, with regard to language, Marek acknowledged the privilege associated with both male and female binaries. Feminists could argue there's little privilege for women when considering the binary of male and female, however, if identified as transgender where, in some environments, you are not named, both male and female assume privilege over transgender. "There is huge pressure to pick an identity of male or female and to fit that gender binary. I feel huge pressure to just be a heterosexual man, to 'just get it over with, you will pass.' You will gain the privilege of having community, not necessarily privilege as a white man living in America, but that I am sure I will gain as well. It's more of gaining the privilege of being one or the other and not being in between." The affiliation to community is important and community extends beyond the binary. Marek's response speaks to affiliation and a sense of isolation when that connection is absent. The question for higher education is whether environments are being created that recognize and encourage these affiliations from all aspects of identity. Is there truly room for everyone? How does language communicate who behaves? Language will continue to impose meanings, particularly through binaries, that recognize privilege, power and difference.

Language will also continue to be constructed and interpreted according to each person's experiences. Marek, Chance and Erin had three unique and separate examples for how language,

regarding the binaries, influences their understanding of gender. All were equally important insights but reflected an individual and personal way of relating to words and circumstances as part of their day-to-day lives. Language, in its very personal interpretations and meanings for trans students, fits with poststructural feminism because this theoretical framework values the individual experience and recognizes the subject with open, creative, and nonbinding restrictions. Language also influences identity.

Identity

As mentioned earlier, identity development is part of the college task and student development theories like Cass (1984) and others suggest the path of evolution, each stage leading to the next in a controlled, methodical manner. These stages, vectors, and phases, while helpful in some contexts, continue to impose an assumed path, a “right” way or successful trek if you flow from one to the next and if you follow the rules of that developmental model. Anything that falls outside of those designated stages and phases are on the fringe, not the norm, and possibly misunderstood. The trans students in this study don’t go for comfort or the path of least resistance. There isn’t a defined right way for their model of gender identity, no clearly defined box to check. Some interesting examples of this complex, nonconforming identity were noted by participants regarding gender and its interplay with sexuality and the influence of binaries.

As I consider Cass’s (1984) identity model, a model that attempts to explain sexual orientation development, I see how there are similar parallels with the feelings and reactions at each stage. While this model is most closely situated with trans-identity formation, it is not strictly aligned. That said, there are some interesting parallels. The overwhelming anxiety and confusion when recalling homosexual thoughts and feelings are not unlike what these trans students described when they realized their gender was different. Stage two, identity

comparison, was referenced a number of times as participants looked to see how gender was being constructed between and among other trans as well as gender-normative peers while they tried to determine what was most comfortable for themselves as individuals. They also sought others out to help make sense of their experiences either face-to-face, in local or regional groups, or on-line. Feelings of isolation and depression (stage one and two – identity confusion and identity comparison) were noted in most of the interviews in one way or another which slowly led to greater tolerance (stage three) and acceptance (stage four) of their gender identity resolution. In stage four of Cass's model, identity acceptance, I am reminded of the influence of environment, family, church and a real, or perceived, sense of safety. This speaks to the academy and the need to ensure colleges and universities are supportive, safe, and accepting places for trans students. College is a ripe environment for sexual experimentation so it is not surprising that many participants could relate to stage five's integration of sexuality (identity pride) with other aspects of their lives. The majority of participants indicated that messages, as well as interest, in sexuality served as a springboard to their gender-identity formation. Finally, every single participant was doing advocacy work on some level which parallels Cass's stages five and six of identity pride and identity synthesis. These stages of development have helped to normalize the various sensations and reactions associated with sexual identity formation in a step-by-step fashion but does not speak to attraction through gender presentation of masculinity or femininity. Not everyone associates their sexual identity to biological sex.

Attraction plays a part in the complex ingredients of identity and does not always reside in a physical association to one sex or the other but rather is drawn to the expressions of gender being feminine or masculine. Sylvie commented on attraction by saying:

Okay, if I am now more often a girl than a boy do I like boys now? That hasn't really changed. It has probably brought me more into a bisexual realm. I find that I am attracted to feminine people. If that person is a boy, then that is fine. If she is a girl, then that is fine. It has removed the physical aspect for me from attraction, because I find that I am attracted to people who are feminine whether they are a boy or a girl. That has taken me a while to get my head around."

Binary language and association would force you to choose between attraction to a man or a woman, but Sylvie doesn't have to choose because both gender identities are acceptable options. She is attracted to gender as a construct not biological sex.

Another way to examine identity lends itself to the relationship between self-esteem and the body, how it is or what it is suppose to be. Chance related self-esteem to identity with these thoughts: "You know, I am beautiful the way that I am. There is nothing that I can do about that. I could get top surgery if I had the resources but it is a good thing that right now I don't have the resources because I really need to get down to loving myself and what that means. I pull a lot of that, like in terms of transphobia, it's the interaction of yourself and the outside world. How you internally, subconsciously react to transphobia and, at the same time, how you further the fear... how you, I don't want to say 'conform,' but how you internalize what you hear, what you see."

Self-esteem is a challenge for many college students, not just transgender individuals, and has great power to influence identity. The media, social networks, family, and friends constantly tout what bodies should be like within the binary of male and female and what constitutes beautiful, attractive, and strong. Chance spoke of being subjected to assertions of masculinity and the need for a stable sense of self where self-esteem becomes more important than a physical fixing to meet a socially constructed rule of what is a man. All too often these rules stifle

expansive thinking about other ways of physically presenting identity. The same could be said for the privilege and dominance placed on thinness as society constructs images of beauty. College is a period of time when many students wrestle with identity so trans students are not alone; their particular circumstances are complex and personal with regard to gender but pose opportunities for learning how to reframe gender as they know and live it on a daily basis in ways that build a positive self concept.

Judy made connections to identity that resonated with her about personal pride as well as affiliation with a culture. “I’m me. I’m a human being. I have hopes, dreams, desires, wants for the future, and for now. I’m very proud of my past. I’m not ashamed that I lived my life as a male. I’m not ashamed. That led to who I am today. I’d want everybody to know that. I’m just like you. That’s what I want people to know. There’s no difference between me and you. My culture is different. That’s all.” Having pride in self, confidence and a sense of comfort, all tie to Chickering’s identity formation. This confidence comes from mastery of each of the vectors with becoming competent; managing emotions; developing autonomy; establishing mature relationships; developing identity, purpose and integrity, but this is not the only way to recognize identity. Judy’s pride in her past speaks of Chickering’s integrity vector yet it is more complex given her socially-constructed gender. The lesson in higher education is not to limit or assume student growth occurs strictly within student development theory, but rather we must use a poststructural feminist framework to expand the possibilities and ways that students evolve as growing, learning individuals. Student development theories offer great guidance and information to make sense of individual progress but these psychosocial identity models have yet to come up with a framework that explains the trans-student experience. A poststructural-feminist perspective differs from student development theories because it is not limited to

vectors, stages, and levels of accomplishment and mastery. It is open to the individual experience and does not identify a point, in time, when development and understanding are exhausted. This theoretical framework can be appreciated for the ongoing growth and openness it invites and, like Judy, it makes no apologies for past experiences in whatever way life was constructed by the individual at the time. A poststructural perspective also welcomes multiplicity of identity.

Antonio had insights about the influence of race and class on identity and stated:

A GLBT youth center in Atlanta was really formative in a lot of ways because of how different the racial and class dynamics were with the kids there. I was one of very few lower, middle class/working class and I am mixed race and just really isolated in that way. I lived among a sea of very wealthy white people. But in my town it is a mostly black city, and most of the kids who went to this GLBT youth center were black. A lot of them were working class and poor and that was different. I feel like I saw, really intensely, that there were many different models of gayness going on. The ways that kids talked about what it meant to be gay to them radically varied and included ideas that were really often around race and class lines. And so I started developing a sense of that.

Antonio's thoughts about identity emphasize the fact that there is not a single way to shape and create identity. He witnessed multiple ways of defining gayness through the lens of race and class, but race and class are not the only identifiers impacting identity. Roen (2006) talks about transgender theorizing and criticizes it as being blind to race and ethnic difference suggesting the need to pay greater attention to cultural and historical specificity so that race and gender are explicitly recognized as significant components of embodied difference. All too often these aspects of identity are compartmentalized especially in higher education through student

development theories focused on sexualities (Cass), race (Helms), and transition (Schlossberg). We must make way for as many different identities as there are people and encourage, in these identities, space to claim and celebrate all aspects of multiplicity of identity. Each person, each student, is going to construct their identity in a way that reflects culture, security in self, family values, institutional assumptions, and social norms. After all, identity-making is a becoming that deepens and grows more complex and intricate over time.

Visibility

Visibility was expressed in a number of ways and included gender performance, gender presentation, being “out,” passing, and visibility in community. Andrew had an example of passing on campus when he was assumed to be a little brother and shared: “My RA walked in, and she asked for me. My dad gave me this awkward smile and said, ‘that’s her,’ and I’m sure she thought that I was my little brother or something, and I just smiled and took the note or whatever it was that she gave me. I thought this is going to be a fantastic year, I’m already passing.” When first moving to college, there is a lot of uncertainty. Students want to make friends, feel confident, and fit in. Trans students, like Andrew, are no different. Visibly passing provided a sense of confidence and relief.

Relationships, while private, also have a public persona and partners’ attitudes and assumptions can influence how visibility feels. Chance shared:

When I was in the relationship with Logan, who was my other trans boyfriend, he was hyper-masculine and he still is; that’s who he is. But he’s like, ‘To be a man you have to do this and you have to do that and you have to look like this.’ And it is small stuff like, ‘sideburns are cut like this.’ I am like, ‘Whoa, you know I am a man.’ I can walk out in a dress, and men wear dresses. You know it doesn’t have any effect and it shouldn’t. I

started binding because he told me that is how you pass more. If you want to pass more, you have to do it. It was kind of like I was following this trans-narrative of having to get to the point of 100% passing and you don't talk about being a girl or anything like that. It's a stereotypical narrative that is totally being busted up. But it is there and it's there with a lot of people in the trans community. Just thinking about it on a small scale as an example, binding, for me, was trying to pass and trying to be something I am not and also trying to deny my body and not being proud of who I am... there is nothing I can do about it.

