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Examining the Lived Experiences of Undergraduate Transgender Students at Four Year Institutions in the South

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Examining the Lived Experiences of Transgender Students at Four Year Institutions in the South

A Dissertation

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By

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I started doctoral course work in fall of 2011. And truthfully, I thought I would take a few courses and probably not ever finish a PhD. Thankfully, I was wrong. My mom once told me that I have really amazing people in my life, and that may just be the most accurate statement about the communities in which I belong. Once I completed my Master's degree in 2007, I thought my academic career was finished. However, through growing interests in the field of higher education pertaining to first year student success, especially those students in marginalized populations, and a lot of support, I decided that maybe my academic career still had room to grow. Thank you to Craig Beebe who encouraged me to pursue a PhD that I never realized I had wanted. He told me repeatedly I could do it, and I am forever grateful for the push he gave me to pursue this degree. Thank you to my classmates for being the best support system through this process. Special thanks to Dr. Dale O'Neill and Dr. Mike Hoffshire who were always willing to read my work and provide constructive feedback. They also were the best listeners when I experienced a lot of self-doubt. I was lucky to have several folks read and listen to my work, THANK YOU! I could write another chapter for this dissertation just expressing my gratitude to all the people who supported me, read my work, shared articles, challenged me in class, and smiled and nodded when they said, "you got this." Special thank you to Dr. Z Nicolazzo for taking time to read through parts of this dissertation (and taking phone calls) to provide feedback and perspectives that I had not considered.

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Abstract

This qualitative, narrative study examined the lived experiences of transgender students at four-year institutions in the South. The college transition process and academic and social integration for transgender students was explored through the frameworks of Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1995), Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 1995; Breslow, Brewster, Velez, Wong, Geiger, & Soderstrom, 2015), and Academic and Social Integration theories (Tinto, 1975; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). College climates can be challenging for transgender students, especially when campus staff and faculty are not prepared and/or aware of transgender students' needs (Pryor, 2015). How students perceive their academic and social integration as well as how their integration was influenced by their gender identity was a key component of this study. Through a four-phase data collection process, transgender students had the opportunity to tell, share, and reflect on their experiences as transgender undergraduate students navigating the college transition, academic, and social integration processes.

Through data collection and analysis, four categories emerged from participant responses: 1) Navigating Identity, 2) College Transition and Challenges, 3) Environment, Space, and Climate, and 4) Sympathizing with Others. Within each category, several sub-categories were identified as well. Institutions of higher education must recognize the ever-growing presence of transgender students on their campuses. Moreover, institutions have the ability and responsibility to create policies, spaces, and opportunities that allow transgender college students to have a supportive academic and social integration process.

Keywords: Transgender, Gender Identity, College Transition, Academic and Social Integration

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When college students enter their first year, they encounter new experiences as they transition to higher education: studying for college level courses, living with a roommate, being away from home, meeting new friends, getting along with faculty, and managing new responsibilities. The first year of college can often be the most difficult (Giddan, 1988), and many First-Year students struggle with the transition from high school academics to college level work (Conley, Aspengren, Stout, & Veach, 2006). There is a large body of research surrounding the college transition for First-Year students, including academic persistence and students' academic, social, and/or emotional integration (Braxton, Hirschy, & McLendon, 2004; Clark, 2005; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Reynolds, 2013; Roos, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1990, 1993, 2006). This research is important as many students do not make it to graduation, and those who do not feel engaged in their institution are more likely to drop out (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, & Kinzie, 2008; Tinto, 1990). Nationally, one in three college First-Year students will not return for their sophomore year (US News and World Report, 2013). While a general focus on First-Year student transition and integration is important, institutions of higher learning must recognize that students may also experience additional challenges with their college transition. For some students, their college transition process, academic, and social integration may also be affected by a variety of identities, including students who identify as transgender.

According to the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAAD), "transgender is a term used to describe people whose gender identify differs from their assigned sex at birth"

(2011, n.p.). For this marginalized population on campuses, this piece of their identity is rarely acknowledged. This lack of acknowledgement is significant as gender identity can be an important piece in development for transgender students. Transgender students are an often underserved and forgotten population, and when transgender students come to college, it is likely they enter campus with identity issues (Newhouse, 2013). In addition, location of schools can also influence a student's experience prior to coming to college. In a 2013 National School Climate Survey, students in the South were the least likely to have supportive personnel and LGBT resources at their secondary schools (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Transgender students and genderqueer students studying in the south also reported the most hostile environments (Kosciw et al., 2014). When those are the experiences transgender students are encountering at the secondary level, those experiences may be compounded when they enter college (Newhouse, 2013). Therefore, there is room for growth in the ways in which institutions of higher education recognize, understand, and serve transgender students. College campuses need to be aware of transgender students' needs in order to create an inviting environment and assist them with their integration to college (Newhouse, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on the problems surrounding college transition and integration of transgender students, which is a population that is often not explored. Despite their possible invisibility, transgender students are on campus and experiencing challenges (Newhouse, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of undergraduate transgender students at four year institutions in the South. This study examined how transgender students

navigated their college experiences, especially their first year or their first year out as a transgender student. This study further examined how gender identity played a role in their college transition to the campus community. In addition, this study focused on how transgender students integrated academically and socially into their college environments, i.e. classroom settings and social situations.

Significance

While colleges may not always be mindful of transgender populations, evidence shows that this population is coming out nationally and are becoming a more visible population (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Bilodeau 2005, 2009; Newhouse, 2013; Nicolazzo, 2015). This trend suggests students will continue to come out whether colleges are prepared or not. However, many transgender college students experience microaggressions, which are acts of unintentional discrimination (Nadal, Rivera & Corpus, 2010), on their campuses. In addition, many of these students may also encounter a lack of inclusive policies, which makes their college transition more difficult (Newhouse, 2013).

When college students do not integrate, they will leave (Tinto, 1990), and if they leave, they do not persist in their pursuit of higher education. Nationally, retention of First-Year students is an issue institutions are facing and addressing. Twenty-eight percent of four-year college students leave after their first year (American College Testing Program, 2012). However, retention data for transgender students nationally is unknown. This data is unknown because it is not being collected.

Understanding that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students face harassment on college campuses, it is surprising that retention of these populations still is not

tracked (Windmeyer, Humphrey, & Barker, 2013). It is crucial for higher education institutions to focus their efforts on marginalized populations such as transgender students, as their gender identity can affect several aspects of their lives, one of which is success in college (Finger, 2010). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and questioning (LGBTQIQ) students can face additional challenges based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. These issues can lead to self-doubt or low self-esteem, and some students do not have good support systems, whether that is from family, friends, or themselves (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). If transgender students are lacking support systems, then campuses should, as evidence shows, create environments that allow for inclusion and engagement (Marine & Catalano, 2015).

Gender and gender identity is an important aspect to consider when working with transgender students; however, this consideration is often complex because it is not always recognized by others (Newhouse, 2013). Meaning, while assumptions are commonly made based off a student's appearance, that student's appearance might not always reflect his/her gender identity. In addition, LGBTQ students have the added concern of being a "sexual minority" and may experience isolation and loneliness (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007), and students that fall within a sexual minority population have a higher risk of departure (Mancini, n.d.). Transgender students additionally may feel uncomfortable on their campuses, and, unfortunately, they are not afforded the same privileges as other cis students (Newhouse, 2013). Gender privilege can be as simple as not having to worry about where to use the restroom or with whom they will share a room in the residence hall. Moreover, transgender students may face harassment, discrimination, and exclusion on their college campuses (Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011), and they also have been known to have higher rates of stress compared to non-transgender students (Effrig et al.). If

transgender students are at risk of these challenges and issues, it is vital for college campuses to provide resources and spaces inclusive to this population in order to promote transgender student development (Newhouse, 2013).

Terminology

As transgender populations are becoming more visible on college campuses, institutions are beginning to become more aware (Bilodeau, 2005, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2015, 2016) and to understand the importance of creating inclusive environments (Wentling, Windsor, Schilt, & Lucal, 2008). In creating those environments and creating awareness, college faculty and personnel must understand the terminology that is used in order to be as inclusive as possible of the transgender communities on college campuses. A variety of definitions exist for the term transgender. Stryker (2008) uses the term "to refer to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth" (p. 1) and further includes "people who cross over (trans) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender" (p. 1). Trans is a Latin word meaning across; therefore, transgender means across gender (Teich, 2012). The term transgender can encompass many other terms as well and is often seen as an umbrella term to describe individuals who define themselves beyond traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity. As an umbrella term, transgender can also include genderqueer, transsexual, crossdresser, and other gender variance (Wentling et al., 2008).

