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TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DEFINITIONS

Genderism is the rigid adherence to the gender binary in practices, policies, and norms (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). **Cisnormativity** refers to the perpetuation of the false belief that there are only two genders, that gender is immutable, and that bodies define gender, such that people assigned as female at birth will identify as girls/women, and people assigned as male at birth will identify as boys/men (Simmons & White, 2014). **Cisgender (cis)** is used to refer to people with binary gender identities that align with cisnormative expectations for the gender they were assigned at birth (Simmons & White, 2014). An authentic critique of cisnormativity not only considers gender but its intersection with social class and race, whereby cisgender identities are especially privileged when “accompanied by the appearance of normative race, class, ability, and nationality” (Enke, 2012b, p. 64).

In this report, **trans** refers to the spectrum of individuals whose gender identities do not align with cisnormative expectations for the gender assigned to them birth, or the expectations associated with that gender (Enke, 2016a; Stryker, 2008). The term **binary trans** refers to trans persons with binary (i.e., “man” or “woman”) identities—that is, trans men who were born with female bodies and consider themselves to be men and live socially as men, and trans women who were born with male bodies and consider themselves to be women and live socially as women (Stryker, 2008). **Nonbinary trans** refers to individuals who identify as both man and woman, as an alternative gender that lies outside of the gender binary, or who do not have or identify with any gender (Cruz, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2016a). Nonbinary trans identity labels include agender, gender fluid, and genderqueer (Beemyn, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Stryker, 2008).

These terms (cisgender, trans, binary, nonbinary) are conceptual tools—not rigid and absolute categories. People who identify with so-called binary gender identities may not, for a variety of reasons, undergo biomedical transition (e.g., hormone treatment, chest reconstruction), and they may actively resist compliance to certain gendered norms (Catalano, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b).¹ Further, there is significant diversity within and across the binary/nonbinary dichotomy, and the meaning of trans (and binary trans, and nonbinary trans) varies across time and place (Enke, 2012a). Thus, there is great fluidity within and across these categories.

¹ Both binary and nonbinary individuals may pursue biomedical interventions such as hormones, but binary identified individuals may be more likely to pursue such options. For example, in the USTS, the majority of trans men and women (95%) desired hormone therapy, compared to 49% of non-binary respondents. Trans men and women were also much more likely to have ever had hormone therapy (71%) than non-binary respondents (13%).



INTRODUCTION

A. Background

In 1960, only 45% of youth recently completing high school entered a two- or four-year college (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In the Fall of 2015, almost 70% of high school graduates were enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). About 10.5 million undergraduate students (62%) attend 4-year institutions, and 6.5 million (38%) attend 2-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), with only about 60% of students who initially enroll in four-year institutions completing a degree within 150% of normal time from their initial institution (Kena et al., 2016). Institutions of higher education serve learners who are diverse in terms of race, class, ability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and may face challenges in effectively meeting the needs of, and retaining, such diverse students. Institutions of higher education may struggle in particular with addressing the needs of students who identify as transgender (trans) or gender nonconforming (TGNC) (Beemyn, 2003, 2016).

Many trans students experience discrimination and harassment at college, which may have implications for their academic success and retention. The U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), a survey of over 27,000 trans adults, found that 24% of respondents who were out as or perceived as trans in college reported being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed at that time—with 16% of those who experienced harassment having left college because of the harassment (James et al., 2016). The National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS; Grant et al., 2017), which surveyed nearly 6,500 trans respondents, found that individuals attending college, graduate school, professional school, or technical school reported high rates of negative treatment by students, teachers and staff, including harassment and bullying (35%). According to the NTDS, participants experienced a variety of barriers to attendance in school—including harassment, financial issues related to transition, and lack of financial aid—that in some cases forced them leave (i.e., K-12 or higher education). Students of color and trans women were especially likely to highlight these barriers (Grant et al., 2017).

Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) found that almost 19% of trans first year students reported major concerns about financing their college education, compared to 12% of a national sample—concerns that are supported by data showing that these trans students (a) came from families with lower annual parental income, and (b) received more financial aid, compared to the national sample.²

² Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) conducted an analysis of data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey (see: <http://heri.ucla.edu/cirp-freshman-survey>), which was modified in 2015 to allow students to indicate whether they identify as transgender. That change allowed them to disaggregate data for a sample of incoming first-year students consisting of 678 transgender students from 209 colleges and universities, which they then compared to the national norms for all incoming first-time, full-time college students. See: https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2017/spring/stolzenberg_hughes

Experiences of harassment and bullying within the higher educational setting may be preceded by even worse treatment in secondary school. Estimates indicate that as many as 75% of trans students report feeling unsafe in high school because of their gender expression, and 50% of trans students report being prevented (e.g., by school officials) from using the name or pronoun that match their gender, highlighting how structural and interpersonal forms of stigma intersect (Movement Advancement Project & GLSEN, 2017). National survey data suggest high rates of harassment (78%) and physical assault (35%) perpetrated against trans students during grade school (i.e., K-12), causing nearly one in six students to leave school (Grant et al., 2017)³.

In turn, many trans students—especially those who were out as trans in high school—may begin college with a history of victimization. College has the capacity to reinforce the gendered and transphobic treatment that many students have already experienced in school and in society, leading to poor academic and psychosocial outcomes; or, to support and empower these students (who already show signs of resilience, in that they have completed high school and enrolled in college), thus enhancing academic and personal success. For students who were not out as trans in high school, college can play an important role in facilitating gender identity exploration—such as by providing the supports and resources needed to allow students to navigate this process while staying in college.

B. Purpose

The current report reviews research on trans students' experiences in higher education with the goal of informing knowledge and practice by higher education administrators as well as policymakers. In this report, attention is paid to the institutional structures and interpersonal contexts that reify and enforce biased treatment towards trans students, or which serve as sources of support and transformation. The report concludes with recommendations to institutions of higher education regarding the creation of more trans-inclusive communities.

The report draws in particular from a multi-stage, multi-pronged project conducted by the author, which involved (a) focus groups with seven nonbinary (e.g., agender, genderqueer) trans college students, which in turn informed the development of (b) a large-scale survey disseminated to over 500 trans college and graduate students, about three-quarters of whom were nonbinary trans, and one-quarter of whom were binary trans

³ Gender identity, assigned sex at birth, and race were all important factors in determining risk for sexual assault, physical assault, and harassment and bullying. For example, multiracial students reported a higher incidence of physical assault than students of other races; respondents identifying as trans men who were assigned female at birth reported especially high rates of harassment and bullying; and respondents identifying as trans women who were assigned male at birth reported especially high rates of physical and sexual assault (Grant et al., 2017).

(e.g., trans man, trans woman) and (c) interviews with trans students, nine of whom were binary trans and five of whom were nonbinary identified.⁴ All quotes are from participants in this multi-pronged project.⁴

C. Colleges and Universities as Gendered Institutions

Colleges and universities typically reflect and reinforce societal genderism in practices, policies, and norms (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Trans students seeking to express their gender identities encounter pressures to conform to socially constructed gender norms in terms of appearance, dress, and pronouns (Catalano, 2015), which affects all trans students but especially nonbinary students. Nonbinary students may struggle with presenting themselves in ways that are consonant with their gender identity (e.g., using pronouns other than “she/her/hers” or “he/him/his”) inasmuch as they face particular scrutiny for not seeking to conform to or be seen as “either” gender (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018; McGuire, Kivalanka, Catalpa, & Toomey, 2016). Cisnormativity and genderism are evident in multiple domains within the higher education microsystem, from physical structures to official records to policies to curricula to classroom practices (Bilodeau, 2005)—and, over time, may create chronic stress for gender minorities actively navigating their identity within such restrictive and potentially alienating structures. According to gender minority stress theory (Hendricks & Testa, 2012), structural forms of stigma create stressful environments for trans people, which may contribute to problematic affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses, and result in compromised well-being (Perez-Brumer, Day, Russell, & Hatzenbuehler, 2017).