Chance's comments are a reminder of the structure of student development theories with all of the well-intentioned rules and steps to mastery. Within the trans culture, it appears there are also rules and steps to mastery according to some, like Logan, especially in regards to passing.

Chance's comment is a perfect example of how he and Logan reproduced the dominant discourses of gender and sex. Passing with all of its rules and expectations is just another way to feed in to the dominant, normative assumptions of what it is to be male and what you have to do to be male enough. Chance made an interesting point in recognizing his own voice and the importance of staying true to what is authentic and comfortable for the individual even if it means pushing back on the discourse. It takes courage to make such a stand and to challenge the rules and assumptions embedded in the dominant discourses of gender and sex.

Higher education, the binaries, even the transgender rules of passing mark right and expected ways of doing and being. Poststructural feminism helps to disrupt any regulated assumptions about being or doing so transgender students have the freedom and space to expand their definitions of their gender identity. People constantly reproduce the dominant discourses

because it is what we know; it is engrained; it is the result of years of social imprinting and construction. It represents power because it has traction, not unlike the binaries.

Being out on campus, as a trans person, educates and informs others about gender-nonconforming identities. While it is not a trans student's responsibility to teach others about transgenerness, by virtue of their visibility, attitudes can shift. Increased awareness and understanding can result over time. Judy stated:

If you look at intergroup contact theory, we're talking about if you put two cultures together and they're constantly together. Over time, the two groups begin to understand and accept each other and by using that theory, by me being on campus and very out about being a transsexual, people start to understand. Everybody on campus knows I'm a transsexual. I don't hide that at all, and I let it be known. They start questioning. Now remember earlier I was telling you how the media, family and all these other sources help shape our views on issues, well people started seeing me and others like me, they start saying, "ok what I'm seeing and what I was taught are not the same. I have to question what I was taught." And through this questioning process well... with education comes knowledge. Through this educational process we start gaining understanding about other cultures. The transgender community is just another culture."

The ways in which trans students are visible to others impacts how they engage and navigate their environment. Being out and visible reminds that community that gender variance exists and is a part of their community, but trans students are particularly sensitive when it comes to safety. Maslow's sense of safety and security can be diluted when trying to understand your own identity and people's reactions to you in your environment. Emotional, physical, and psychological safety all matter to the trans student especially when it comes to being

unexpectedly “outed,” or accused of being in the wrong bathroom due to being visibly perceived as counter to your gender presentation. This has been especially true for transsexual trans who start to use the restrooms of their preferred gender, as part of their Harry Benjamin standards of care, before legally or physically “passing” in a manner that does not draw questioning stares, negative attention, or physical harm.

Safety

When examining the theme of safety, participants shared stories that included physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual circumstances where safety was a concern. Marek recognized the risks involved with his appearance not matching the name on his driver’s license. “Well, it is kind of scary because every time you go to the store, you are going to be outing yourself accidentally. If you pay with a credit card they will ask, ‘can I see your ID?’ and if they see on there that it says female, they might have an issue. I live in Riverside County which is fairly conservative. In February, we had an anti-gay hate crime where two men were attacked. Then there was one in Long beach; there was a trans man who was attacked. So this is my own history with hate crimes. It’s scary and for me, passing is not that important for the purpose of the identity, passing is important for the purpose of safety.”

Fear of harassment and violence are very real for people who identify as transgender. They take special care to be aware of their surroundings and avoid potentially antagonistic situations. Kat faced a terrifying situation that she never expected when arrested. With a softened voice, she explained:

An incident happened two years ago. It’s really embarrassing but I think it is significant. I ended up getting in an argument with a roommate and she called the police on me. I got arrested and they took me to jail. When they did, they ended up putting me in with the

men. I was raped by three people and the thing is, I don't understand that because I don't know why you put somebody that is like me, that obviously looks like a woman, in a pen with horny, angry, violent, people and not expect that to happen. What sucked is that I could not do anything because I was considered incarcerated at the time. I couldn't receive victim's services. I couldn't receive any help. It was like, "well you are a faggot, you like getting fucked so what is the problem?" My mom even called them up and said, 'Please don't put her in with the general population because something is going to happen.' Again, I don't understand why they did that. I was in isolation, solitary confinement, when I first went in there and that is where I should have stayed for the duration. When I got out I had no rights. I could have pressed charges and I made a report but nothing came of it. They went to the guys. One had already left and fled back to Mexico or something. The others denied it so it just became my word against theirs and there was no way I was going to go and have a trial and have to face those people again. There was just no way.

Trans violence happens in college and university settings across the country and in society in general. Bathroom culture is one of the most frequently discussed concerns among trans students. Kael shared his preference for gender-neutral bathrooms because of safety: "Gender-neutral bathrooms, they are bigger. I can lock the whole door. I can adjust if I need to. Even in the bathroom stalls there are all the little cracks and whatnot which is fine for the most part but at the same time it does make you wonder. What happens if the lock doesn't work? That is a fear and if it happens, what did I just get myself into? Am I going to get jumped the moment I walk out of the stall? It's just a comfort thing. Having the actual physical lock on the door to be

able to find that separation and having the full closure so that whatever I am doing is ok helps to feel safe.”

When you consider the practices of everyday life, something as natural as relieving yourself, the threat of harm and fear should not be your first thought when entering the restroom. This fear, this looming sense of threat, is an enactment of institutional belief systems to continue to oppress and separate. It is no accident that there are men’s restrooms and women’s restrooms. Those with access, those that are named as men and women, have their places. Gender-neutral bathrooms were included on participant’s wish lists in this study. Colleges and universities need to be cognizant of the very real impact of space and facilities when it comes to safety and a sense of wellbeing for trans students. If not addressed, these students could choose to pursue their education elsewhere.

Not all aspects of bathroom culture are negative. Some experiences, in fact celebrate mastery of the environment. Judy turned a fear into a success as she recalled her lessons in bathroom etiquette from her friends:

Women talk in the bathroom. And so going to the bathroom at the university, I was very nervous because I didn’t want to talk to anybody, not at all. I had a bunch of classmates that, every time I’d go to the restroom, would trail in behind me and they made me talk in the restroom, literally made me! Yeah! Remember that I talked about how we’re conditioned? I was socially conditioned that you don’t talk in the bathroom, and it was really difficult for me to overcome that conditioning. Overcoming it was the scary part. They were my friends and they knew I was a transsexual and they knew I was maturing as a woman and they were determined to help, ‘you’re going to learn these things.’ They wanted to teach me how to be a woman, that’s what that was.

Judy's experience highlights the support of allies and friends who are eager, and willing, to help while offering acceptance for gender-nonconforming identities.

Safety is a concern for most underrepresented groups, trans students included. Their experience is different in that they spend a lot of ongoing energy thinking about their safety, anticipating their risk level and planning escape routes whereas most students are thinking about calling a friend in between classes or going for a latte. This study has helped to illuminate just how much mental pressure trans students manage beyond their work load and normal interpersonal adjustments to college. Trying to balance transition to college with this personal gender-identity formation can be extremely challenging and is compounded with any incidents of harassment, bullying, or other taunting that marginalizes these individuals.

Colleges and universities must examine their campus cultures and identify ways to promote safety, support and inclusion. Many institutions do this and the academy, in general, has been quite liberal attempting to name and create spaces for underrepresented groups. It is important that GLBT centers exist, that facilities meet GLBT needs for privacy and security, and that trainings occur for administrators, faculty, and staff because it really matters from a human rights, respect and dignity standpoint, not just so that institutions can say they've covered their bases. When considering community resources and support, it is increasingly more apparent that trans students need to take responsibility for their own self-care.

Self-Care

The theme of self-care surfaced with regard to mental health, balance, and the desire to improve self-esteem. In general, college students operate at a frenetic pace, constantly multi-tasking, being overly involved and busy. Some of this activity is better represented by the inside job trans students are working on versus external influences. Bruce was talking about a time

crunch with school and said: “I remember making really significant decisions that self-care needs to come before all this other stuff that I need to do in life. I may not graduate on time and I didn’t. I graduated a year later than my class but I had to make choices that were what I needed. Taking care of myself has to come before the things I need to do to meet other people’s expectations.”

Kael had some additional insights regarding wellness as he realized, at one point, that he compromised his own self-care by stating:

For a long time I was just very depressed about it. It was because of my parents. It took me some time to become okay with identifying as trans but it was not having the parents’ support that took me quite awhile to get past and become okay with wanting my gender to align with other aspects of my identity. I was very sad. My dad helped me out a lot with that. My mom still makes me sad. I am in this grey area like I said. Being referred to, and assumed to be, male feels right. It is where I am supposed to be and just fitting into that is the least conflicting thing I have done when it comes to sexual orientation and gender. There has always been a little bit of resistance in me with claiming the terms tomboy, lesbian or butch. Even if I have accepted them, there has always been a little bit of me that has been resistant or maybe a little bit resentful. Portraying as masculine and going with it is like this click. It clicks. I am in the right place.

Honoring what feels right, what clicks, and what is needed for optimal health and a sense of well being are necessary components of self-care but as Kael mentions, they don’t occur free of emotional struggle. This theme recognizes how vulnerable this population can be to feelings of fear, doubt and insecurity and mental health concerns that can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Kael realized that he was allowing his trans identity to shrink his experiences:

I didn't go to the gym for a year and a half because I was very concerned about what would happen there, how I would be perceived. I wasn't sure how the bathroom situation worked. Even after I learned about it, I was still kind of unsure of it. That was really too bad. I got depressed and at the same time I was having issues finding work. I was having some issues with my group of friends so I had all three of these things at one time and I got depressed. I have, in the past, been diagnosed with bipolar depression. Although looking back on it, I am not sure if I was actually depressed or if it was some of these gender issues screwing with me in high school. But not letting that take over your life or your body is important. One of the big realizations for me was that I can be transgender and I can still eat all right, I can still exercise.