For the purposes of this study, I will use the term transgender as an inclusive term to represent individuals that may identify as genderqueer and or gender non-conforming as well as those who are male to female, female to male, and or trans non-binary. The terms genderqueer and gender non-conforming refer to individuals who do not want to identify their gender on a

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binary or do not identify as fully male or female (Donatone & Rachlin, 2013). Additionally, the

term gender fluid appears in discussions of the participants and findings and is defined as "an

umbrella term to describe the possibilities for gender identity beyond the binary 'man' or

'woman'" (Parker, 2016, p.166). Throughout this discussion, I will use the terms gender and

gender identity when discussing transgender students' identity development. It is important to

distinguish that gender, which is often confused with sex, is a social construction placed upon

individuals at birth (Teich, 2012). Transwhat, which is an online resource for terminology and

allyship, breaks down the difference between gender and gender identity as follows: gender is

the sociological construction, and gender identity is psychological for the individual as in how

they see themselves (n.d.). As such, I will use the term gender when referring to an individual's

socially constructed identity and gender identity in reference to how individuals see themselves

as a man or woman or something outside of those terms (Stryker, 2008). When discussing gender

identity or a transgender individual, I will use the following terms: coming out and presenting.

Coming out, as defined by the Freedom Centre, is when individuals explore and are aware of

their identity and share that identity with others (2013). Presenting focuses on external

appearance and refers to gender presentation; this includes how a person dresses, how a person

looks, or how that person acts (Transwhat). While this study examined participants' perceptions

of their college transition and integration processes through their gender identities, it would be

negligent to ignore other aspects of their identities and how those identities are defined. For

instance, participants self-disclosed their sexual orientation as part of their identity as well.

Participants defined themselves as pansexual, asexual, and demisexual. While these terms are

defined more extensively in chapter four, briefly defined, pansexual is defined as an individual

who is attracted to or has sexual desire of persons not limited to a specific gender identity or sexual orientation (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Alternatively, asexual, according to Merriam-Webster, can mean "not involving, involved with, or relating to sex" or "not having or showing a particular sexual identity". While Demisexual or demi sexuality as defined by dictionary.com, refers to "a sexual orientation characterized by not experiencing sexual attraction until a strong emotional connection is established with a specific person." Lastly, I want to comment regarding pronouns. Depending on whom I am talking about, will dictate the pronouns in which I use. If I am referring to transgender students in general or a transgender student in general, I will use the pronouns they/them/their, even if I am using it for a singular person.

Lastly, it is important to note that transgender populations are often included within the larger spectrum of sexual minorities. Some of the research, concepts, and theories addressed may pertain to other populations in addition to transgender individuals. I will use the following acronyms when discussing said populations: LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer), and LGBTQIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and questioning). Though the "T" is often seen in discussions about lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, the term transgender does not refer to sexual orientation. Significantly, when individuals identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, this definition specifically pertains to who they are attracted to. Alternatively, the term transgender pertains to an individual's gender identity (Renn, 2007).

Research Questions

This study is guided by an overarching research question, with three sub-questions that will assist in framing this study.

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Research Question:

How do transgender college students perceive their academic and social integration into college?

Sub questions include:

1. How do transgender students perceive themselves within the college transition process?

2. What is their perspective of their university experience within their community (and within the southern region)?

3. How does gender identity play a role in transgender student acclimation to their new environment?

Conceptual Framework

As students navigate their gender identity and continue "coming out" as transgender on college campuses, it was beneficial to incorporate theories that could assist in framing the stories and experiences of these students. This conceptual framework examined three theories that assisted in my understanding of how transgender students experience their college transition. Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory, minority stress theory, and academic and social integration theory provided a framework for the experiences of the transgender student participants.

Transition Theory

When students are making the transition to college, several factors can influence their success. Schlossberg (1981) defined transition as an event or nonevent that can result in a change regarding roles, relationships, and/or a routine (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg,

2012). Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) focuses on the four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies. Situation focuses on who or what caused the transition, and whether the transition is within the control of the person experiencing it or not. Self focuses on the characteristics of the person in transition such as age, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation. Considering self, promotes questions such as how does a transgender student's gender identity affect their transition, in this case, to college? Support refers to the family, friends, relationships, and networks or communities the person in transition has. Support in this case examines the networks of friends, family, and communities the students experiencing the transition has. Finally, strategies include the skills and coping mechanisms the individual develops to assist in transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). For this study, I ascertained ways the participants utilized and created strategies to assist them in their college transition and integration processes.

Transition theory provided a foundation from which to view the experiences of transgender college students. This theory was also a valuable resource when exploring transgender students' experiences and how they coped with their transition to college as well as how higher education professionals can create support and strategies to assist in this process. Furthermore, transition theory also assisted me in outlining the transgender students' experiences by allowing me to look at how each participant utilized self, support, situation, and strategies in their transition to university life.

Minority Stress Theory

Meyer (1995, 2003) originally proposed ideas regarding minority stress as it pertained to lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Minority stress occurs when stigmatized and marginalized

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populations, like LGBT populations, experience high levels of stress (Meyer 1995, 2003). He

examined what caused stress among this marginalized population (LGB) and focused on two

factors: distal stressors and proximal stressors. Distal stressors are external factors that affect a

person; alternatively, proximal stressors are internalized (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Breslow,

Brewster, Velez, Wong, Geiger, & Soderstrom (2015) adapted this theory for transgender

individuals. Transgender individuals can be exposed to harassment and discrimination, distal

stressors, and those experiences can negatively impact their self-concept, a proximal stressor

(Breslow et al., 2015). Anti-transgender discrimination can lead to psychological distress

amongst transgender individuals (Breslow et al., 2015). Similarly, many transgender individuals

experience minority stress, which is socially based, and the individuals experiencing it have no

control over it (Meyer, 1995, 2003).

Minority stress theory was beneficial in studying transgender college students as it

assisted me in identifying stressors experienced by the participants within their campus

communities. When transgender students experience distal and proximal stressors, it has the

potential to affect their college transition and integration into campus life. Meyer also pointed

out that individuals can experience unique additional stress by being a part of a sexual minority

population (1995, 2003). When people who are within a minority population continue to have

experiences that reinforce their minority status, it can spark initial stress and can lead to

psychological distress (Meyer).

Academic and Social Integration Theory

Several factors can affect a student's integration into campus life. Additionally, according

to Tinto (1975), academic and social integration can influence a student's persistence. Academic

integration involves both structural dimensions, the standards of the institution, and normative dimensions, a student's identification within the academic system (Tinto, 1975). Alternatively, social integration involves how the student and the social system, both college level and subcultures of the institution, are congruent (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's 13 propositions of his Interactionalist Theory (1975) states a student's initial commitment to their institution will affect their degree of academic and social integration, and their initial commitment is influenced by the student's characteristics. Once past the initial commitment, the greater the student's level of academic and social integration is, the greater their continued commitment to the university will be (Tinto, 1975). For transgender students particularly, looking at characteristics they had at entry into their institution can assist in understanding how their initial experiences affected their integration into campus life.

Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon (2004) added that the commitment of the institution to student welfare, communal potential, institutional integrity, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial adjustment, and ability to pay are all factors that affect a student's social integration. For transgender students, academic and social integration may be affected by whether or not they see themselves reflected in the university's social and academic systems. This representation can be seen in policy, opportunities for engagement, and recognition by institutions as how they see themselves.

Transition theory, minority stress theory, and academic and social integration theory assisted in framing the stories and experiences of transgender students. Transition theory guided stories of students in transition, and the systems of support and strategies set in motion to assist each student with their college transition. Minority stress theory, in this research, aided in

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identifying distal and proximal stressors that influenced a transgender student's experience and

affected how well they were able to academically and socially integrate into their institutions. On

the next page is a diagram of how transition theory, minority stress theory, and academic and

social integration theory interconnect and provided a foundation for this research.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
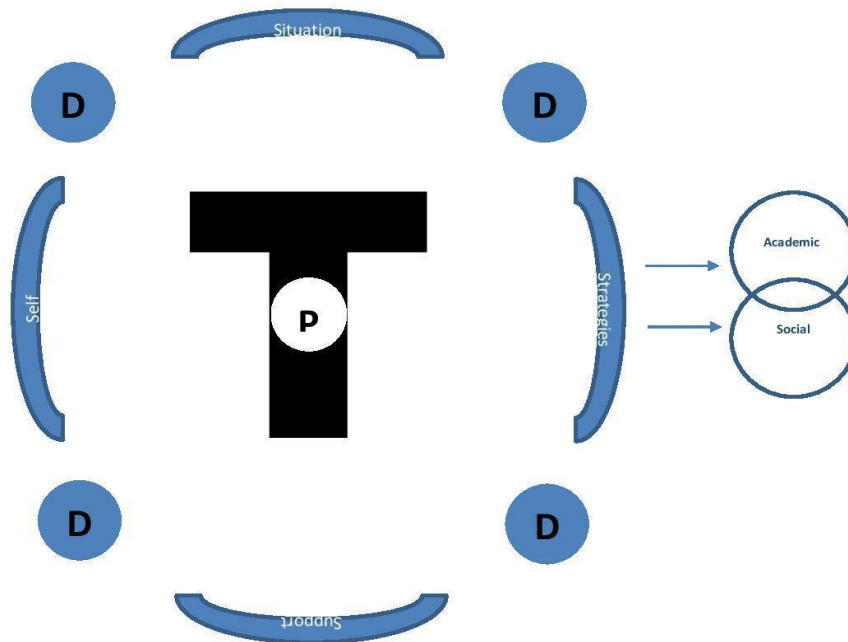
T = Transgender Student