Sex-segregated restrooms represent one institutional feature that excludes trans people and/or exposes them to harassment, which causes them significant stress (Seelman, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2013). Gender-inclusive and/or single stall restrooms are rare or nonexistent on many campuses (Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2018a; Seelman, 2014b). Sex-segregated housing represents another institutional feature that contributes to exclusion, invisibility, and discomfort for trans students (Goldberg et al., 2018a; Seelman, 2014b). As one white college student who identified as a trans man said: *“Most of our university dorms are split by sex so I was forced to live for three years on the half of the building that related to the sex on my ID rather than how I identify. It made me very uncomfortable, and considering how I present, I’m not sure anyone else was comfortable with it either”* (Goldberg et al., 2018a). Nonbinary students face particular challenges with regard to accessing housing options that are safe and comfortable. As a white nonbinary student in Goldberg et al. (2018a) said:

I only have one issue: Gender-blind housing. Currently, students are assigned housing based on a binary choice of M/F. I believe it is easy to change your official university gender, but housing only sees those two options. Students are automatically randomly assigned a roommate of the “same” gender, unless they request “gender-neutral housing.” But “gender-neutral housing” just means that you have to specify a particular person of the

⁴ A series of papers related to this project are published, in press, and in preparation. See, for example: Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018; Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2018a; Goldberg, Kivalanka, Budge, Benz, & Smith, 2018b; Goldberg, Kivalanka, & Dickey, 2018c; Goldberg, Smith, & Beemyn, 2018d.

“opposite” gender that you want to live with. There is no option to just be randomly assigned a roommate of any gender. For a nonbinary person, this is very othering.

Significantly, some colleges and universities have adopted gender inclusive housing policies, but these are considerably diverse. For example, some allow students to live in the same room with one or more roommates of any legal sex or gender identity, and others offer apartment-style housing wherein each student is given a room with a locking door within a larger apartment (Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013).

Forms, documents, and records can also be alienating for trans students, who routinely confront paperwork that only allows male and female as gender options, does not differentiate between sex and gender, and provides no means for students to change their gender marker without legally changing their “sex.” In addition, few institutions enable trans students to use the name they go by, rather than their “dead” (i.e., birth, or legal) name, on records and documents, and the institutions that do offer this option do not always advertise it effectively or make the process easy (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Campus Pride, 2018; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b). In their study of over 500 trans students, Goldberg, Beemyn, and Smith (2018a) found that some respondents reported that their colleges and universities had instituted a chosen name process, but described it as incomplete or inefficient. As one white trans man said: *“The preferred name option is not utilized for anything except the school login, leaving the email that everybody sees, and your name on school documents, as the birth name, which needs to be fixed.”*

Colleges and universities also vary greatly in the extent to which they have policies that protect trans students, staff, and faculty from harassment, with community colleges and religiously affiliated institutions typically offering fewer protections (Campus Pride, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018a). Despite the fact that, over the past decade, more than a thousand colleges and universities have added “gender identity” to their nondiscrimination policies (Campus Pride, 2018), such policies are not always enforced, wherein faculty, staff, and students who engage in transphobic language and acts are not always held accountable (Goldberg et al., 2018a; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b). Similarly, institutions’ health insurance policies are often trans-exclusionary: they do not cover counseling, hormones, and/or surgery for trans students or staff (Campus Pride, 2018⁵; Goldberg, Kunalanka, Budge, Benz, & Smith, 2018b), despite evidence that such coverage would ultimately be cost-effective for insurance companies (Padula, Heru, & Campbell, 2016).

Cisnormativity and genderism are also evident in the context of the classroom (Pryor, 2015; Pusch, 2005). Trans students often experience avoidance or antagonism from faculty and other students, leading them to feel anxious, uncomfortable, and possibly threatened (Bilodeau, 2005). Often, faculty do not take seriously students’ requests to use their affirmed (as opposed to birth or legal) name, creating anxiety and discomfort for trans students (Goldberg et al., 2018a).

⁵According to Campus Pride, a total of 86 colleges and university currently cover gender transition related medical expenses (e.g., hormones; gender affirming surgery); see <https://www.campuspride.org/tpc/student-health-insurance/>



FINDINGS

A. Climate

Indicative of their marginalization within college communities, trans students nationwide report greater levels of harassment and discrimination, have a more negative perception of campus and classroom climates, and feel less accepted as part of the campus community, as compared to cisgender students (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; James et al., 2016). Again, the USTS found that 24% of respondents who were out as or perceived as trans in college/vocational school reported being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed at that time—with 16% of those who experienced harassment reporting that they left college because of it (James et al., 2016). A study by Dugan et al. (2012), which compared trans-identified students, cisgender LGB students, and cisgender heterosexual students, found that the trans students viewed the climate on their campuses as more hostile (i.e., less tolerant and inclusive of them as trans people), and also reported a lower sense of belonging (i.e., acceptance and integration) within their campus community. Goldberg, Kovalanka, and Dickey (2018c) found that two-thirds of trans students reported that concerns about physical/emotional safety affected how they presented their gender on campus, with many stating that they dressed and presented in ways that were in closer alignment with the gender binary than was their actual gender identity. Similarly, in focus groups with trans students, Goldberg and Kovalanka (2018) found that students constantly weighed the benefits of freely expressing gender (e.g., via beginning hormone treatment at college; via the use of binders, among female-bodied participants) with the risks of discomfort and possible physical harm associated with visibility and public scrutiny.