Personal self-care can be managed in public and private spaces. Knowing of this struggle for trans students is important for student affairs professionals who aim to serve this population in ways that support their success. Student services and mental health-care professionals could benefit from knowing these details about trans students in order to provide quality assistance if faced with trans student needing self-care. Offering trained, competent and trans-educated professionals to students as resources are one way to assist. These kinds of resources enable trans students to build supportive relationships that aid in their success.

Relationships

Relationships with family, classmates, and university officials have all been identified as significant and supportive despite going through adjustment periods together. The trans student is occasionally faced with the rejection of loved ones which some have indicated is agony. Mentoring connections are not uncommon both within and outside of the trans community and provide much needed support. Many relationships can be positive with community and

university professionals. Participants identified lawyers, professors, advisors, and some administrators as important allies. That said, not all relationships are encouraging. For example Andrew shared: “Ever since I came out as trans, my relationship with my parents has deteriorated. My dad and I aren’t best friends anymore and he doesn’t look at me very happily when I come home anymore. I’m going to give him years, I guess, of patience so they’ll come around, but the relationship has definitely changed.”

Kathy had a different experience when she spoke of times with her grandfather, and events when she could connect with her trans friends who really took her under their wing offering her support, friendship, and guidance: “We got to talking about shoes, where you can find them and stuff like that. They connected me with a trans support group in Norfolk. It’s been awesome. It meets once a month. They actually live here in town. I would ride down to group with them or to Richmond for something. They have been amazing and they talk to me about hormones or boy troubles or whatever.” Kathy also talked about intimacy and how it feels to be sorting out all of the confusing and exciting aspects of her gender identity and what that would be like with another person in the picture. Ze said:

It’s been 19 or 20 months since I last did anything sexual with anyone else. At that point I was still identifying as a gay man and it was with a gay man. My trans identity really influences my sexuality, especially activity, because I don’t really know who might be interested at a local level. But also if someone were interested, how would they feel about a certain aspect? Like if I were to hook up with a gay guy, how would he feel about my really long hair or my chest or whatever? If I were interested in a straight guy, how would he feel about some parts of me that, I don’t know, he probably doesn’t have much experience with so a lot of it has been that I am going to step back to avoid these

questions... not avoid them but try to figure out where I stand on them before I involve someone else in trying to figure out their identity in relation to me. With a better understanding of my trans identity, it also could shift who I am attracted to. I feel like I have always been kind of attracted to those straight guys. A lot of that, when I was identifying as gay, might have been 'you always want what you can't have.' That is how I thought about it. Now I feel more like, 'of course I want a straight guy.' Gay guys are interested in guys. So where do I fit in that?

Twyla was reflecting on how it felt emotionally to connect to hir gender-queer identity and stated: "quiet and spacious. There is so much baggage with 'man' and 'woman,' you know. I suppose wanting to identify with one of those categories I think I would feel sort of bombarded and put under pressure and very, very visible and called to account for something that I am not responsible for. Whereas if I identify as gender queer it's like I can scamper around in the tunnels underneath the parade and go about my business without being called to task for things." Twyla's comments relate to the personal because ze identifies the importance of a quiet reflective space to sort through aspects of identity with hirself. Building a relationship with self and honoring that quiet time can intuitively enhance other aspects of daily life.

Poststructural feminism calls for examining language in all of its covert and overt signs and symbols. Considering the subject, through daily experiences, matters and aids in examining gender differences and power. The personal themes in this chapter tell stories about the daily experiences of students in the study. Some of them reflected on tragedy, while others shared bold moments. These individually constructed themes convey the meaning and perceptions experienced by trans students. There is room, in this framework, for blending, weaving, conceptualizing and resituating ideas, assumptions and thoughts.

Antonio offers a slightly different spin by suggesting: “Poststructuralism is really good for recognizing that genders emerge systemically and also ephemerally and that I do have a measure of autonomy and a measure of obligation in the ways that I can pursue the different things for my body and my life and like I said, I don’t get the feeling that where I am with my gender and my sex right now is the only thing that could have happened. I do see it, to put it in more draconian terms, as a certain practice of generating pleasure in finding ways to take pleasure in my gender and my body and my sexuality. It is not an inevitable thing that had to happen, but is something that I’ve made choices around.” Choices are personal and speak to self-authorship. Knowing comes from socially constructing meaning from these experiences. Language (words, meanings, perceptions, assumptions, symbols) influences how we choose, and respond, to life circumstances. Binary systems shape the experience and influence of women and men in the college community which directly impacts trans students on campus.

Summary

The personal themes of language, identity, visibility, safety, self-care, and relationships have offered insight into the complex nature of transgender identity and the challenges faced by trans students on a daily basis. Just as there are common themes between participants, there are many aspects of their daily life that are unique to each person. Knowing the person in the context of daily life even before identifying as trans can offer details that enable the reader to have more insight on the trans student experience now. There are positive and negative aspects to each of these themes that, depending on the individual, can impact daily life. When considering the higher education environment, university staff and faculty need to be educated and able to offer support and resources in a nonjudgmental way to trans students regarding these personal areas of their lives.

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) introduce the notion of crystallization which ties nicely to an explanation of the individual profiles as well as the poststructural feminist framework:

The central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous.

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns. What we see depends on our angle of repose...Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity"; we feel how there is no single truth, and we see how texts validate themselves. Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic.

Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (p.963)

Crystallization offers a new way to examine trans identity. Consider the different facets of a prism and the ways that it reflects and refracts light; each angle and image parallels the many ways trans students experience the multiplicity of their identity. Each lens is unique offering new and unique insights, and the angles themselves are constantly shifting and moving like a prism spinning so no knowledge or understanding is fixed. Identity is continually constructed and evolving, influenced by dominant discourse and life circumstances but able to flex and shift similar to the prism, constant motion, always new ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Crystallization ties well with this chapter as a way to acknowledge individual and unique experiences.

The metaphor of crystals with all of their angles and new light is a good one. Trans students manage a great deal of pressure beyond what is expected of them as students and it is

important that the university aims to provide an environment that is conducive to their learning. The research findings have been interesting when looking back to the start of the study. Initial assumptions did not manifest in the ways that were expected and there were some surprising realizations. Some of the initial assumptions about transgender identity and trans students included the following:

- Trans students are constantly challenged by language and pronouns.
- Trans students feel disenfranchised from the academy.
- Binary thinking and doing marginalize them.
- Trans students reject the binary.

Language, according to the study participants, does pose challenges especially when it comes to gender-normative pronouns. Some students are spanning beyond binaries and comfortably situating themselves in a gender-neutral space where they have created their own words and symbols for expression. This aligns well with poststructural feminism. Others are constructing their gender in a manner that is not rigidly set but is gender normative most days, and finally, there were three students who clearly wanted to remain attached to the gender binary with language and identity as well as with their heteronormative privilege and cisgender recognition. After transitioning they became legally married but would not have been eligible or recognized to do so had they remained females. The majority of study participants linked to the binaries and, when probed further, did so out of convenience and connection rather than political motivation. When peeling this finding back, there were approximately nine participants who indicated feelings of frustration about the academy primarily targeting the systems within it, but the sensation of being disenfranchised was too strong an assumption to claim. Feelings of marginalization, hurt, agitation, and depression were described to varying degrees and were

mainly directed toward ill-prepared systems or personal circumstances. One of the most prominent findings was the adherence to, and tolerance of, the binary. The personal themes that were identified and described in this chapter speak to having connection, a sense of place, a sense of support and additional forms of binaries.

As colleges and universities evolve, it will be important that they recognize their roles and responsibilities with regard to modeling community, regulating policies, records, and systems as well as respond to student advocacy. These will be the next dimensions discussed in chapter six.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ORGANIZATION/POLITICAL: COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Introduction

This chapter presents findings related to the organization of higher education as well as the political components situated within the academy that influence access and inclusion. The organization can be defined as a modern, forward-thinking environment committed to learning and expanding knowledge. Simultaneously, it is also a bureaucratic business with a very real bottom line steeped in tradition. Colleges and universities aim to be a place that disseminates knowledge through research, teaching and service. The environment models dominant discourses of sex and gender in its facilities, policies and community. The academy still attaches itself to normative ideas, concepts of operation and learning that marginalize trans students. These traditional spaces of operation and binary learning strategies are exactly what trans students push against when attempting to navigate the campus culture as gender-nonconforming young adults.

Three areas stood out among the students in the study regarding the organizational/political themes. These were community; policies, records, and systems; as well as advocacy. All three impact quality of life and the ways in which trans students can effectively navigate the campus culture and its administrative bureaucracy. This chapter presents findings related to the following research questions:

- What is the experience of the transgender student in the college and university setting?
- What organizational structures hinder or enhance the transgender college experience?

When referring to the organizational/political dimension, this study examines the university environment and the many different ways that community is experienced by students. This could include, but is not limited to, involvement in a residence hall community or affiliation with the GLBT resource center or local organization. Community is also found in the classroom as part of a group of scholars or in a club or organization that represents a passion or hobby either on or off campus. Community is discovered when school spirit and a sense of affiliation with the campus becomes an aspect of student identity. These are some of the ways community can be identified, and later in this chapter, trans students will share how they have experienced community on campus.