D = Distal Stressors (external) – Minority Stress Theory
P= Proximal Stressors (internal) – Minority Stress Theory

Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies – Transition Theory

Academic and Social Integration Theory

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study, the research questions, and the conceptual framework provided guidance for the research. This process was steered by the purpose, questions, and framework by supporting the research and creating a blueprint for the research to follow. In the next chapter, I examine the current literature regarding transgender students as well as the research surrounding First-Year college students, campus climates, gender identity, the importance of environments, and the existing policies or the lack thereof.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Exploring lived experiences of college students is not a new trend in research studies. However, exploring the experiences of college students based on gender identity has become a rising topic of interest. The Orlando mass shooting at a nightclub where members of the LGBTQ community were injured and killed in the summer of 2016 as well as proposed anti-transgender bills across the nation, predominantly in southern states, has shown how imperative it is to recognize the impact that socio and political climates have on transgender students. Transgender populations have not been given the same attention in the literature as other populations (Beemyn, 2005; Bilodeau, 2005, 2009; Pusch, 2005; Rands, 2009), and there is little known about transgender students' experiences in the classroom (Beemyn, 2013; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Pryor, 2015). Much of the current research relevant to transgender individuals offers an array of perspectives; however, there is an absence of research regarding transgender students in higher education (Nicolazzo, 2016). In addition, some research is inclusive to LGBT populations as a whole but without a specific focus on transgender students alone. Furthermore, the research pertaining to transgender students is often from a deficit lens (Nicolazzo, 2016).

This review of literature explored the research surrounding the climates for transgender students (high school and college), experiences of First-Year college students during college transition, gender identity and identity development, integration to campus for transgender students, campus environments for transgender students, psychological distress for transgender

students, transgender student resilience, campus awareness, and policies or the lack thereof as it pertains to transgender individuals.

Climate Today for Transgender Individuals

Rousseau (1988) viewed climate in terms of descriptions and perceptions, while Beemyn and Rankin (2011) referred to psychological climate as "the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of people within an organization, institution, or culture" (p. 80). They added that climate impacts safety and is an important component for people when they interacted in their community (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). This is true for college students as well. However, for transgender populations across the county, the climate continues to be a hostile one (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). In 2017 alone, there have been 25 transgender individuals murdered in the United States (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).

The Impact of Orlando

In June of 2016, the Pulse night club in Orlando, Florida became the site of one of the deadliest mass shootings in American History. The victims of this attack were LGBTQ persons of color. Throughout 2016 and 2017, anti-LGBTQ legislation has been widely discussed, especially in the Southern States, and it would be negligent to not recognize how horrific events such as the Pulse shooting have affected transgender people. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) released a report recently detailing hate crimes that resulted in deaths of the victims (Calacal, 2016). This report found that LGBTQ individuals experienced increased rates of violence in 2015, and 67% of the fatality victims were transgender or gender non-conforming (Calacal, 2016). Moreover, queer people and people of color continue to experience violence and hate crimes all too often (Lopez, 2016).

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When acts of violence occur at a national level, those effects can trickle down to students that identify within that marginalized population on college campuses. Some individuals have felt that staff and administrators within higher education have not done enough to show support or address growing concerns of the LGBTQ community (Bondi, 2016). The Orlando shooting is a reminder to many LGBTQ people, especially LGBTQ people of color, that hate crimes and violence are a continued reality. Trans populations are more likely to encounter violent acts, including rape, beatings, and death (Spade, 2015). Suggestions for creating spaces and opportunities to further the discussion and provide support include: listening, working to understand forms of oppression, dedicating resources, and engaging others in the conversation who may not bring it up themselves (Bondi, 2016). Such efforts can be utilized for spaces in higher education, too. Members of university faculty, staff, and the administration have a responsibility to create the same inclusive environments for transgender populations as they would for cisgender students.

Middle School and High School Climate

The 2013 National School Climate Survey, which involved over 7,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) participants, looked at the experiences those students had at the middle and high school level. Concerning school safety, the study found that

- 55.5% of LGBT students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 37.8% felt unsafe because of their gender expression.
- 30.3% of LGBT students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and over a tenth (10.6%) missed four or more days in the past month for similar reasons.

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- Over a third of LGBT students avoided gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (bathrooms: 35.4%, locker rooms: 35.3%).

- Most LGBT students reported avoiding school functions and extracurricular activities (68.1% and 61.2%, respectively) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014, p. xvi).

Additionally, 54.6% of LGBT students experienced negative comments regarding their gender expression, and a third heard transgender specific comments (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Over half of the participants experienced verbal harassment based on gender expression, and over 22% experienced physical harassment based on gender identity (Kosciw et al., 2014). Below is a chart from the 2013 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2014) that showcases LGBT participants' responses pertaining to activity and involvement in middle school and high school based on feelings of comfort and safety.

Figure 2:

LGBT Middle School and High School National Climate Survey Responses

Figure 1.2 Percentage of LGBT Students Who Avoid Spaces at School Because They Feel Unsafe or Uncomfortable
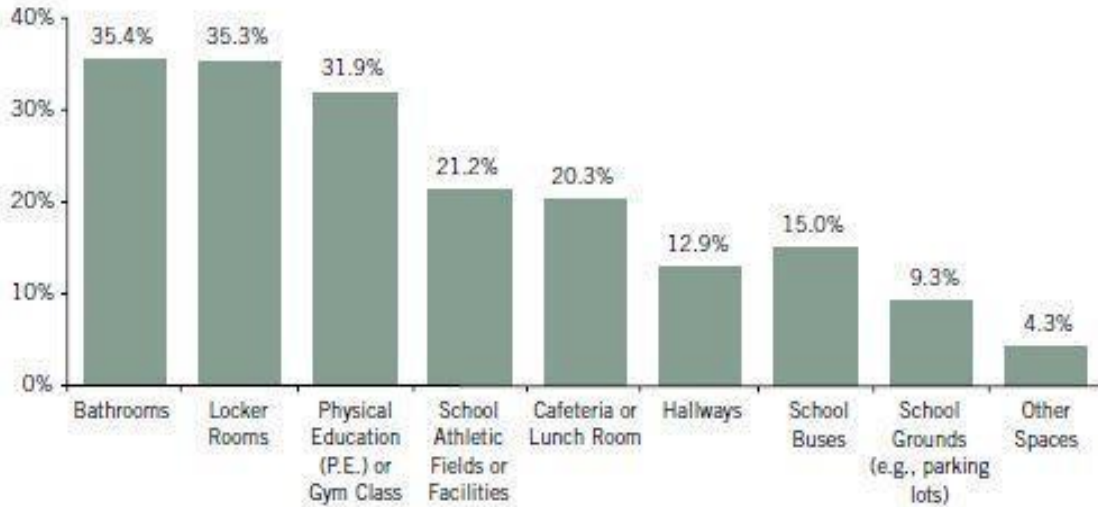
Figure 1.3 Frequency that LGBT Students Missed Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable
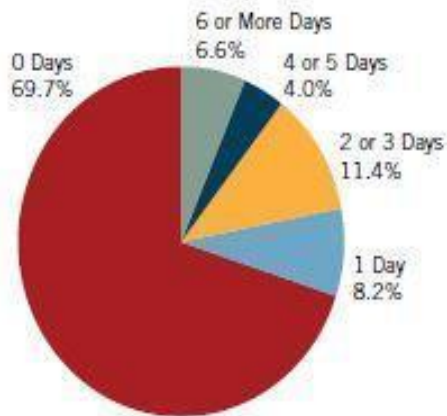
Figure 1.4 Percentage of LGBT Students Who Avoid School Activities Because They Feel Unsafe or Uncomfortable
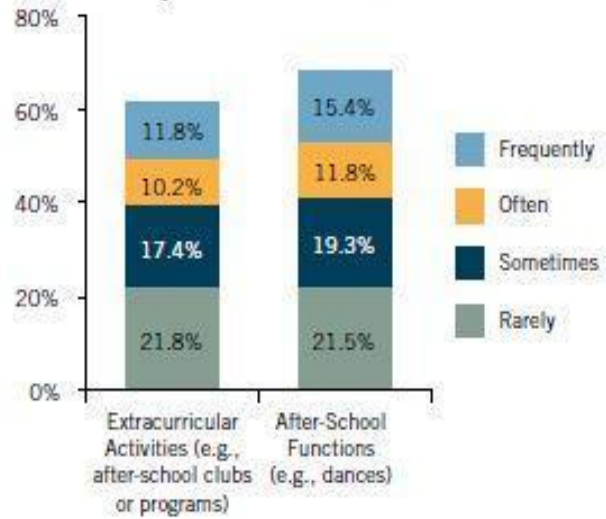
When over half of the LGBT populations at middle and high schools are avoiding school social functions due to concerns of safety and more than fifty percent have experienced negative remarks and verbal harassment, it is clear that there is a problem with inclusion and awareness at the PK-12 level. In 2016, the state of North Carolina took a clear anti-transgender stance with bills that did not offer protection for transgender individuals and proposed that in some districts, high school students would be allowed to carry pepper spray for protection in bathrooms from transgender individuals (Golgowski, 2016). For a population that has already experienced harassment and fears for their safety, transgender students in the state of North Carolina faced the added fear of being pepper sprayed.