Some research has linked the presence of trans-inclusive policies/supports on college campuses to trans students' psychosocial and academic outcomes. In their study of over 500 trans students, Goldberg, Beemyn, and Smith (2018a) found that the presence of trans-inclusive policies/supports was related to a greater sense of belonging and more positive perceptions of campus climate. Among the supports that students valued most were gender-inclusive restrooms, non-discrimination policies that are inclusive of gender identity, and the ability to change one's name on campus records (Goldberg et al., 2018a). In a study of 152 trans college students, Woodford, Joslin, Pitcher, and Renn (2017) found that the frequency of experiencing select trans environmental microaggressions (e.g., not having access to comfortable bathrooms as a trans person) was associated with increased risk of negative academic outcomes. Finally, Seelman (2016), using data from the NTDS, found that among students who had attended college, being denied access to restrooms or gender-appropriate housing during while in college was associated with a higher risk for suicidality.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Classrooms are a microcosm of the larger college or university. In turn, faculty can play a powerful role in reinforcing, or resisting, the transphobic treatment that students may face on campus and in society at large. Faculty are often unwilling or resistant to using students' affirmed names (i.e., the names that students use for themselves, which may differ from their legal or birth names, which appear on the class roster), prompting discomfort and anxiety among trans students when they try to assert themselves (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018a). As one trans student said, *"Needing to explain your name and pronouns to every new professor, and dreading knowing that they'll probably read your birth name out loud to the class, is extremely stressful and miserable and embarrassing"* (Goldberg et al., 2018a).

Distinct challenges may be present for students who do not hold binary gender identities, whose physical presentation is not clearly gendered as stereotypically male or female, and/or who do not pursue biomedical transition (Catalano, 2015; Pusch, 2005; Pryor, 2015; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Nonbinary identified students may feel highly visible and vulnerable, but also invisible, in that their gender identities are often "foreign" or unrecognizable to others. Goldberg, Kivalanka, and dickey (2018c) found that nonbinary students reported more frequent misgendering by staff, faculty, and peers as compared to binary students—in part because of the lack of cultural visibility surrounding nonbinary identities; or, as one student said, *"nobody knows nonbinary is a thing."* As one agender and nonbinary identified student noted, *"Because I am nonbinary, it is impossible for them to gender me correctly unless I have informed them of my gender and/or pronouns."* Yet some students do not wish to endure the stress and discomfort of constantly educating, reminding, and correcting faculty of their affirmed names and pronouns; in turn, they may "give up" on these efforts, especially if faculty promise to use them but don't (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016a).

FACULTY ADVISORS AND MENTORS

Relationships with faculty mentors and advisors may be important sources of support and potential buffers to transphobic treatment that students face on campus and in society. In their study of 91 trans graduate students, Goldberg et al. (2018c) inquired about experiences with faculty, and students' relationships with advisors and supervisors emerged as salient contexts for support or invalidation. Some participants described how, even though their advisors and supervisors were not necessarily highly aware of TGNC issues or identities, they had made a strong effort to learn from and respond compassionately to participants. Participants appreciated when their advisors and supervisors took responsibility for their actions, apologizing or correcting themselves if they accidentally misgendered them—and indicated a commitment to learning and "doing better." Some students noted that had it not been for their advisor's support and affirmation of their trans identity, they may not have "survived" the stress of graduate school. This highlights the potential for advisors to represent powerful sources of resilience, buffering against the broader stress associated with both graduate school and being a gender minority (Beemyn, 2016; Grady, LaTouche, Oslaski-Lopez, Powers, & Simacek, 2014; McKinney, 2005).