The political is the other half of this dimension. It represents both the impacts and influences of administrative management components such as policies, records, and systems as well as advocacy either for, or by, transgender students. Allen and Iverson et al. (2010) describe policy as being “more broadly defined to also include the dynamic and value-laden process through which political systems operate to solve problems at the institutional level” (p.4). Fowler (2009) states that the study of institutional policy can involve political culture, ethics, demographic trends, values and discourse which generally refers to “the way in which language, or, more broadly, bodies of knowledge,... define the terrain and consequently complicate attempts at change” (Bacchi, 1999, p. 40). Trans students have expressed, for example, concern that college and university nondiscrimination clauses do not include them. Changing this policy could be a challenge depending on the discourse of gender on campus. These challenges are precisely why it is important to be able to work with policies to affect change. Examining the underlying systems that dictate who is named and how gender identities are situated in the academy is a start. Seeking new ways to reframe the power associated with the

dominant discourse of gender would then follow. These changes are exactly what poststructural feminism aims to accomplish.

The organizational/political dimension is important to examine because trans students have some unique needs that impact how they navigate the campus culture in order to be successful. Some colleges and universities are well equipped to address trans student needs with support, resources, and inclusive operating systems. Institutions can grow and change in support of this population, and this study shares recommendations for better ways to serve trans individuals. A positive outcome of these conversations with participants has been to identify their needs specifically and to also consider the ways in which community impacts their sense of belonging and mattering. The students have shared examples of system failures that hinder success so that colleges and universities might implement changes in the future and create the campus community that draws trans students to it.

Lewis (1993) said it best, “Universities are both the site where reactionary and repressive ideologies and practices are entrenched and, at the same time, the site where progressive, transformative possibilities are born” (as cited in Ropers-Huilman, 1998, p. 58). Trans students should not have to weed through the institutional bureaucracy to see if they have a place at the table, but occasionally this is how it feels. A sense of connection and affiliation are important and need to be expressed through policy and practice. An overlapping theme for organization was the notion of community. Student interpretations of community varied and related to their experiences on campus. For some, community meant inclusion and connection while for others it was the association with a group so as not to be alone. For others still, community was depicted as a subculture of the organization, such as a class. There were many ways for the trans students in this study to engage in community. Another component that stood out was how

students were assisted or challenged with policies, records and systems. This was most prominent with students seeking preferred names as changes to the students' legal university records. Finally, student advocacy also fell under the political dimension as trans students shared their gender-identity information to improve communication with faculty and other university officials. Advocacy was also revealed through student involvement in policy changes regarding nondiscrimination clauses, gender-neutral restrooms, as well as gender-neutral housing. Insights about the areas of community, policies, records and systems, as well as the political follow in the next sections.

Community

Research into successful students advises that institutions can work against risks of premature departure or underperformance by promoting student involvement and a sense of campus belonging (Astin, 1984). Community is a group of people that come together with a common connection. Communities could be based on gender identity, a mutual hobby interest, or the residence hall where you live and make friends. The connection to a group, having an affiliation and a sense of mattering, helps to build self-esteem and security. Chance shared a good example about community as chosen family by saying: "Because I really lost my biological family early on, I did find myself in this eternal search for a community and a place where I could be me. What that comes down to is a job where I can help others. I can help others grow and explore and I can just be a positive influence on other people that are similar to me and have similar interests. At the same time, I can look to elders and ask for similar resources to help me, and I can open up to people and have intimate relations and just know that there are safe spaces and places and people for me." Chance has found this rewarding community link through his work at the campus Queer ("Q") Center.

When considering his experiences in the community and how that related to his gender identity, Edward had a discouraging experience and explained his situation that relates to community affiliation:

People see me as being a cisgendered male. I should have qualified that probably. I am usually comfortable being perceived as a cisgender male. In the queer community, when I go out with Laura, we are perceived as being a straight couple which is very strange. It is very strange for us and a little bit hurtful at times because we get looks like you are an outsider and you are not really one of us. I have to actually come out again to the queer community as trans. As does Laura because she is perceived as being straight and she's not. So obviously it's a perception on people's part where I fall. I certainly don't identify as being completely exclusively on the male end of the spectrum.

Regardless of where he falls on the gender spectrum, Edward and his wife, Laura, experienced push back from the GLBT community by virtue of their gender presentation. As previously mentioned, not all trans folk identify as GLB, but many find their way to their gender identity through the formation of their sexual identity so to conceivably be rejected by this community would be painful.

Talburt (2010) identifies how homophobia and transphobia impact community. While the police have to address matters of homophobia and transphobia, when they occur it can feel very isolating for the trans student. Talbert (2010) states:

Much anti homophobic research and practice, which informs university policy and practice, encourages the provision of support systems that enable young people to develop LGBT identities in a safe environment so that they can successfully enter LGBT adulthood. Many college campuses have responded by encouraging and/or implementing

Safe Zone programs, LGBT-inclusive multicultural programming, and student groups... these extracurricular activities are premised on an idea that with appropriate support and resources, LGBT students will build community; create visibility; participate in and contribute to a positive educational climate; and develop leadership skills, coping strategies, and positive identities. While well intentioned, such practices rely on narrow ideas of who LGBT youth are and what they need (p.113).

GLBT centers and Safe Zone programs are valuable in the ways that they create a space that is a GLBT-affirming location and a social reprieve. They serve to educate community members and identify those individuals who support others as allies. Interestingly enough, just over half of the participants discussed safe zones and/or GLBT centers as stand-out programs on campus. Some students said these places were their home-away-from-home while others did not know if they existed. A number of the participants actively served on GLBT speaker's panels so they had positive reactions to these aspects of community life. Halberstam (2005) argues that these practices (GLBT centers and Safe Zone programs) are limiting based on a linear development model and do not consider more "queer" understandings of time, space, and identity in which subjects disrupt all normative accounts of a linear narrative between adolescence and adulthood. Antonio spoke to this surface presentation as part of his frustration with the center and LGBT group on his campus. While nice, he argued that they were not critically thinking about identity and engaging from queer perspectives so it was a waste of his time. Antonio voiced strong opposition to these initiatives because he perceived them to be superficial and "fluff," lacking an avenue for critical thought and discourse. That said he did recognize value in having safe spaces identified across campus regardless of the level of critical engagement that would be occurring there.

Classrooms are also communities with members who get to know each other in the context of that specific learning environment. As such, it matters that the classroom experience feels safe to trans students, that they are recognized in ways that align with their gender identity including preferred pronouns as well as names on the rosters. Morgan had a slightly different experience as ze was relating to hir classroom community. “I would ask them to not use my legal name in class because, for awhile, I didn’t have it changed until my last year in graduate school. I didn’t have the money and I was trying to avoid anger from my dad about changing my name. There were multiple times when they wanted us to think ahead and log into Angel, which was this electronic classroom tool, and there would be my legal name on the screen for everyone to see. It was a very anxiety-creating situation because my cohorts didn’t know my legal name. I told them to use my preferred name at all times. The other situation was explaining how I identify and asking professors to use gender pronouns in reference to me. There were some professors who were really good about it and there were some that I felt totally ignored my request.” Morgan went on to share another situation that impacted hir classroom community. The professor put hir on the spot with an inappropriate question about her sexuality regarding hir preference of men or women, Ze was stunned and uncomfortable with being asked such a question in front of hir peers who were all laughing.

In all four of these examples, the connections to their communities impacted how each student felt personally. For Chance, being able to help others and outreach validates his experience and provides an avenue for creating a caring community space. Edward wants to feel accepted without constantly having to explain himself or out his trans identity. Antonio wants to connect with community members who can engage in critical dialogue around the dominant discourses of sex and gender. Morgan’s classroom situations were uncomfortable and could

have been avoided if the faculty member had honored Morgan's wishes by using his preferred name and respected his privacy by never asking personal questions in the first place. Community is important to all of them but means very different things.

Some participants identified that the on-line teaching tools used on many campuses today, such as Angel or YouLearn, are not safe. They engage students in web chats or interactive blogs, but in order to participate you must sign in with the name that is associated with your university records so for those that are going by a preferred or alternative name, often reflecting a desired gender for trans students, this gets tricky. Peers in the class do not recognize the name and also do not "see" the person that they've come to know by the preferred name reference. As a result, some trans students have opted not to participate thereby accepting a failing grade on the assignment, while others were outed and faced awkward questions. These circumstances are disruptive to the learning that was intended. No matter how communities are defined, they are necessary for optimal growth and support of the trans student. Policies, records, and systems are a part of a larger community system, but for the sake of this study, this next section will refer to administrative tasks and gate keepers that impact the trans-student experience.

Policies, Records, and Systems

This section includes insights about nondiscrimination clauses, university records and applications such as transcripts, housing agreements, and other legally binding services. The name change process, email and payroll are additional examples as well as the university communications which host the institution's nondiscrimination clauses. This section relates to community because it oversees many of the administrative tasks affiliated with university operations that impact the student experience. On a positive note, when these are going well, it

is a win for the university with no complaint. If students have cause for concern, changes need to be made to improve the environment or the student circumstances. In this study, the nondiscrimination clauses were examined with respect to language, specifically wording related to gender and gender identity/expression.

Of the 27 schools listed, 12 indicated individual listings or a combination of gender, gender identity, or gender expression on their nondiscrimination clauses. Surprisingly, gender itself was only listed six times and only two schools included all three gender descriptors as part of their clauses. All schools included sex with the majority also listing sexual orientation, which has been an upswing over the past decade. This was an interesting observation and prompted questions regarding the impetus for this change. Could the highly publicized murder of gay college student, Matthew Sheppard, have been an influential factor in this increase? These clauses identify groups of people who are considered a protected class so it is significant that over half of the institutions reflected in this study failed to claim gender or gender identity/expression in their groupings. Allan, Iverson, & Ropers-Huilman (2010) recognize the influence of the dominant narrative and state:

Policy analysis using Feminist Poststructural framing of power poses many questions and challenges. Finding information is difficult when the dominant narrative has documented one perspective in accessible ways, but not others. Feminist poststructuralism urges attention to silences... how can we make sense of what was not recorded or articulated, and the values inherent in those constructed absences? At a time when there is no lack of rhetoric around inclusion, many are stymied by ineffective practices; this kind of deep analysis provides a potential opening for change. (p.39)

Institutions of higher education can be a part of this change by considering ways to improve ineffective practices on campuses that hinder trans-student success and recognize this often silenced population. It is not enough to simply redo the system with overly simplistic, but necessary, fixes that attend to human needs. Rather, post-structural feminism would argue that while you must take care of the personal through those fixes, it is necessary to practice expansive thinking and doing, to think the unthought, to arrive at altogether new and innovative ways of engaging students. Examining the underlying ideologies and practices, and changing them to reflect inclusive spaces that support constituents, needs to be the framework that drives service and outreach. Beyond the nondiscrimination clauses, there are other organizational systems that impact this population and reflect the bureaucratic environment that reinforces homogeneity and the dominant discourses. The student voices that follow will highlight some of these challenges.