Also in 2016, Texas Lieutenant Governor, Dan Patrick, asked high schools to ignore President Obama's stance of adhering to Title IX rules for protection of transgender students (Kingcade, 2016). For the past 20 years, there has been an increasing amount of research that shows a general lack of support for LGBTQ students in the middle school and high school arenas (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). Additionally, LGBTQ high school students are more likely to experience bullying than their non-LGBTQ peers (Robinson & Espelage, 2013), and when transgender students do face harassment and/or discrimination in schools, they do not always receive assistance from services created to support the LGB population (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). Transgender high school students exist in spaces that do not offer support, guidance, and/or protections from harassment in the same way that they do for cisgender students. Moreover, the transgender students that move onto higher education may be integrating into environments that continue to perpetuate cisgender norms.

College Climate

College climates can be challenging for transgender students, especially when campus staff and faculty are not prepared and/or aware of transgender students' needs (Pryor, 2015). Existing research illustrates that transgender students continue to experience marginalization on college campuses (Seelman, 2014). With the recent national attention on states like Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, which proposed anti-transgender legislation, the possible impact for transgender college students in the South could be significant. In addition, 11 states sued the Obama administration last year to be able to discriminate against trans people (Lopez, 2016). According to the Campus Pride 2010 National College Climate Survey, "the overwhelming majority of LGBTQQ students, of every race, color and ethnicity, report harassment, isolation and fear on their college campuses" (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010, n.p.). Transmasculine respondents (87%) and transfeminine respondents (82%) indicated their gender expression was the basis for harassment compared to 20 percent of men and 24 percent of women (Rankin et al, 2010). This is crucial in recognizing that transgender students face harassment based on their gender identity and expression, and institutions should be asking the question, what can they do to educate their communities.

Further, Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012) found that "transgender students reported more frequent encounters with harassment and discrimination as well as a significantly lower sense of belonging within the campus community" (p. 732). If transgender students are reporting high levels of harassment based on gender expression on college campuses and do not feel as though they belong, then it is clear that institutions of higher education are not fulfilling a

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responsibility to create inclusive and supportive environments for transgender populations. Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer (2010) found that the ways transgender people felt oppressed on campuses was through "harassment, violence, marginalization, tokenization, and exploitation" (p.12). These findings indicate that transgender students are impacted by distal stressors that could be impacting their integration into their campus communities.

These fears and feelings can lead to a sense of exclusion among trans individuals. Colleges and universities make it clear to transgender populations (students, staff, and faculty) with their policies or lack thereof whether they are valued and recognized. At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the decision was made in the fall of 2015 to remove information regarding preferred pronouns from the university's website (Jaschik, 2015a). UT Knoxville's Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which one may argue was doing their job by making the campus aware of transgender students' needs pertaining to language, was asked to remove the pronoun guide from their website (Jaschik, 2015a). Many argued that it seemed that the guide was promoting the disuse of the traditional pronouns "he" and "she." This was not the case; rather, it was an opportunity to recognize and include transgender students and give transgender students the option to identify how they see themselves.

Similarly, Biola University in California released strict statements regarding the ban of same sex relationships and gender identity (Jaschik, 2015b), thus causing some staff and faculty to fear for their jobs. Students at both institutions witnessed administrators creating and enforcing policies geared toward heteronormative norms, which could result in transgender students perceiving those campuses as uninviting. In addition, such practices reinforced the belief that anything or anyone outside of the "norm" was not recognized or valued.

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High School to College Pipeline for Transgender Students

For transgender students, how they were treated, what they learned, and whether they felt included or excluded could affect their transition to college. Transgender topics do not get discussed often in schools (Singh & Burnes, 2009), and students learn early what boys are supposed to be like and what girls should be like (Meyer, 2012). When systems reinforce gender stereotypes, they fail to empower students whose gender identity does not align with their assigned sex. Also, giving students the opportunity to participate in a dialogue with one another and their teachers is important in allowing them to share ideas and thoughts, which can lead to creating new knowledge (Freire, 2000). Educators have a responsibility to examine how gender is connected to power and institutional organizations and attempt to redefine those systems (Saltman, 2014). More often than not, transgender students are educated in environments that operate within binary systems. Therefore, transgender students are not given opportunities to learn about people like themselves.

In addition to discussing transgender populations in schools, role models are important as well. To foster positive identity development, it is crucial for LGBTQ students to see LGBTQ role models as leaders, to have access to resources that can help these students to develop coping skills, and to be able to connect with support systems (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Some students do not always have the appropriate preparation and or support in high school to help them with the college selection process (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). In the K12 setting, LGBTQ students who had more than 11 identified supportive staff members at their school reported they were less likely to say they were not going to college and were more likely to have higher GPAs (Kosciw,

Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). It is beneficial for LGBTQ high school students to have supportive staff members, and the benefits increased the more supportive the staff was. However, for LGBTQ populations that lack supportive staff , they also had lower GPAs and might not consider going to college (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Moreover, for LGBTQ students at Biola University, the opportunity to connect with LGBTQ faculty and/or staff would be difficult because LGBTQ faculty and staff are fearful of being open with their sexuality or gender identity due to the university's new stricter code of conduct (Jaschik, 2015b). When students do not have access to mentors or resources, it can affect their development of coping skills, which in turn can affect how they develop self-efficacy. As students develop higher forms of self-efficacy, stressful or intimidating situations can be viewed as a challenge as opposed to a threat (Bandura, 1997). In addition, when students learn in a supportive and collaborative environment, they can also develop a higher sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). For transgender students, if they did not build on those skill sets in high school because there was not an opportunity to or they did not have positive LGBTQ role models, then they may be at a disadvantage compared to their peers transitioning to college.

Additionally, colleges can improve their campus climate for LGBTQ students and assist in creating a smoother transition in the PK-16 pipeline by creating LGBTQ centers, LGBTQ organizations, specialized housing, and specific programming (Burleson, 2010). Another option for outreach to incoming transgender students is through breakout sessions at First-Year programs. Some institutions utilize new student orientation as an opportunity to hold breakout sessions geared toward LGBTQ students (Burleson, 2010).

Transgender students can experience forms of discrimination within their campus environments, including the classroom environment (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009). A proactive way to discourage these biases by non-transgender students in the classroom is for faculty to state their values in the syllabus pertaining to inclusion and allow transgender students the choice to disclose their identity to the class (Case et al., 2009). When faculty are intentional about creating an inclusive space for transgender students, then those students can feel supported in one more university space.

First-Year College Student Experiences

Often times, First-Year college student success is evaluated based on their transition to college (Clark, 2005). A crucial transition for many teenagers is the move to college (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). College may be the first time a student is not living at home or even in the same state as his/her family. Even for students who may remain at home and commute to their new institution, challenges can still exist (Pope, Miklitsch, & Weigand, 2005). Whether the student lives on campus or commutes, a variety of factors and experiences affect a First-Year student's transition to college. Unfortunately, First-Year college students do not always receive the support they may need from their institution (Reynolds, 2013).