Other graduate students in Goldberg et al.'s 2018c study reported much less positive experiences. For example, some participants described repeated misgendering by advisors and supervisors, which was especially distressing inasmuch as students worked closely with them and had talked to them about their affirmed names and pronouns. Participants were aware of existing power differentials and were often scared to address repeated instances of misgendering. In turn, they typically remained silent as a means of avoiding retribution and possible jeopardy to their academic and professional futures. A genderqueer participant shared: *"My dissertation advisor, who is aware of my gender identity, refers to me exclusively using the wrong pronouns. It's upsetting and frustrates me, but I haven't corrected her yet because I don't feel comfortable doing so [because of the] culture [within] my department."*

B. Academic Self Esteem and Achievement

National data on first-year college or university students suggests that, compared to national norms, trans first year students rate themselves lower in the areas of physical health, social self-confidence, leadership ability, and academic self-concept, a composite that integrates respondents' self-rated academic ability, mathematical ability, intellectual self-confidence, and drive to achieve (Eagan et al., 2017). First year students who identify as trans appear to have graduated high school with a slightly lower GPA than the national average. Namely, 53.9% of trans students had a high school GPA of A- or higher, compared to 58.7% of the national sample (Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017). At the same time, however, they have greater confidence in their artistic ability and creativity, compared to national norms (Eagan et al., 2017).

C. Mental Health, Counseling, and Health Care

Trans people are at an elevated risk for mental health problems in the broader population, due to the multifaceted stressors associated with their gender identity (Perez-Brumer et al., 2017). Trans students specifically may also be at elevated risk for mental health issues. Research indicates higher rates of distress among trans college students (Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011), suicidal ideation (Becker, Roberts, Ritts, Branagan, Warner, & Clark, 2017), and eating disorder diagnoses (Diemer, Grant, Munn-CHernoff, Patterson, & Duncan, 2015) compared to cisgender college students. In their analysis of data from first year college students, Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) found trans students were more likely to report frequently feeling depressed, compared to the national sample (47.2% vs. 9.5%)—as well as to report feeling "overwhelmed" in the year prior to college (54.9% vs. 34.1%). In Goldberg, Kovalanka, Budge, Benz, and Smith (2018b)'s mixed-methods study of over 500 trans students' mental health, mental health care, and health care experiences, almost 58% of students reported at least one mental health diagnosis from a health provider, and another 27% said they struggled with mental health concerns that had not been diagnosed. Thus, only 15% said that they were not dealing with any mental health issues. Across diagnosed and undiagnosed difficulties, 68% reported depression (including bipolar disorder), 67% anxiety (including social anxiety and generalized anxiety), 4% ADHD, 4% eating disorders, and 4% personality disorders.

In light of these challenges—which students in Goldberg et al.’s (2018b) study attributed to a range of factors, including experiences of and fears of victimization, invalidation and nonsupport from family, lack of community, loneliness/alienation, and stress related to gender dysphoria—trans students may be especially likely to seek out and benefit from mental health care treatment. Indeed, Stolzenberg and Hughes’ (2017) analysis of data from first year college students indicated that nearly three-quarters of trans first year students anticipated seeking counseling, compared to half of students in the national sample. Yet trans students are vulnerable to insensitive, incompetent, and even destructive interventions by mental health care providers.

In Goldberg et al.’s (2018b) study, students named a range of negative experiences with mental health providers, which often involved explicit invalidation of their gender identity, whereby therapists had denied their particular trans experience or identity, especially nonbinary identities. One white genderfluid undergraduate student shared: *“I go to a trans-affirming therapist for my PTSD which was caused by a very violent assault where my gender identity was the main trigger. [Before that] I had non-affirming therapists who suggested I go off hormones and try to live as a female.”* Other students described how their therapists overemphasized their gender identity, centering it as the root cause of all their mental health issues, which participants felt was misplaced. As one white nonbinary graduate student shared, *“My therapists always assume my depression stems from my gender identity, but it doesn’t. So they are sensitive to my gender, but also make it my defining aspect.”* By contrast, some students encountered avoidance of their trans identity, wherein therapists seemed unwilling or uninterested in addressing their gender, “skirting around [it].” Often, students asserted that their therapists were never explicitly transphobic, but lacked competence in trans issues, were generally unhelpful, and sometimes expected clients to educate them about trans issues. Notably, therapists who used participants’ affirmed name/pronouns were appreciated, as were those who showed knowledge of trans identities and issues.