Sylvie had a concern to share regarding university communications systems and shared, “The thing that has caused the biggest problem is not the instructors or the university, but it’s the email. My email address says my legal name. All my instructors know me as Sylvie. They get this email and they ask, ‘Who is Sylvester?’ It’s a very masculine name. I went to admissions and said, ‘How do I go about getting just the name on my email changed?’ They directed me to Information Technology and said ‘Oh just go to the IT department. You need to have a name change form.’ So here is the thing, I haven’t changed my name and when I explained to them what was going on, they were bewildered but willing to help. They went to the head of the department of admissions. They asked, ‘What do we do about this?’ She looked through all the paperwork and responded that they could not help due to FERPA and student privacy records.”

While there was some progress made, it was done at the expense of Sylvie having to run from place to place with the burden of fixing the problem carried by the student. Basic needs

impact quality of life and a student's ability to engage so it becomes a priority to find a solution. Thinking beyond the fixing itself, but expanding to a new way of thinking, what would it be like if institutions streamlined all student identity records and systems and provided access for students to update and revise certain information without having to go through the gatekeeper?

In a study conducted by Iverson (2010) on diversity action plans, Allen (1999) was cited as referring to policy itself as a form of disciplinary power that “both constrains individuals by subjecting them to regulation, control, and normalization and, at the same time, enables or empowers individuals by positioning them as subjects who are endowed with the capacity to act” (as cited in Iverson, 2010, p. 196). Alcoff (1988) had another way of examining power and says:

The idea here is that we individuals really have little choice in the matter of who we are, for as Derrida and Foucault like to remind us, individual motivations and intentions count for nil or almost nil in the scheme of social reality. We are constructs – that is, our experience of our very subjectivity is a construct mediated by and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond (way beyond) individual control. As Foucault puts it, we are bodies ‘totally imprinted by history.’ (p.416)

It is also helpful to examine those areas on which we want to push back. Where is the tension? What is the cause? “A key aspect of feminist poststructuralism concerns the ways in which power is understood, conceptualized, enacted through discursive practices. Power is not something that is hierarchically positioned, never to be disrupted or resisted. Instead, power constructs relationships and opportunities, as well as the very terms through which policy and resistance can be understood and engaged.” (Allen, Van Deventer Iverson, & Ropers-Huilman, 2010, p.37). Advocacy is a way to challenge these power systems but can be tricky in research and is reviewed in this next section.

Advocacy

Advocacy was a consistent theme among participants and guides the second overarching dimension of this chapter, the political. Advocacy was both overt and subtle, involving trans students as part of a collective as well as individuals in a more private exchange. A number of trans students learned to advocate for themselves as part of their navigation of campus culture and as a means to support their emotional survival. Within the organizational/political dimensions, students shared stories and experiences that supported a focus on community as well as the impacts of policies, records, and systems. The political dimension examines the ways in which trans students have advocated for themselves or for their community. Advocacy is another area where diverse approaches were common. All of the study participants were politically and socially involved in GLBT-related events and activism on some level. Judy made an interesting discovery when she went to court with her lawyer to advocate for her gender identity stating that she could marry a man or a woman:

I have Phyllis Frye (Trans identified lawyer) for my attorney. The judge ruled, and by the way this is a Republican judge, that when I was born, I was accidentally, mistakenly, misidentified as a male and ordered my birth certificate corrected to say female. So, when you look at that, I should have been identified as a female, living my life as a female from birth because I was a female at birth. Being identified as a female means I can marry a male. The state of Texas says same sex marriage is not legal. So I can marry a male. Now, there was a case law in Texas, Kristy Littleton vs. Dr. Prayne. Kristy Littleton was a transsexual. The court ruled against Kristy Littleton and the ruling was that the marriage is determined by your chromosomes, you know the 23rd pair. It says a marriage is between an XX and an XY. I'm an XY so I can marry an XX.

This type of advocacy enables trans people, at a formal level, to be aware of their rights as well as, in the ways that they are specific to the state that you live in, identify some interesting loopholes. Judy's experience with her lawyer and the court ruling ties to this organizational/political overview because in knowing who you are and in learning your legal rights, you offer yourself as a resource to others. Judy is a well-known student on campus who has shared her story and resources as a way to help others navigate challenges both on and off campus as well as in the state of Texas. She also uses her activism as a way to unite with others in solidarity while facing trans-related issues.

When considering advocacy further, Morgan was another student who had an example of administrator support when ze said, "I guess a surprise would be at my undergraduate institution. We got a new vice chancellor who was very big in student affairs and my mentor encouraged me to share my idea of a Safe Zone program for students and to make that my NASPA undergraduate fellows program. I was very surprised when the vice chancellor decided to fund it and run it out of his office and to be a supportive mentor to me. I guess I was surprised because I didn't know this guy. He did not seem to be a GLBT person and you know he was going out of his way to do this great thing for me." When describing people's reactions to hir, Morgan explained that ze isn't sure how ze is often perceived by others. "I know myself and I feel normal but I don't expect the kind of reactions I get and sometimes I don't even realize why I am getting these reactions until later when I reflect upon the situation." Morgan's remark is a reminder to intentionally model openness and to not make judgments. It matters that university officials are able to serve in a helpful manner by not making assumptions or judgments regarding a student's gender identity and to focus on the best way to assist and support the student experience and student success.

Finally, Kathy had an example of administrative support when ze said, “During exams we have something called primal scream where students gather on, or near, our main lawn. The president comes out to direct us in screaming for stress relief during exams. It’s really cool but the first time, I guess this was sophomore year, he said “let’s hear from the ladies” and they screamed, and then “the gentleman” and they screamed and then “everyone” and I screamed with everyone else. I emailed him the next day to say that the primal screams don’t need to be divided by gender.” While it is possible that the president was attempting to be inclusive, it is more important to note Kathy’s confidence in emailing the president directly to state her point and further emphasize a transgender-positive approach to primal scream. It mattered to hir to advocate for this change and one cannot effect change without taking action.

When considering hierarchies and those that have power over others, Judy shared the way she explains these systems of power to her classes when teaching:

If society is the dominant group, the dominant group is not trans, not gay, typically white, educated, and healthy. This is the dominant group you typically deal with in an educational institution. And so, you’re going up against this construct of a very large group of people who are very satisfied with their power structures. Whenever a male-to-female transsexual gets involved, what happens is the patriarchal group is losing a male therefore losing a member; you’re losing power, but if it’s a female-to-male then the patriarchal group is saying, “see, they really are trying to imitate us because they know we are the greatest, we are the men and as hard as they try to imitate us, they will never be like us.” So you have this built in discrimination which is built into the whole system. Within the educational institutions, people will say, “yes, we don’t want to discriminate and yes, we respect the idea that everybody gets to choose their lifestyle and so that’s

ok.” But when you get down to the necessities of life, the transsexuals don’t get the quality jobs, for the most part. They don’t get the extremely high evaluations. I looked at some statistics and the U.S. Department of Labor has unemployment as 9.7% and some of the research I’ve done has shown that unemployment within the transsexual community across the U.S. ranges anywhere from 25-65% depending on the geographical location. So if you take that bottom number and compare it to the 9% national average, that’s huge. And it’s indicative of systemic discrimination. And you have that in our educational institutions. That exists and that is currently what I’m trying to get changed in Texas.

When considering the transgender student experiences on campus with policies, records and systems, it is clear that there is work to be done and that many of these systems are still rooted in the traditional model locked into dominant discourses that emphasize power over, a right or set way of functioning, and binary frames of operation. These limit understanding of trans people, hinder service, and alienate students further, as they live beyond binary constructs.

Summary

Change is possible from a variety of levels of the academy and with many different people on campus, but it takes time and focused attention to mobilize. When considering the organizational/political, it is important to acknowledge change, while desired, cannot easily occur overnight. Deeply entrenched systems take time to unravel in a way that offers new options and approaches for effective service and buy-in. Encouraging student advocacy brings their voice to the issues and systems that hinder their success. Trans students are a small part of the campus community that represent another diverse voice. Their experience is complicated, especially as students attempt to navigate organizational systems rooted in binary frameworks

and regimented protocols. Trans students navigating the organizational and political must do so with the understanding that limitations exist. These limitations can potentially hinder their experiences if they do not intellectually prepare to live and engage in an environment rooted in the traditions of dominant discourses around sex and gender. Connecting to communities and being engaged with others through a shared affiliation provides support, resources, and friendship with peers. Managing the policies, records and systems takes patience and a methodical approach to ensure legal affiliation with the university is not compromised when pursuing preferred-name changes in the systems or other administrative transitions. Proactive, personal disclosure is one way to advocate for trans needs within the classroom or out on campus. Identifying university allies for support and establishing safe spaces for transparent and authentic exchanges are valuable. Poststructural feminism identifies the influence of language, the personal and subjective experience of day-to-day life, and systems of power through the organization of higher education in the examples that were provided.