Another aspect to be considered regarding First-Year college students is their diversity. The diversity of new students' gender, sexual orientation, and race is greater than it was decades ago (Pope Miklitsch & Weigand, 2005). Within the growing diversity of new college students, some of those individuals that are part of minority populations can have a higher risk of departure (Reynolds, 2013). When students have a higher risk of departure, additional factors may influence their decision. Moreover, "At-risk students tend to be filled with even more

uncertainty and stress than their college counterparts" (Reynolds, 2013, p. 31). Lastly, first year students may encounter new experiences and gain additional perspectives they did not have previously. For some students, identity surrounding race, sexual orientation, and/or gender can create added challenges (Weigel, 2010). Those challenges may be due to the lack of support on behalf of their institutions, or can be due to distal and proximal stressors students experience due to their marginalized identities.

Gender Identity

Transgender student research has mainly focused on identity formation (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012). Until recently, gender identity development has not received the same attention as LGB identity development. Identity is constructed and is how an individual sees oneself in relation to others regarding race, sexual orientation, or religion, for example (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). College students can construct those identities from their interactions and influence from others (Jones, 1997; McEwen, 2003; Torres, 2003; Weber, 1998). Gender identity can be defined as a person's inner sense of self as a gendered person (Wilchins, 2002). In our heteronormative society, gender and sex are situated on the binary system of male and female (Teich, 2012). However, gender identity defies binary systems and challenges social norms.

Transgender students can experience additional challenges during their transition into their university. They also have an added disadvantage compared to their cisgender counterparts in that when these students were in high school, attention to their identity was most likely left out of the conversation (Singh & Jackson, 2012). Therefore, if a student identifies as transgender, gender nonconforming, or gender queer, their identity has probably not been discussed or even acknowledged. Also, transgender students have additional challenges surrounding their

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development of a positive transgender identity. For many, they have grown up knowing that their identity has been "stigmatized" and may lack the same support systems that non-LGBTQ individuals have (Fairchild & Hayward, 1998). In addition, if faculty and staff have a better understanding of transgender students, then they are able to provide more support (Pryor, 2015).

While heterosexual students and cisgender students have not seen their identities stigmatized in society, transgender students have; therefore, transgender students do not have a positive frame of reference for their gender identity development. This has the potential to affect transgender students' identity development process, and impact their transition and integration into college. If parents or an impactful adult projects negative views of society regarding a specific identity, this can affect the transgender student (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). They must often learn on their own how to cope with this identity as they have not seen it modeled in their families and communities (Caitlin & Futterman, 1998). For positive identity development to occur, it is crucial for LGBT students to see LGBT role models as leaders, to have access to resources that can help develop coping skills, and to be able to connect with support systems (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

For some students, gender identity may not be clearly defined. Gender identity as well as sexual orientation can be open and fluid (Plummer, 2011). Transgender students do not identify solely as male or female. Instead, gender identity to each individual may be seen as fluid rather than on a fixed binary. In a case study of transgender college students at a Mid-Western university, one participant discussed his identity development:

I'd use the word transgender. I'd also use "non-operational female to male." I'd

also use the word "genderqueer." I identified as a feminist before identifying

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as trans. It was really embedded in me. It played a big part in my decision not to have surgery. I've tried with my identity to not reinforce the gender binary system, and options have been limited to the trans community by focusing so much on transsexualism (involving gender reassignment surgery). The only option is, if you're male, to become female, or vice-versa. Transgender youth have felt that binary gender system is not for them. We want to increase the number of genders. (Bilodeau, 2005, p. 33)

In that same study, another student contributed this about her gender identity:

A big part of my gender identity is dyke. I never identified as lesbian as a sexual orientation, but I love being a dyke. It feels strong and powerful. At the same time, I do identify as pansexual and transgender in a general sense. It's like queer . . . all of those words do work ...I also identify strongly as a woman ...I identify as transgender because I transgress gender and I refuse to be limited by gender. I still really strongly value my identity as a woman and women's spaces (p. 33).

These two students articulate that a transgender identity can be much more than being male to female or female to male. Bilodeau (2005) concludes that higher education institutions need to work to break down binary systems and think about how those systems are impacting transgender students. This indicates that understanding transgender student experiences and needs on our campuses is much more than exploration of students that fall on a male – female binary. Gender non-binary or gender queer students might have additional challenges pertaining to navigation of their gender, which in turn could be reflected in their college transition process as well.

Integration to Campus

The transition to college for First-Year students can be a critical time for these students (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). For LGBT students, their transition to college is compounded because they must learn to cope with concerns and additional stressors because they are a part of a marginalized population; therefore, it is imperative that they have supportive mentors and peers (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). When First-Year students are socially integrated into their institution, and with peers, academic staff, and faculty, they are more committed to that institution (Tinto, 1993). One research study found that students who got involved with LGBT organizations increased the "degree to which they were out," and it also helped these students to be more involved with other involvements or programs related to social justice (Renn, 2007). This study might indicate that the college transitional issues faced by First-Year transgender students' might be lessened by early engagement in LGBT organizations. Therefore, the ways that colleges attract transgender students can be integral to getting them connected to those resources.

While some universities might recruit students based on major, race, or ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity has not previously been an area of focus (Burleson, 2010). This suggests that institutions place importance in having diverse student populations based on race and ethnicity, but they do not consider the importance of having a diverse student body in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity. In Seelman's (2014) findings, transgender students identified an area of action for colleges which was to recruit more diverse groups and

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encourage inclusive practices. There are certain actions colleges can take to improve their campus climate for LGBTQ students, including developing LGBTQ centers, LGBTQ organizations, specialized housing, and specific programming (Burleson, 2010). In addition, faculty can help transgender students to feel integrated on their college campuses. One way in which this can occur is when faculty make efforts to recognize transgender students as they see themselves, by using their preferred names and pronouns.

Another option for outreach to incoming transgender students is through breakout sessions at First-Year programs. Some institutions utilize new student orientation as an opportunity to hold breakout sessions geared towards LGBTQ students (Burleson, 2010). Creating resources that assist transgender students with their transition to college and help them integrate into campus may give them a sense of belonging. When students feel as though they belong, then it can affect a student's intention to persist (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007).

Environment

Another factor affecting students' transitions and integration into campus is their environment. Environments play an important role in how a transgender student acclimates to their institution. Campus policies or the lack thereof can also affect how students experience their environment. While campuses move towards inclusion policies and diversity trainings for staff, faculty, and students, recent studies have shown that there are still a high number of students identifying as LGBTQIQ who do not feel safe on campus or who have experienced harassment. The lack of safety and the continued harassment may stem from a general lack of awareness and understanding of a marginalized identity, such as transgender identities. Ultimately, "The continued lack of comfort and safety for trans* college students is predicated

on—and perpetuated by— genderism" (Nicolazzo, 2015, p.29). Meaning that campus communities will continue to struggle to meet needs and best serve transgender students if they cannot recognize how their institutions continue to operate on gender binary norms, and how that often leaves out transgender students.

College climates can be challenging for transgender students, especially when campus staff and faculty are not prepared and/or are unaware of transgender students' needs (Pryor, 2015). Transgender students might avoid spaces on their campuses that tend to be cisgender or heteronormative due to the fact those spaces do not offer much support for them (Nicolazzo, 2015). For these students, they are integrating into college while lacking support that their peers received at the secondary level. Transgender students can experience forms of discrimination within their campus environments, including the classroom environment (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009). Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010) state that the current ways transgender people are feeling oppressed on our campuses is through "harassment, violence, marginalization, tokenization, and exploitation" (p.12). HB2, which was passed in late spring of 2017 in North Carolina dictates that public institutions must segregate bathrooms based on a person's assigned sex at birth rather than their gender identity (Logue, 2016). Therefore, college students at any public university in North Carolina are entering institutions already knowing their environment has restrictions for them based on their gender identity.

A proactive way to discourage these biases by non-transgender students in the classroom is for faculty to state within the syllabus values pertaining to inclusion and allowing transgender students the choice to disclose their identity to the class (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009). Nicolazzo (2015) provides an example of one transgender student changing her major due to a

negative interaction in a classroom. While another student shared a much more positive experience in the classroom:

> I can remember when we had the syllabus up in one of my [education] classes on the first day and [the professor] was talking about how we need to be respectful of, you know, race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender variance is what [the syllabus] said. That was great, you know?
>
> (Nicolazzo, 2015).

When faculty are intentional about creating an inclusive space for transgender students, then those students have one less thing to concern themselves with. Significantly, "Like many areas of campus, the classroom setting provides areas of vulnerability, especially when it comes to being misgendered" (Pryor, 2015, p. 442). Additionally, schools can utilize language that is inclusive of LGBT populations by including these populations in anti-discrimination policies (Singh & Jackson, 2012).