Regarding campus mental health and health care experiences specifically, over one-third of the students in Goldberg et al.’s (2018b) study who had experiences with on-campus health services reported being misgendered sometimes or often. Almost one-quarter of students who had experiences with campus counseling described their experiences as mixed or not affirming, whereas slightly less than half of students who went to campus health services described their experiences as mixed or not affirming. While binary students did not rate counseling services significantly differently than nonbinary students, binary students rated health services as more trans-affirming than did nonbinary students. Nonbinary students were also 71% more likely to report frequent misgendering than binary students by on-campus therapists, and 76% more likely to report frequent misgendering by on-campus health care providers.

D. Community and Support

Many schools lack formal or informal LGBTQ organizations or clubs. Even among those that do, membership in LGBTQ student organizations tends to be predominantly cisgender, so trans students often have a difficult time meeting other trans people on campus (Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b). The needs and experiences of TGNC people in such groups tend to be “silenced and ignored in favor of those who are cisgender” (Marine &

Nicolazzo, 2014, p. 266) and also white (Nicolazzo, 2016c), reflecting broader tensions within the LGBTQ community (Beemyn, 2016; dickey, 2016). For example, a participant in Goldberg and Kivalanka's (2018) study of seven trans students said: *"As someone who self identifies as both gender nonconforming/gender neutral and as sexuality-wise queer, it feels very different to be in a space that is sexuality oriented. It feels problematic to me personally that the two are paired together, in general. Spaces that are very genuinely attempting to be supportive are also clumping groups together that don't necessarily identify along similar lines. And therefore some stories become heard and catered to more than others, even though that often is not intentional."*

To address or offset a lack of perceived connection, support, and community within LGBTQ oriented groups, some students form formal or informal trans-specific campus groups. Indeed, Goldberg et al. (2018a) found that students often described a desire and perceived need for TGNC-specific support groups and student organizations, where they could gather with other TGNC students, share information and resources, and receive mentorship. Students saw a variety of possibilities for these trans-specific spaces, including serving as a resource exchange wherein students could share binders, breast inserts, and tucking supplies, as well as offering a safe space to congregate and/or hold events and host speakers. Among the small group of students who did have TGNC groups on their campus, some mentioned problems with these groups, including organizational issues, such as poor funding and inconsistent leadership; and failure to address intersectionality—i.e., they were not inclusive of trans students who were of color, older, or had a disability.

In the absence of supportive networks on campus, trans students may spend more time engaging with online social networks (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018). In their focus groups with seven trans college students, Goldberg and Kivalanka (2018) found that the Internet (and Tumblr specifically) was a valued source of information, community, and affirmation, especially when students lacked support elsewhere. Significantly, Stolzenberg and Hughes's (2017) analysis of first year student data found that trans students were more likely to participate in online social networks for six or more hours per week compared to national averages (3.9% vs. 26.3%).

E. Civic Engagement Activism, and Leadership

National data on trans first-year students indicate that they outpace other student in their pre-college civic engagement (e.g., volunteering, protesting) and social agency (i.e., their valuing of social and political engagement), highlighting trans students' unique strengths (Egan et al., 2017). Further, trans first-year college students appear to be committed to influencing politics and social values in the long term: 43.1% believed that influencing the political structure was an important or essential goal, compared to 22.3% of students in general (Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017). Trans students were also more likely than students in general to regard influencing social values as important or essential (63.3% vs. 43.9%). Trans students were also twice as likely to score high on a measure of civic engagement compared to the national sample (47.5% s. 23.4%) and also reported a higher likelihood of committing to social change after college, possibly reflecting their awareness of and commitment to influencing ongoing public debates affecting transgender communities (Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017).

Goldberg, Smith, and Beemyn (2018d) examined over 500 trans students' experiences with advocacy and activism. Some students described engaging formal advocacy, such as working on campus campaigns on issues such as gender inclusive restrooms and housing, leading trainings on trans issues on campus, organizing trans educational/social events on campus, and speaking on university panels about their experiences. More often, though, students described engaging in informal advocacy, such as providing support and mentoring to trans students, offering themselves as resources to administrators, faculty, and students, and correcting peers/faculty regarding names and pronoun use in class. Some participants, intriguingly, emphasized that their primary advocacy took place in the context of academic work or employment, whereby they pursued class projects and faculty research opportunities that focused on trans identities or trans related topics. As one participant said: *"I did a project interviewing different departments of the university about everything involved in changing one's name in the university system."*