This study offers the ability to create transformational changes so that trans students on campus have equal footing when it comes to their learning experience coupled with a sense of welcome. Recommendations are included in Chapter Seven for better ways to serve the transgender student beyond the binary.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMING FULL CIRCLE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Introduction

Returning to the original research questions that guided this study, and reflecting on the stories shared by the trans students who were interviewed, it was apparent that this population is not well known or understood on campus. Traditional ways of serving students, while necessary, have been shortsighted when considering a poststructural-feminist framework and the expansive opportunities that await willing minds. Knowledge, understanding and service need to be constructed differently to take into account the influence of the dominant discourses around sex and gender, and how they, in turn, impact the trans-student experience, a ripple affect in action. The study participants described themselves as intelligent, serious students, socially conscious transgender individuals who want, and deserve, to be a part of campus communities as actively engaged scholars. Their stories provided details and answers that are creating greater understanding of the following research questions: What it means to be transgender, how transgender identity is manifested, what trans students experience in college, and what organizational structures hindered or enhanced their success while on campus. Seeking insight in these areas of inquiry can shape and direct best practices for institutions interested in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for transgender students. In the sections to follow, the research questions will be revisited, participant recommendations will be highlighted and some closing thoughts will be shared regarding the learning experienced by the researcher throughout this process.

Research Questions

What does it mean to be transgender?

Eighteen unique individuals provided their personal definitions. These were subjective presentations influenced by each person's socially constructed experiences. Some of the words that describe their identities include, but are not limited to: Transgender, trans man, trans feminine, queer, genderqueer, bi-gender, gay, straight, fluid, nonnormative and normative cisgender. Being trans means not relying on the traditional or heteronormative gender assignments of male or female. There are as many interpretations of gender as there are people each with unique characteristics and ways of being.

Trans identity is personal and exemplifies poststructural feminism. It is subjective to each person. Language influences gender-identity interpretation, understanding and presentation. Trans identity can be many things or singular things, betwixt and between, undefined, unrestricted, creative, open, fluid, evolving, and shape-shifting as time goes on. As this study unfolded it seemed that trans students, and the theoretical framework of poststructural feminism, were blended each reflecting the other. Trans students, on campus, express many variations of trans identity and proved that gender identity is not a stagnant, essentialist notion. It is complex and celebrates multiplicity. One shoe does not fit all, and each person's experience with their gender identity is influenced by their upbringing, values, and other socially constructed identities.

This research study was framed in a poststructural-feminist framework which provided critical thought around the dominant discourses and their influences on language, binaries, the subjective and personal experiences of the day-to-day, social processes and the organization of higher education. Interesting themes surfaced when considering the transgender student

experience and a poststructural-feminist framework in the university setting. The most interesting observation was the chosen, as well as seemingly unconscious, adherence to binary systems by the majority of the participants because of what the systems represented: Security, affiliation, being a part of, and fitting in.

College and university environments have much to learn from trans students and their gender identity development. The academy can adopt better ways of accommodating trans-student needs so these individuals are retained successfully to graduation. Through this population, increased awareness and a deeper understanding of the experiences of a gender nonconforming person are possible. New perspectives are being discussed and normative binary systems are deconstructed and interpreted through a transgender lens. Trans identity leads the way to a broader gender construct befitting critical thinkers and doers who want to remain unstuck and open.

What are the many manifestations of the transgender identity?

Transgender identity is unique to each person with a mix of feminine, masculine, androgynous, and fluid images. All expand beyond binary thinking. “Language is an important clue that indicates the failure of boundaries and the possibility of resistance and freedom; and by placing humanism *sous ratur* we can interrogate what it takes for granted” (St. Pierre, 2000, p.479). Transgender identity interrupts boundaries and pushes this resistance.

The manifestations are as diverse as each person describing those qualities that are unique to self. They, quite literally, are individual so there are as many expressions, subtle and overt, nuanced, a swish, a swagger, high pitched, hair tossing, upbeat, normative, nonconforming ways to express gender. Do they reside in the feminine, masculine, or undefined? These manifestations are presented in dress, voice inflection, mannerisms, and interpersonal

engagement. There are no hard-and-fast rules, no essential ways of presenting or doing gender which also connects closely to the poststructural-feminist perspective.

What is the experience of the transgender student in the college or university setting?

The college and university experience for trans students has been rewarding for the most part. They have been able to make friends, perform academically to their expectations, and get involved as advocates for GLBT issues. Occasionally a student faces an interpersonal struggle or has to deal with ignorant and hurtful exchanges from others. That said, all student participants appeared to be resilient, conscientious and enjoying their college experience.

Reflecting back on the study, some participants were leaders paving the way for others to follow such as a trans activist or homecoming queen, while others chose a more modest, understated path. The poststructural-feminist lens encourages many variations of being and doing. All approaches are acceptable so long as they are right for the individual.

What organizational structures hinder or enhance the transgender college experience?

College and university administrators, faculty, advisors, partners, family, friends, campus and local GLBTA organizations, as well as regional agencies all served to enhance the trans students' college experience. University systems that dealt with student records, legal names, and/or the legal name-change process were at the top of the list for identified needs so that trans students can have their preferred name match their presentation. Email addresses, that include preferred names, were of extreme importance as well. Other aspects of campus life that could help (or hinder if absent) included gender-neutral bathrooms and housing, inclusion of gender expression and gender identity in the institution's nondiscrimination clauses, comprehensive trainings on transgender identity, knowledgeable staff in administrative offices including the counseling and health centers and support staff in high-traffic student service areas.

Another translation of the organizational systems is the notion of power. St. Pierre (2010) stated:

We are naturally endowed with agency, which first exists outside ourselves, and it gives us the power to act in the public world. Power, then, is also something we possess; and we can deploy it – give it away, take it back, etc. Power is often thought to be inherently evil; therefore, those concerned with social justice often try to give away some of their power to avoid domination; they try to “empower” those less fortunate than themselves. Resistance to domination is practiced by self-contained, autonomous individuals in response to an oppressive force from the outside, a force that challenges both the natural and political liberty of the individual. In this sense, resistance is thought to be an act of negotiation that nullifies or counteracts an infringement of rights. (pp. 488-489)

The trans students in this study wanted to identify, as well as actively claim, their power. Sometimes their power was exercised publicly while at other times it was experienced and exercised in silence. In all ways, the students were empowered to construct an original experience with power in their lives.

Poststructural-feminist perspective relates to transgender identity in easy, meaningful ways. Language, the subjective day-to-day experience, the challenge of binary- normative systems, the avoidance of essentialist notions, and the concern for equal access are reminders that there is work to be done in higher education to celebrate and welcome trans students and embrace a poststructural-feminist framework applied to learning. Study participants had ideas about how to improve the campus culture that reflects traditional, service-based recommendations. Some of the earlier assumptions about transgender students would have led me to expect suggestions that were more political and “big picture” in scale. However the

findings were a reminder that it is necessary, and equally important, to meet the basic and functional needs of the person while working to change culture. The student recommendations follow in the next section.

Recommendations for Best Practices

During the interviews, participants were asked what they would implement in order to enhance the trans student experience if they were in charge of their campus. Many recommendations and suggestions were offered with frequent overlaps. Participants had creative ideas that have the potential to gain traction if institutions are ready to embrace gender-variant students and aim to serve them well. A number of suggestions were generated to help promote community connections, improve system operations, and educate student-service providers. While these suggestions are important from a service standpoint, there is an interesting juxtaposition in their recommendations to the theoretical framework chosen for this study. The students made recommendations that appear to represent a more traditional and humanist approach to college life. Practitioners in higher education could appreciate these suggestions as service providers who seek to solve problems, offer solutions, and provide support to students on a daily basis. A macro view of the challenges, and possible solutions, needs to be explored through poststructural feminism which examines power and change in organizational systems through language and social processes. There are two forces at work here.

Students offered recommendations on aspects of their lives that help to create safe spaces and educate others, but these things are not enough. There needs to be critical examination and the willingness to change underlying structures and processes that reinforce the gender binary. Both positions mark necessary change and would advance the academy in ways that not only serve trans students well, but institutionally moves the organization beyond the dominant

discourses of sex and gender that marginalize. Recommendations follow that include both the student voice as well as some possibilities for redefining the academy from a systems lens.

Resource Center/Safe Space

When considering community it was suggested that having a designated GLBT resource center on campus would feel comfortable and inviting. Noting that not all participants have access to centers on their campuses, this amenity would offer helpful resources; ideally be staffed with friendly, knowledgeable, and caring administrators; and serve as a learning space where students could make friends and critically think about and discuss social issues related to their identities.

From a poststructural-feminist perspective, what would a campuswide safe space entail? As colleges and universities have attempted to recognize diverse groups and offer equal footing with specialized centers, the dominant discourse influences how people engage in those spaces. Assumptions about sex, gender, class, race, and other constructs influence how students define themselves and experience these places. Am I gay enough, disabled enough, feminist enough to fit? The community at large would have an opportunity to discuss multiple identities and remove barriers that place power over or suggest being “less than.” Language would be a key driver in making changes and would need to focus on inclusion, transparency, and new ways of operating with policies and protocols. Respect for all ways of knowing and doing would need to become an institutional value. Culture does not shift overnight so buy-in would have to be sought from all constituents. A university safe space where people are free to be themselves and supported for how they learn and apply knowledge would set the stage for inclusion and learning but still this is an oversimplified recommendation. Emphasis would have to be on building and

sustaining community from a fundamental level, at the institutional core. Given the foundational structure of the academy, this might be an unrealistic suggestion.

Gender-Neutral Housing

Gender-neutral housing, in the residence halls, was another recommendation that would allow for the celebration of gender beyond the binary with like-minded students. Some examples of this were described as students, in single occupancy rooms, on the floor sharing a gender-neutral bathroom. Another option was suggested for mixed genders to share a room where the social construction of gender is openly celebrated, discussed, and students are able to select this housing option on the housing application.