Psychological Distress

Effrig, Fieschke, & Locke (2011) found that transgender students specifically had higher rates of stress compared to non-transgender students. In the same study, Effrig et al. (2011) utilized minority stress theory as a framework to examine transgender students' experiences and found that transgender students can experience internal stressors if they experience negative interactions within society. This research included participants that were seeking treatment for psychological distress as well as participants that were not. Whether the participants sought treatment or not, the results indicated that transgender college students across the board experience distress (Effrig et al., 2011). The population growth of transgender students or gender

non-conforming students on college campuses can create additional challenges for college health

care providers (Donatone & Rachlin, 2013). Often, these students seek assistance outside of their

institutions because they think their college healthcare providers are not prepared or are not

aware of their needs (Donatone & Rachlin, 2013). It is imperative to recognize that

psychological stress can be related to anti-transgender discrimination (Bockting, Huang, Ding,

Robinson, & Rosser, 2005; Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006).

Institutional Location

In addition to classroom environments, students are affected by institution locations and

campus climates. For example, Campus Pride, which is an online index of LGBTQ friendly

campuses, offers a listing of colleges across the United States that offer services and resources

for students that identify within the LGBTQ population. A quick search of public four-year

institutions indicates that institutions that one, participate in the index, and two, rank higher in

terms of providing services are not commonly located in the South (Campus Pride, n.d.).

Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia have a combined total of three public

institutions that appear in the index; whereas five states in the mid-Atlantic region have a

combined total of 20 institutions in the index. Additionally, the top ranked institution of those

mentioned southern states had a score of 2.5 out of 5, while the top ranked institution in the mid-

Atlantic region had a score of 4.5 out of 5 (Campus Pride). Though institutions are not required

to participate in the index, it is telling that only three public four-year institutions from those

selected Southern states participated.

With the recent national attention on states like Georgia and Tennessee, which are

proposing anti-transgender legislation, the possible impact for transgender college students in the

South could be significant. Research surrounding experiences of LGBT youth at secondary schools in the South indicated that those students (and students in the Midwest) experienced higher levels of victimization than those in the Northeast (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). Also, students in rural areas experienced more victimization than those in urban or suburban communities (Kosciw et al, 2009.). This indicates that students from the South attending higher education institutions in the South may come to campus having already experienced discrimination and prejudice. In *College and University:* "How to Make Your Office and Institution More Transgender Friendly.," Miner (2009) focuses solely on transgender student experiences. Miner looks at the different needs transgender students have compared to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students and finds that different populations have different needs (Miner, 2009). Sexual orientation and gender identity are very different, and students identifying as transgender are dealing with gender identity, which is different than students who may be questioning or navigating their sexual orientation identities. When campuses merge sexual orientation and gender identity, there is a risk of negating the experiences of trans students (Nicolazzo, 2015). Campuses must address these issues, which are essential to the success and feelings of inclusion of transgender students. If schools ignore issues or do not provide education about marginalized populations, then dominant ideologies continue to prevail (Meyer, 2012).

Transgender Student Resilience

Though most of the research with reference to transgender students is rooted in their exclusion, isolation, and/or the challenges they face as college students, there is a need for research that focuses on their resilience. Bronfenbrenner (1999) explored resilience through interactions between people and their environments and how those interactions lead to positive

results. Rutter (1993) noted that individuals do not achieve resilience by dodging challenges but rather through facing moments of difficulty and continuing on. Singh, Hays, & Watson (2011) found five common themes of resilience in their phenomenological study of 21 transgender individuals. The themes that emerged were: (a) evolving a self-generated definition of self, (b) embracing self-worth, (c) awareness of oppression, (d) connection with a supportive community, and (e) cultivating hope for the future (Singh et. al, 2011). Moreover, two additional themes surfaced in some of the participants: activism and positive role modeling. This research highlights the ability of transgender individuals to navigate what could be perceived as negative or challenging experiences and convert those experiences into opportunities to grow, develop, and move forward. Nicolazzo (2016) addressed transgender student resilience and how it is often framed through persistence. Nicolazzo explains that "trans* students remain invisible throughout college records, as no data are collected on this sub-group of students" (p. 42). Therefore, if institutions measure resilience by persistence, these institutions are unable to obtain that information if transgender students are not yet recognized.

Campus Awareness

Despite the knowledge base most institutions of higher learning possess, there much to be done regarding assisting and supporting diverse student populations throughout their college transition process (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Regarding transgender students, campus offices and services that are on the frontline of communication could benefit from increased knowledge pertaining to this population. For example, student services staff may not always understand the needs of transgender students and may have to recognize their own

biases and prejudices towards transgender students before they are able to effectively

communicate (Chung, 2003; Enright, Conyers, & Szymanski, 1996).

An institution must move beyond the written policies or lack thereof for some and seek to

understand their transgender populations. McKinney (2005) elaborates:

There also appears to be a general lack of transgender resources at many colleges and

universities. Resources, such as gender-neutral restrooms and recreational facilities,

knowledgeable faculty and staff (especially at counseling and health-care centers),

student groups for transgender students, a well-funded GLBT center, and responsive

student affairs professionals, are important for transgender students to feel welcomed on

campus, as well as for non-trans people to educate themselves about the issues

confronting transgender students (p. 73).

Once schools have made a decision about anti-discrimination policies, they must be

prepared to take action (Singh & Jackson, 2012). McKinney (2005) also noted that college

personnel lacked understanding of transgender populations; there were not enough resources on

campus or programming efforts for transgender populations, and health and counseling services

were not meeting transgender students' needs.

Some students within the LGBTQIQ population may experience loneliness or isolation

on campus as well (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). When recent studies continue to show similar

results, that transgender students are still impacted by negative experiences on their campuses, it

is apparent that a need for inclusion policies continues to exist. Bringing more awareness to

college campuses and a clearer understanding of how transgender students were included in Title

IX protections, a "dear colleague letter" was released by the United States Department of

Education. This guidance stated that Title IX was inclusive of transgender students and recognized LGBT students were at a high risk of facing discrimination (United States Department of Education, 2014). Though that was the case, some institutions still did not recognize transgender students within anti-discrimination policies. For example, until December 2015, an urban public institution in the South did not include gender or gender identity in its' anti-discrimination policy. In the 2017 political climate, the seemingly forward movement that existed under the Obama administration has been somewhat halted.

Title IX

The Trump administration reversed guidelines for Title IX protections in early 2017, citing that those guidelines had not undergone proper legal analysis (Kreighbaum, 2017). This, however, does not mean institutions must stop protecting the rights of transgender students. Regardless, this reversal sends a message that the highest level of the United States Government does not place value on gender identity protection.

Under President Obama's Administration, the American Council on Education (2016) released a brief on the interpretations of the US Department of Education's guidelines for Title IX as it pertained to transgender students. This document was important as it outlined expectations for college campuses to follow for transgender students. The document stated, "The Departments treat a student's gender identity as the student's sex for purposes of Title IX" (American Council on Education issue brief, 2016, p. 2). Therefore, according to the US Department, transgender students are covered under Title IX and should be treated the same as other students that have the same gender identity as they do (American Council on Education, 2016). Additionally, if a student identifies oneself with a gender identity that differs from their

sex at birth, the institution must treat the student based on how he/she/they have identified their

gender (American Council on Education, 2016). Additionally, when considering campus

housing, an institution must allow for students to live in a space that aligns with that student's

gender identity (American Council on Education, 2016).

However, under President Trump's Administration, these previous guidelines have been

disregarded. There has been a recent emphasis placed on reevaluating Title IX as it pertains to

both gender equity for transgender students but also sexual harassment. As it currently stands

(early Fall 2017), transgender students are still covered under Title IX protections; however,

those protections are vulnerable as are the populations they were created to protect, especially as

the administration discusses the future of Title IX.

Safe Space Programs

An option for both K-12 schools and institutions of higher education is to create and

implement safe space programs. Faculty and staff have the potential to assist in creating a

positive campus experience for LGBT students through these types of trainings (Poynter &

Tubbs, 2007). Safe space programs can assist in creating awareness and systems of support for

people that identify within the LGBT community. LGBT students may not take care of

themselves when exposed to negative environments (Vaccaro, 2012). Meaning, transgender

students who experience harassment and discrimination are likely to lack self-care practices,

which in turn can affect engagement in and outside of the classroom. Black, Fedewa, and

Gonzales (2012) conducted research in 17 schools regarding "safe school" programs. Black et al.

concluded that students had a more positive psychological outcome if that school participated in

"safe school" policies; alternatively, schools that did not participate had more negative psychological outcomes (2012). When schools implement safe space type programs, it sends the message that LGBT students are valued in that community (Black, Fedewa, & Gonzales, 2012).