Students were asked why they did or did not engage in advocacy, and the following facilitative factors emerged: personal values (e.g., it was important to them), perceived need for change (e.g., perceived invisibility of trans people on campus; a lack of trans-inclusive services, supports, and infrastructure); sense of personal responsibility (e.g., *"If I don't do it, who will? I need to do it; I need to give back"*); and desire for trans community/support. Barriers to engagement in advocacy included: lack of time/other responsibilities (e.g., job, classes, etc.); structural constraints (e.g., live off campus/commute); concerns related to outness and (hyper)visibility; lack of identification with campus trans community; other identities are more salient and warranting advocacy (e.g., racial justice advocacy; disability advocacy); mental health issues (e.g., social anxiety); lack of a priority; and lack of opportunity (e.g., no known opportunities for advocacy or activism on campus).



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations draw from work by Beemyn (2003, 2005, 2016, 2019), Seelman (2014a, 2014b), Goldberg and colleagues (2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d; Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018), and others (Donatone & Rachlin, 2013; Miner, 2009). See these publications for more details.

A. Policies and protections

Trans students in the US currently lack important legal protections that would enable them to participate fully in higher education—and the lack of these protections has important consequences for their ability to succeed academically and for their social and emotional well-being. To counter the broader negative climate, colleges and universities should explicitly include gender identity and expression in their nondiscrimination policies. Such policies should codify protections for TGNC students, prohibit transphobic acts and language, and be widely disseminated, discussed, and enforced.

B. Curriculum

College curricula should address gender identity, and specifically trans identities and experiences. Trans-inclusive content is beneficial to both trans and cisgender students and should be incorporated across disciplines and in some depth. Colleges and universities should encourage faculty to develop appropriate trans-inclusive curricular content, possibly providing seed money or other incentives to faculty so that they have the time and resources to develop such content.

C. Trainings/educations aimed at students

Students should be provided with education/training to enhance their understanding and acceptance of gender diversity—including nonbinary gender identities. This education can begin with new student orientations. Training student leaders (e.g., resident advisors; officers of student organizations) is especially important, so that these leaders can help to transform campus climate and create respectful spaces for all students. Such training can include role plays and educational content that will help students to develop comfort with trans-affirming and inclusive language.

D. Trainings/education aimed at faculty and staff

Faculty/staff (e.g., campus security, dining services, financial aid, and residential life staff) should be exposed to mandatory training which include trans terminology, pronouns, tools to interrupt the gender binary, best practices, acting as an ally to TGNC students, and resources to create a more inclusive campus. Counseling and

health services staff in particular need professional development to support their competence in serving trans students.

E. Name and gender change; pronouns

Students should be able to list a name other than their legal first name on campus records, including student ID cards, class rosters, email addresses, and diplomas. The change of chosen name process should be clearly and effectively advertised. Students should also have the option to change their gender marker on campus records and documents without having to change their gender marker first on legal documents. Alternatives to male/female (e.g., nonbinary options) should be provided.

F. Documents, forms, and records: An overhauling of the gender binary

Universities and colleges should review all documents, forms, records, and website pages to ensure that gender-inclusive language is being used (e.g., acknowledge the existence of trans people; include gender options beyond male and female). Avoid unnecessarily gendered language (e.g., in communications to parents, say “your child” instead of “your son or daughter”). Consistency across offices (e.g., admissions, the registrar) should be prioritized.

G. Restrooms

Plans for all new buildings should account for the presence of gender-inclusive or single-stall campus restrooms. All existing restrooms should be reviewed, and a not insignificant number should be modified to be gender-inclusive or single-stall. These should be well advertised around campus (e.g., universities should develop a campus map that identifies all gender-inclusive restrooms on campus). These restrooms should be just as well maintained as all other restrooms.

H. Housing

Trans-inclusive/trans-accommodating housing options, in which students can be housed in keeping with their gender identity should be pursued, and residential life staff should provide support to trans students navigating the housing process. For example, institutions can ask all housing applicants to designate if they would prefer sharing a room/floor with women, men, both men and women, and/or people of other gender identities. Institutions should offer alternate housing options for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals who, for safety reasons, would rather not have a roommate (e.g., single-occupancy dorm rooms).