To expand this idea further, what if gender was not a box you checked on any housing application, and residents could be assigned by mutual interests or a desire to live in a particular building? Community standards would be established together with discussions to identify how residents want to construct the space, self-govern, and thrive as scholars. This concept would stretch administrators, students, and their parents alike because some students and parents seek the traditional model, almost to the point of in-loco parentis. Single-gendered housing is still a popular choice on campus but what makes it so? Is the appeal a community of women who bond as a sisterhood, or is it really to control who comes into the hall with a concern for safety from men? In an attempt to stretch beyond the known and consider the possibilities, this kind of housing, system-wide would create a dynamic space where students would be living together as independent adults, treated as mature individuals with respect and an equal sense of place. This example would push against the dominant narrative of sex and gender.

Facilities

The topic of bathrooms was extremely popular. Every participant stated that there need to be more clean, well maintained, private and securely locked restrooms located in the academic and administrative buildings as well as in the residence halls. Not only did students see the need for these facilities across most of the campuses, but having information posted regarding their locations was also imperative for easy access. When considering facilities in community, the participants recommended that there also be a gender-neutral locker room where changing clothes or showering could be done in private after a workout or swim. While costly to build new, all of these suggestions are things that could become a reality with intentional planning and financial prudence.

In this example, expanding to the unknown would suggest lifting all segregated bathrooms and providing private, clean and secure restroom spaces everywhere. Energy would not be wasted on the ongoing designations for male, female, gender-neutral, family restroom; bio room; and locker-room spaces. Men's and women's reactions to the new, shared space would be interesting to explore, especially as this concept disrupts a long tradition of gender binaries and, with it, the social rules and assumptions that are affiliated with bathroom culture. Every human uses the bathroom as a function of daily life. Neutralizing the space neutralizes the act. This idea would help the trans student to simply be another student and the campus community could use facilities that would meet a basic standard of privacy and cleanliness instead of separation that perpetuates the dominant discourse of the gender binary.

Preferred Name-Change Process

Students were most vocal about their inability to exercise the use of a preferred name without it competing and conflicting with their legal name and university records in the system.

For those who had not changed their names legally, this was a conundrum. Student legal names are associated with so many university records simultaneously that they cannot be easily modified. While in this middle state between birth name and preferred name, betwixt and between, students described facing awkward questions when put in a position to have to explain why their presentation did not align with the name they were known by. This has been discussed in earlier chapters but should be noted as one of the most stressful and concerning needs of the participants. This also includes email systems and having their emails match their preferred name so that Harry does not show up on the class roster when she has been going by Harriet for months. In the ways that university administrators can assist with these changes, they will reduce tremendous anxiety for trans students and create a more engaging learning environment as a result.

Extending beyond administrative systems that currently hinder a name-change process, it is interesting to ask what a campus would be like if no names were used and student and faculty identification (id) numbers were the sole source of identity in the system. With so much emphasis being placed on building community and connections, this idea could equalize the landscape but at the same time run the risk of the real, or perceived, experience of reducing people to their id numbers. Colleges and universities spend extensive time and money marketing the experience and environment to prospective students and their families. They highlight academic excellence, building leaders for the future, communities that care and friendships for a lifetime which all have a humanist flavor. Resorting to id numbers in the system could be an effective way to disrupt the dominant influence of gender and sex, but would demand additional energy and effort to insure it does not compromise the value of academic, social and interpersonal connections.

Inclusive Nondiscrimination Clause

Another administrative request was to add gender, gender identity, and gender expression to the university nondiscrimination clauses. Being acknowledged appears to matter to trans students and shows that the university counts gender identities as part of its protected classes. This builds a sense of affiliation and trust that otherwise would be lost and expresses care for trans people as members of the campus community. In similar fashion, the students wanted faculty to know that it is important to honor the student's preferred pronoun and name request in class, and that the students are willing to answer any questions if it can help create more understanding.

Naming is a discourse, in and of, itself. To imagine a college or university setting that removed the nondiscrimination clause would push for an entirely new way of engaging in the academy. If no one is named, no one has power. If everyone is named, everyone has power in theory. Those that are named are protected and protection equals power. When some people are named, inevitably someone is excluded. The trans student complaint resides in not being included or protected. These are interesting concepts to consider because the dominant discourse relies on "power over" to remain intact. Equalizing the setting would disrupt all things as we know them when it comes to protection and positionality. Erasing the practice of naming and removing this policy would force the academy to redefine its community standards as a whole. How should community members treat each other; what is expected of everyone when considering justice, respect, peaceful behavior, and engagement in a learning environment? Small steps toward change might be more palatable. Rather than remove a nondiscrimination clause and eliminate all sense of security and support entirely, adding gender, gender identity,

and gender expression encourages the institution to recognize all constituents who identify in these categories as supported groups.

Education and Training

Students also emphasized education. This was in the forms of Safe Zone programs, speaker's panels, and trainings for administrative personnel who would be working directly with students as well as the counseling and health professionals.

Expanding education to the entire campus culture would be an option for raising awareness and increasing knowledge. This could be approached in a variety of ways. Utilizing faculty senate, the college deans and provost as well as the vice presidents overseeing nonacademic areas in establishing a message about inclusion of all underrepresented groups would be helpful for buy-in. Messaging would address not only gender identity, but race, class, religion, ability, sexual orientation, size, and veteran status with the focus on establishing an open, affirming, and inclusive campus community. These leaders would need to model what they are asking of their faculty and administrators. This could be challenging given that the very structure of higher education is hierarchical and upper-level administrators do not typically present their opinions on the negative impacts of transphobia, homophobia, racism, and sexism. Emphasizing social awareness and the need for sensitivity between and among community members around topics of gender identity and the "isms" that impact faculty, staff, and students would be a start. Education about creating safe and supportive spaces that recognizes power within the academy will be a challenging task. Support from the president of the university would be fundamental in initiating this culture shift.

Mental Health Support

It was particularly important to request that there be a counselor or psychologist who could see, and treat, trans students and who would have the confidence and competence to write letters for hormones and medical treatment plans. Another recommendation related to health insurance. Some schools do offer this and if possible, selecting an agency that could cover partial or comprehensive trans medical needs was requested. Additionally, while it was important to be nice and approachable, it also mattered that these professionals were able to critically think about, and discuss, gender identity from a social-construction perspective.

Expanding this recommendation further, but recognizing the limitations of discussion with mental health professionals due to privacy, it would be an improvement to envision university faculty, staff and administrators who could engage in critical thought and dialogue with each other and students around social issues and the dominant discourses. This ability would span across the disciplines and be applied inside and outside of classroom discussion. Not unlike Antonio having to engage in critical theory as part of his preparation on the debate team, this level of thought and discussion could enhance learning on campus. Community forums could take place with members across the disciplines and within the administration to practice this engagement.

Curriculum Design

Students wished for Gender Studies and Queer Theory classes and to have these topics as part of a diversity, core requirement. At the very least gender identity should be added as part of a curriculum for the required core for diversity. Infusing critical theory, and specifically emphasizing gender identity and the influence of the dominant discourses around sex and gender in each discipline, would be an expansive way to educate students about these power structures.

It would also reveal the ways in which gender identity impacts each and every person regardless of how they identify. Gender identity is influenced by every discipline and every discipline impacts how gender is experienced. These recommendations are a starting point, and as the academy evolves, the push for change to underlying systems that reinforce the gender binary need to be a priority.

When the student recommendations drew to a close, many noted that as campus communities continue to evolve, trans needs will likely shift as well so use caution against assuming these recommendations are fixed or exhaustive. Many of the suggestions made by students were noted in the literature through Sears's (2005) recent publication entitled, *Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Issues in Education*. Two recommendations that were not discussed with the participants but that Sears (2005) offers are that institutions need to develop policies and procedures that address harassment and transphobic violence. Sears (2005) stated, "Harassment and violence against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are also predicated on gender variance. Rarely do homophobic attackers know someone's sexual identity; they target those who fit the stereotypes of gay men as feminine and lesbians as masculine" (p.116). Also, he recommended having advocates in offices or units where problems are likely to occur so that the student has a person who is able to address the issue without being distracted by the gender-identity presentation. From a practitioner's lens, these resources make a difference in the quality of the experience but nothing trumps a sensitive and caring professional who knows these students personally and recognizes their process with respect and a desire to help. This study has helped to expand my awareness and understanding from my original knowledge.

My Original Knowledge

As I think back to my start on this journey, I clearly see the limitations of my original knowledge and thinking. I first got involved because I personally supported a trans man through his transition while he juggled his life as a college student. As a practitioner, I wanted to help trans students in the residence halls as part of my work in residence life. Gender had always been presented, and accepted, as a binary construct of male and female in my life with little thought beyond that before I was introduced to trans identity. I grew up in a home with social-activist parents who encouraged me to do what made me happy. I had some traditional messaging around gender but not to the extent of it stifling me or rigidly binding me to any binary construct. I presented as a normative female and found it frustrating when I was presumed to be heterosexual after coming out in my twenties. I was perplexed by these social assumptions but never critically thought about the power of my hetero-normative, female presentation. I have since realized, and used, this power to deflect judgment, exclusion and harassment as a gay woman. I see now how pervasive gender is as a part of the daily, lived experience and how it suggests binary influence and power on a regular basis.

My working definition of a transgender person focused on the transsexual experience. This trans population was underserved at the university level, more often than not, because the environment was not equipped with knowledge and resources to support the student experience effectively. I made assumptions about this population based on my personal and professional experiences at the time which included the following:

- Transgender people are transsexuals who feel they were born into the wrong body.

While this, for some transsexuals, is true, there are many more ways that people identify under the transgender umbrella.