Chapter Summary

Much of the literature provided some valuable insight as to areas of concern and challenge for college students that identify as transgender. The current research demonstrates several consistent themes: concerns about campus climates, prejudice, harassment, isolation, a need for more inclusive policy, and identity development. While transgender individuals are included in the LGBTQ population, they are not often represented as a stand-alone population. For this very reason, the importance of research needed specific to transgender students is critical. In the next chapter, I will continue to build on this process by outlining the methods that were used for this study. The selection of participants, data collection process, and analysis will be discussed in depth.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Qualitative research allows researchers to understand the experiences of individuals and how people construct and interpret their worlds (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), "Engaging in systematic inquiry about your practice – doing research – involves choosing a study design that corresponds with your question; you should also consider whether the design is a comfortable match with your worldview, personality, and skills" (p. 1). This chapter will discuss the selected methods for this study, discuss the narrative approach as well as the research positionality, explain the four-phase process that was utilized for data collection, and detail participant selection, analysis, delimitations, and limitations.

Narrative Approach

The purpose and population for this study permitted a narrative approach in qualitative research. Narrative research often utilizes methods such as telling stories about an individual; exploring the life of an individual; involving the researcher through observations and interviews; and allowing the researcher to interpret the meaning of the stories the subject tells (Creswell, 2013). In narrative research, the researcher has the ability to assist in shaping the story told by participants (Riessman, 2008). These stories are integral in guiding the research and developing interpretations. Stories are a way for researchers to make meaning of the human experience

(Merriam, 2009). Additionally, narratives are about both what is being said and the act of storytelling itself (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). For this study, the narrative approach allowed transgender participants to make meaning of their college transition process and their academic and social integration, and it also gave a voice to their stories. Sharing personal stories is key in narrative research (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Utilizing various techniques to allow participants to share their stories assists the researcher in understanding the narratives of how participants construct their experiences (Keats, 2009).

Gender identity can be fluid for many people. Through a postmodern lens, research regarding transgender students can embrace the experiences and identities each student has without placing them into a box or within the gender binary. Postmodernism which thrives on fluidity of experiences and truths, aligns with students in this study and how they see themselves as fluid individuals. Furthermore, postmodernism, which allows for multiple truths (Merriam, 2009), provides a lens that allows the recognition of various truths. Transgender students in this study were each able to tell their story and share the truths of their own identities. Meaning participants were able to reflect and share pertaining to their lived experiences regarding their gender identity and how that had impacted their college transition and integration processes. Narrative research connected well with postmodern lenses due to its' view of truth being "unstable" (Bold, 2012, p. 13). Engaging with transgender students using a narrative approach allowed me as the researcher to be an active part of the interpretation of the stories these students told.

In reflecting on how I make meaning, what appeals to me most in constructing "truths" is those ideals involved in multiple truths or the lack of one truth, fluidity of ideas and self-

expression, as well as uncertainties. These ideals are in-line with the postmodern paradigm. This epistemological lens allows for fluidity, plurality, and a lack of certainties (Merriam, 2009). This lens allows for multiple meanings of the stories told by participants. Transgender students possessed varying experiences, and each of these students' transition and integration to college was outlined by multiple experiences, interactions, and challenges. Postmodernism has multiple truths, involves playful and creative research, and celebrates diversity (Merriam, 2009), which connected well to each participant and the research questions.

Research Positionality

When I began working at the University of New Orleans in fall 2007, I quickly noticed the lack of a diversity and inclusion center and/or an LGBTQIQ office on campus. This was odd to me as UNO is a public institution and prides itself on being a diverse campus. I recognized that UNO's lack of space and efforts pertaining to LGBTQIQ inclusion and awareness was quite possibly a reflection of other institutions situated in the South. Shortly after I started working at UNO, I was asked to join the university's Diversity Cabinet. After joining, another member and I acknowledged the lack of LGBTQIQ awareness training programs. In fall 2010, our first Safe Space Allies program was created and implemented. Through this process, we worked closely with a student who identified as queer. Through my collaborations with this student, I was introduced to the many challenges our students who identify within the LGBTQIQ population faced and continue to face, and more specifically, our students who identify as transgender. Through conversations with this student and other students who identified as transgender, I was able to gain perspective on both the emotional challenges transgender students on UNO's

campus faced as well as everyday challenges cisgender individuals do not have to actively consider.

Throughout my tenure at UNO, I had the opportunity to work with several transgender students. I supervised two of these individuals in their roles as student leaders with our First-Year camp and our First-Year seminar program. In fall 2012, I worked with a student who was struggling with her decision to live on campus in a room where she felt comfortable. Our housing office had no clear policy (at that time) regarding transgender students. Unfortunately, the experience was frustrating for her, and ultimately she made the decision to leave the university. This is one example of many that transgender students have shared that excluded them from feeling a part of the institution. As a cisgender straight woman, one might question my intentions of wanting to work with and research transgender students. While I have endured some prejudice in my life mainly because I am a woman, I generally have experienced a fair amount of privilege. I have lived and navigated through spaces where my voice is usually heard. I have never had to worry about being misgendered or where to use the restroom. I have never wondered if it was ok to use the women's locker room or worried about passing as female.

In my profession, students' transitions to university life are a main focus. I feel that I have the ability and the voice to help create awareness and a change in policies in order to make them more inclusive for transgender populations. In turn, changing these policies and brining more awareness to university faculty, staff, and administrators, I hope to help transgender students connect, engage, and persist in university settings.

Participant Selection

Participants for this research study had to identity as transgender, gender non-conforming, or gender queer, and they had to attend or have attended a four-year college or university in the South. Ideally, participants would be underclassmen as they were asked about their experiences with college transition and how it was affected by their gender identity. I recruited participants through email (appendix A) utilizing listservs and colleagues at other institutions that work in or with programs such as orientation, transition, and retention. I started the recruitment process in early fall 2016. Potential participants contacted me if they were interested in the study, and I communicated with seven transgender students who were interested in participating in the study. After corresponding with potential participants, four were able to commit to the process.

A challenge for me during the recruitment process was the presence of gatekeepers at other institutions who may not have been in support of this research or may have been opposed to having their students participate. I completed outreach to university professionals who also worked in Gender and Sexuality offices or departments, and I requested that they share my email with their students and post in their private Facebook groups. Some participants were recruited through snowball sampling, which involved participants identifying additional participants that might meet the criteria for the study (Merriam, 2009). Three to five participants were sought out for this study, and four participants were able to commit.

Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research can involve a variety of forms, including observations, interviews, focus groups, memos, and journaling. In narrative research, data collection also involves gaining access and permissions to information and the participants

(Cresswell, 2013). This research study involved a four-phase process described below and was designed to gather a breadth of information for each of the participants. Prior to beginning the data collection process, I completed the IRB approval process. This process allowed me to clearly state the intentions of my research study and outline how I planned to protect the participants. I have included the IRB consent form (appendix B), which addresses the purpose and how I maintained confidentiality of this particular population. This study focused on transgender students in the South, meaning that participants were recruited and obtained from more than one institution. Once IRB approval was completed and participants were selected, the four-phase process commenced.

Phase One – Introductory

This phase of the research process involved initial meetings with each participant to inform them of the process and timeline. This allowed me as the researcher to establish rapport with each participant, gain a better understanding of who they were, and verify they were comfortable with the impending process. This phase also involved gathering basic information from the participants regarding demographics and gender identity (appendix C). The last portion of the introductory phase included a semi-structured interview (questions in appendix D). Interviewing was an important part of the research process. Interviews allow the researcher and the participant to engage in a conversation related to the research study (deMarrais, 2004). According to Merriam (2009), interviews are important when you cannot observe behavior or how individuals interpret the world around them when looking at past events. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for flexibility in conversation, but the structure also created a foundation to facilitate conversation.

Phase Two – Exploratory

During this phase, participants participated in a photo project and a journal reflection (appendix E). For the photo project (appendix G), participants were asked to take photos throughout their day that either exemplified how their campus community included or excluded them. This method allowed for participants to share their experiences through pictures and articulate their stories through these images as photographs are a way for others to see things from the participant's point of view (Riessman, 2008). Participants were also asked to complete a journal in phase two, and the prompts for this journal entry were based off of the initial interview responses.

Phase Three – Informative

In the third phase, participants completed their second interview. These interviews were less structured as questions were created and adapted from responses given from the first journal submissions. This phase was informed by the first two phases of data collection. Following the completion of phase one and phase two, I read through the data, which included the first interview, the first journal, the good day/bad day journal entries, and their photo submissions. From their previous responses and posts, I was able to create questions that were informed from the first two phases of data collection (appendix F).