I. Trans-inclusive/sensitive counseling and health care

Counseling and health services staff should receive training on trans-inclusive and trans-affirming practices. Effort to hire trans providers should be made. Providers should be familiar with the trans-affirming providers and services in the broader community, and should regularly update their referral lists—especially if on-campus

providers cannot provide transition-related medical care such as hormone therapy. Health insurance coverage should be reviewed and negotiated to be inclusive of trans students.

J. Trans-specific spaces

Trans-specific spaces and/or groups should be pursued, and provided with sufficient resources to support trans related programming and events. Notably, LGBTQ resource centers and university-sanctioned LGBTQ student groups are often primarily white spaces, limiting their meaningfulness to trans people of color. Further, most LGBTQ groups are primarily centered around sexual orientation rather than gender identity, and thus it can be difficult for trans students to gain support and community within these groups, especially when there are few if any out trans students (e.g., at small colleges/universities or religious institutions). Staff and administrators who work to support marginalized or underrepresented community members should become knowledgeable about off-campus trans resources and supports and ensure that this knowledge is accessible to trans students or students exploring their gender identity (e.g., via counseling services, campus diversity office(s), and/or the university website).



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ENDNOTES

Research Methods

A) *Focus groups.* In the first stage of the project, I drew inspiration from participatory action research models (Case, Kanenberg, Erich, & Tittswort, 2012), whereby I, a cisgender female professor of psychology, partnered with three TGNC students on my campus to create the focus group questions. I also trained two of these students to be the focus group leaders. The purpose of our collaborative research approach was to bring trans students into the research process not merely as subjects to be studied but as active agents in the construction of research and the knowledge produced by it (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2016). Two focus groups with 4-7 individuals were held. Five individuals participated in both group meetings. One unique individual was present in each meeting. Participants were between 18-22 years and undergraduates at a liberal arts university in a mid-sized city. Five were white and two were of color. All seven participants identified as nonbinary trans.

A primary aim of the focus groups was to gain insight into the experiences of nonbinary trans students in college, with the ultimate goal of improving services aimed at TGNC students. A second aim was to inform the development of a survey that could be disseminated to TGNC college students and which would be sensitive to the experiences of nonbinary identified students. A third aim was to provide an opportunity for networking and connection. Focus group sessions tackled a variety of topics, including feeling scrutinized for one's gender identity, reasons for pursuing or not pursuing advocacy around gender/trans issues, perceptions of existing and needed supports and services for TGNC students on campus, experiences with faculty and staff, and career goals. (For more details, see Goldberg & Kusalanka, 2018.)

B) *Survey.* The focus groups, along with the existing literature and input by scholars who study trans populations, helped to inform the development of a large-scale online survey of trans students' experiences in higher education. After pilot testing, the survey, which was constructed using the Qualtrics software application, went "live"; it was active from May–November 2016. Study information was distributed to LGBTQ groups, clubs, and resource centers on college campuses across the US. Some colleges did not have LGBTQ groups or resource centers, but, rather, a designated staff member within a larger center, such as multicultural affairs, that provided support or resources to LGBTQ students. In such cases, study information was provided to them directly with a request to disseminate to relevant individuals. Information was also distributed to listservs and social media pages aimed at trans people and/or college students.

The survey included questions on a range of topics, including demographics, gender identity, experiences with faculty, and sense of belonging on campus. Students with nonbinary gender identities were particularly encouraged to participate. Ultimately, approximately three-quarters of the sample identified as nonbinary, and about one-quarter as binary (e.g., trans man, trans woman). About three-quarters were white, and about a quarter were of color. About three-quarters were assigned female at birth, and the remainder were assigned male at birth. (For more details, especially about the breakdown of binary and nonbinary categories, see Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2018a; Goldberg, Kusalanka, Budge, Benz, & Smith, 2018b; Goldberg, Kusalanka, & Dickey, 2018c; Goldberg, Smith, & Beemyn, 2018d.) These demographics are very similar to those of younger trans participants, particularly nonbinary trans participants, in other studies of trans adults (Beemyn, 2019; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011; James et al., 2016).

C) *Interviews.* I conducted interviews with 14 students who had left college (i.e., they took leave, dropped out, or transferred). These 14 students (12 white, two of color; nine binary, five nonbinary) took the survey and indicated a willingness to be contacted about future study opportunities. In turn, they were willing to complete a telephone interview about their experiences of leaving college, including why they left and, if relevant, why they returned. Data analysis of the interview data from these interviews is underway.