- Transsexual people are trying to find their authentic selves in order to become whole.
I assumed that they did not feel whole, that they were on their way to becoming someone entirely new. Some trans might feel as if they are not whole, but I learned very quickly that I cannot generalize and many feel complete with a more fluid gender identity.
- Trans students are an unknown population on campus; no one understands how to serve them.
On some campuses, trans students were out and engaged in very public positions with high visibility. Other trans students, through persistent outreach, became known to administrators and faculty because the student took the time to build rapport and a relationship.
- Trans students are miserably stuck in an in-between space between male and female and aim to get to their desired gender as quickly as possible.
Most trans students I talked with didn't feel stuck at all. In fact, they preferred their undefined and more fluid gender space. It was empowering and true to them as individuals.
- Trans identity is strictly about gender.
Some trans students are purists about gender versus sex and tend to compartmentalize these aspects of their lives. Others choose not to and actually celebrate the fluidity of their gender identity.

I arrived at these assumptions from my personal and professional exposure to trans students who happened to identify as transsexuals at the time. Little did I know that my understanding of transgender identity was about to expand my thinking in profound ways.

My Learning and Understanding

As I come full circle through this research experience, I have learned that transgender identity is a complex, messy, highly evolved thinking and doing. It is a way of being. It is not constricted to time or space or rules, and it caters to the individual allowing for freedom of interpretation, expression, and language. Transgender identity is provocative and must recognize its direct connections to oppressions that are deeply bound together. Gender and sexuality are embedded within a broader sociocultural discussion of class, religion, and race (Bettcher, 1996). In a variety of ways, the students in this study acknowledged these complex relationships. Trans identity is about humans and how every person is unique with regard to their gender identity. How gender looks, feels, moves, expresses, talks, walks, loves, learns are unique to each person and subject to change at any moment. Trans identity is also closely aligned, by choice as well as in opposition to, the gender binaries. The pull toward gender binaries supports a known place, a connection and an affiliation to the socially and culturally identified as male or female constructs. The push away from gender binaries was about disassociating from the dominant discourses and finding a new way of experiencing gender and language. The purpose of this study was to identify the many different ways that transgender identity is manifested. Eighteen examples have been presented. The trans students I spoke with want to be visible, counted, and named as part of the university community.

Initially, I was shortsighted in what I knew about the transgender experience. I have since, with the help of these eighteen students, expanded my learning to more closely comprehend the trans student experience on campus. This research has increased my knowledge and thinking about transgender identity as well as challenged some of my own assumptions and awareness about myself as a gendered person. I knowingly claim my female, feminine gender,

only I do not see her as “less than.” Recognizing the dominant narratives of sex and gender, I have seen how gender continues to be a marginalized construct influenced by binary systems on a daily basis, especially to the gender nonconforming person.

When I consider this process as a researcher, I have had to examine my understanding of academic writing versus advocacy and where to draw the line between the two. This has been a powerful lesson. Research done well can become an effective vehicle for change and advocacy which is important to me. The learning from this experience is not over. In fact, there are many ways to build on this foundation for trans students in the academy with future research.

Future Research

Pandora’s box has been opened for me, and I am eager to learn more. Future research is needed to continue to expand the knowledge on transgender students as well as to deepen understanding about their lived experiences. This study has revealed transgender identity in many images and has the potential to advance the trans student college experience by increasing awareness. Trans-related topics for future research could include deeper investigations of binaries, language, naming (individually, institutionally, through dominant discourses and psychological shifts), mental health, student advocacy, academic writing/research and leadership development of underrepresented students. Recommendations such as the removal of all gendered restrooms, expansion of nondiscrimination clauses, and the implementation of a system-wide, gender-neutral housing experience are ripe topics for additional exploration. The poststructural-feminist perspective, as a theoretical framework, is another area for deeper learning in the ways that it seeks to change underlying systems and processes that reinforce gender normativity. It has been a complimentary theoretical framework for this study. In so

many ways this research is only scratching the surface, but it has presented a base for new learning regarding trans identity and the trans-student experience in higher education.

Summary: Stepping Forward

Stepping forward my eyes are wide open and my feet are firmly on the ground ready to move; there is work to be done. Research must continue to advance learning about transgender students in higher education, not only about their identity and experiences but about how the academy itself addresses gender identity and the dominant discourses of sex and gender.

Knowing this population enables colleges and universities to better serve these students in ways that attend to basic needs as they navigate organizational systems of operation. Insight in to the institutional culture, and its messages about sex and gender, provides context when there is an interest in affecting change at the macro level. To understand the barriers, I had to begin with the student voice.

Eighteen individuals shared their stories with me. They appeared to be open, transparent, and willing to show their vulnerabilities while also highlighting personal successes in the ways that they defined and experienced their gender identity. Often in the face of adversity, and not without personal sacrifice or consequence, they were claiming their transgender identity and letting it influence how they construct other aspects of their lives. Lorber (1996) speaks of the influence of sex and gender by saying:

Most sociological research designs assume that each person has one sex, one sexuality, and one gender, congruent with each other and fixed for life. Postmodern feminists and queer theorists have been interrogating bodies, desires, and genders, but sociology has not. Deconstructing sex, sexuality, and gender reveals many possible categories embedded in social experiences and social practices. As researchers, as theorists, and as

activists, sociologists have to go beyond paying lip service to the diversity of bodies, sexualities, genders. The sociologist's task should be to deconstruct the conventional categories of sex, sexuality, and gender and build new complex, cross-cutting constructs into research designs. There are revolutionary possibilities inherent in rethinking the categories of gender, sexuality, and physiological sex. (p.143)

This research has explored ways to rethink gender identity and the impacts of dominant discourses that influence the trans student experience in higher education. The time is ripe to increase knowledge and deepen understanding so colleges and universities can serve trans students well and in ways that support their success. It is a privilege to be on this learning journey beyond the binary.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

I have read the information outlining the research project on serving the transgender student being conducted by Kelly Ward and Eleanor Finger. I understand the research purpose, process, safeguards, and that information about my interview will be kept confidential and presented anonymously. I agree to participate.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

I greatly appreciate your willingness to be a part of this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please do not hesitate to contact Eleanor Finger at the following address:

Eleanor Finger
Ph.D. Candidate, Higher Education Administration Program
Streit-Perham Administrative Suite
P.O. Bob 1724
Pullman, WA 99164-1724

For more information you can also contact the IRB office at Washington State University

Malathi Jandhyala
[Institutional Review Board](#)
P.O. Box 643005
Albrook, 205
Washington State University,
Pullman WA 99164-3005
Phone: 335-3668

APPENDIX B

Beyond the Binary: Serving the Transgender Student, Improving the College Experience Interview Protocol

- Name: _____ Date: _____
- Explanation of recording
- Consent
- Pseudonym Preference _____

Intro. Transition: Tell me about yourself and your upbringing.

- I. Basic Demographics
 - Family, age, hometown, major you're pursuing & where, year in school, race, ethnicity, religion
 - Early messages about gender, when you realized you were different with regard to your gender identity?
- II. What does it mean to be transgender
 - Tell me about your gender identity formation.
 - What words best describe, or connect, to your identity and why? What words do you prefer?
 - How has your trans identity evolved over time?
 - Sometimes people intertwine their definitions of sexuality & gender. How has your thinking about sexuality and gender changed as a trans person?
 - Gender tends to be thought of in very binary, black and white terms. How do you think of gender and sexuality now? (Binary Language)
 - What would you want to say about your trans identity to increase understanding?

Transition – These next few questions focus on more specifically how you characterize your trans identity.

- III. What are the many manifestations of the transgender identity?
 - How do you describe your trans self? (Characteristics, actions, preferred pronouns, etc)
 - Describe the appearance of your trans identity. (Dress, mannerisms, attitudes, etc.)
 - How does it feel to be transgender? (Emotional associations)
 - What reactions have you received from other students? Faculty? Staff?

Transition – I want to learn more about your campus experience so let's shift to some questions in that direction

IV. What is the experience of the transgender student in the college and university setting?

- Tell me about your journey to college.
- Describe your campus and what it's like to be a trans student there/here?
- I really want to try and get at what it's like for you on campus in terms of your experience. Can you give an example of an event or situation where you haven't felt, or been, supported as a trans student on campus?
- How about describing examples of times when you have felt supported?
- How does it feel to be trans/ _____ on your campus?
- What are some processes you went through to have the university recognize your lived gender?
- Talk about ways accommodations were made for you or were not and what that was like? What was helpful?
- How has what you expected of college met your experience of college? (Exceeded or fallen short)

Transition – So these next few questions are focused on success

V. Success

- How do you define being a successful student?
- What is being a successful trans student?
- How would you fit your own personal experience into these categories? (What's surprising or missing?)
- What hinders your success as a trans student? (Administrative systems, facilities – bathrooms & housing, no center/safe zone program)

Transition - So the next few questions are focused on what it's like for you on campus – really trying to zoom back down to more of your personal experiences...

VI. What organizational structures hinder or enhance the trans student college experience?

- What's it like on campus?
- Tell me about your university resources.
- What enhances your college experience and success? (Departments, administrative response, access, visibility?)
- Talk about safety on campus.
- If you were in charge, how might you make the campus more trans friendly? (Residential experience, administrative systems and services, bathrooms, etc.)
- Does your campus participate in a Safe Zone program? If yes, what does it look like? (Student or Admin. driven? How did it get started?)
- What advice would you give to trans students who are considering enrollment at your institution?
- What are some strategies you've utilized to be successful on campus?

Support

- Thinking about the people in your life (personally and professionally) what are the sources of support and in what ways are they supportive? (Friends, family, GLBT community members, faculty, staff mentors, etc.)
- Who's your perceived go-to ally on campus and why did you pick that person?

Transition – ok, we're winding down with some nuts and bolts questions now...

VII. Policies

- Do you know about your institutional non-discrimination clause? If yes, how has it impacted you?

And finally...

VIII. What's Next?

- What are your personal and professional goals from here?
- Is there anything else you want to say about your trans identity, being a trans student or your experiences on campus?
- If anything else comes to mind, please contact me so I can add your additional thoughts to your interview.

Thank you & Close