Phase Four – Reflective

In the final phase, participants completed a final reflection journal as well as wrap up discussions with me regarding the process and their experiences. This wrap-up allowed for me as the researcher to share the analysis I had compiled at that time with the participants. Member checking allowed participants to provide me with feedback pertaining to my interpretations of

the data and allowed participants to check for overall accuracy in the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to the four-phase process, I requested that participants throughout the research process keep a good day/bad day journal. Participants were not given specific questions to address for this type of journal, but rather I asked them to document when they had something positive or negative happen to them surrounding their transgender identity.

Researcher: Reflective and Method Journaling

In addition to participant journaling, I also kept a journal as the researcher; the journaling process allowed me to keep a record of my thoughts and rationale throughout the process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), which allowed me to be mindful of my own biases and assumptions. It also provided a system of notes that I was able to refer back to during the data collection and analysis processes.

<center>**Ethical Considerations**</center>

Working with a marginalized population created additional challenges regarding ethical considerations of the participants. First and foremost, I needed to provide confidentiality for participants. Each participant selected a pseudonym that was used throughout the research process. I kept all documents, recordings, and transcriptions secured to prevent participants' identities from being known. Additionally, marginalized populations that encounter discrimination and prejudices may have emotional stress (Breslow, Brewster, Veliz, Wong, Geiger, & Soderstrom, 2015; Meyer, 1995, 2003). Unsurprisingly, it was difficult at times for some participants to discuss their experiences. This process proved to be difficult emotionally for a couple of participants, but one participant especially. As the researcher, it was my

responsibility to provide space and resources for participants should they encounter feelings of distress. I researched and was aware of resources available to the participants on their campuses or in their communities in the event they required those resources during the research process. Transgender student participants offered stories and experiences that were difficult to talk about and/or in some instances brought up negative feelings. As the researcher, I was mindful and aware of the potential distress my participants could face in divulging personal information and was prepared to share resources with participants if they needed them.

Lastly, safety was a concern for some participants. If the participants were not out within their own campus community, with family, or with other communities, there was a potential risk of being outed by participating in this study. It was crucial for me not to expose any participant or put them in an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation. I maintained confidentiality of participants by keeping all recordings, transcriptions, notes, photos, and demographic information locked up where it was only accessible to me.

Analysis

Data analysis is a process that should be done in conjunction with data collection (Merriam, 2009). Through the interview process and data analysis process, I was able to identify themes from the interviews, journal reflections, photo projects, and good day/bad day journals. This process initiated with reading and re-reading through transcribed data from the interviews and reading and re-reading through journal entries. I then divided the data into data points. Once data was separated into data points, I read and re-read through data again. During this stage, I identified words and key phrases from each of the data points. I used both Google spreadsheets and printed out data points to manually read through, highlight, circle, and note common threads

of data. Through a coding process, I divided the data into categories and sub-categories. I began

with open coding, which included segmenting the data into data points, then identifying key

words and phrases (Merriam, 2009). This process is further detailed in Chapter Four. Once I

completed the open coding process, I grouped data into categories, which is called axial coding

(Corbin & Strauss, 2007). In addition to coding data from the interviews and journals, I

incorporated visual analysis (Riessman, 2008) to help in analyzing images participants provided

from phase two. Through visual analysis of the photo project, I examined what the photos

included, what they might have suggested, and how it might be interpreted by the participant

and/or other audiences (Riessman, 2008). This process included evaluating each photo for its

content and the purpose or reason why the photo was taken and completing follow-up

interactions with participants for additional clarification of each photo. Participants were also

allowed to add descriptions of photos if they chose. The figure below illustrates the analysis

process. To establish that the results were worthy of attention, trustworthiness was included in

the analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Figure 3: Analysis Chart
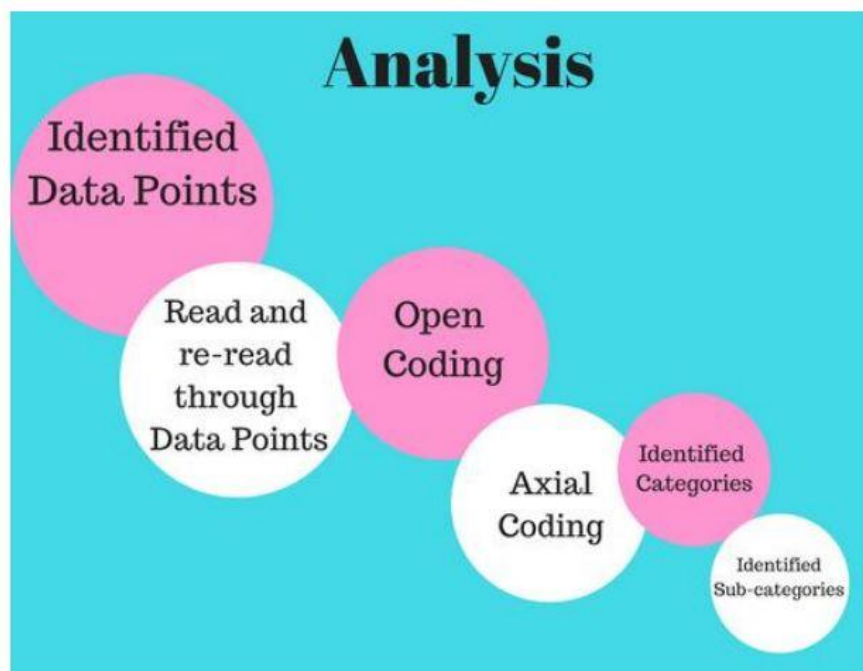
Trustworthiness

Several techniques exist for the researcher to have trustworthy results. For my research, I utilized a variety of techniques to establish trustworthiness, including aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility: To ensure your results are credible, there are certain techniques Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest. For my study, I used triangulation. Triangulation involves multiple forms of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). The forms of data collection used for this study included interviews, journaling, and the photo project. In addition, I utilized peer debriefing to keep my own biases from clouding my judgement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also incorporated member checks, which involved sharing findings with my participants to make sure the researcher (me) had not misinterpreted the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Transferability: To ensure that findings could be transferable, it is important to include thick descriptions in your research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A thick description includes detailed descriptions that encompass a wide range of information about your study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was my responsibility to provide as much information as possible to allow readers to make the decision if it could be transferable (Lincoln & Guba). However, creating a thick

description for this study was challenging. I wanted to provide descriptions of participants and settings that were clear and truthful while maintaining participant confidentiality.

Dependability and Confirmability: The final techniques I used to maintain a trustworthy study included audits and maintaining a reflective journal. Audits for this study included maintaining notes, recordings, photos, and transcripts of the research so that I was able to keep the data organized and consistent. Additionally, I used an outside auditor to evaluate and provide feedback during the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, I kept a reflective journal to critically reflect on myself as the researcher. This process allowed me to share my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Delimitations

Delimitations are issues that are within your control as the researcher while limitations are outside of your control (Simon, 2011). That which you will not be doing in the research appear in the delimitations section (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). For this study, participants identified within the transgender population. The term transgender was an umbrella term for individuals that identified as gender queer or gender non-conforming as well.

One of the delimitations of this study is that I did not examine the larger LGBTQ population. One could argue that it was important to include other populations that are sexual minorities. It is understood that the growing diversity of new college students means that some of those populations are minority populations that can be at a higher risk of departure (Reynolds, 2013). In addition, minority stress theory was originally based on LGB individuals and then later adapted to transgender individuals (Breslow, Brewster, Velez, Wong, Geiger, & Soderstrom, 2015). However, the goal of this study was to focus on students' gender identity not their sexual

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orientation, and I felt it was important to share the stories of transgender students factoring in their perceptions from a gender identity standpoint.

Another delimitation for this study was obtaining students who identified as transgender that were open to sharing their stories. As a marginalized population, transgender students may feel uncomfortable discussing their experiences and might withhold information. In addition, I planned to have three to five participants in this study. While I communicated with several potential participants who expressed interest in this study, for some individuals, the time commitment was too much while others were (understandably) apprehensive about participating in general. Another delimitation was that I searched specifically for undergraduate populations, which excluded transgender students enrolled in graduate programs. Lastly, transition theory and academic and social integration theory served as delimitations as they were both rooted in populations different than transgender college students. As a result, I made the decision to utilize three theories as opposed to one or two. Each theory brings valuable insight that was applied to this population, and minority stress theory supported both transition and academic and social integration as it had been recently used in researching transgender populations.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses or potential restrictions that could affect the study or the outcomes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). However, limitations are not within my control (Simon, 2011). One limitation I had expected was my ability to secure participants throughout the Southeast region. If participants were only from one area/state, then it could be difficult to argue that the results could be transferable to other areas. My conceptual framework accounted for another limitation as it did not include information about how intersections of identities could

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affect the transition and integration process. However, there was the potential that other aspects of identities could be discussed throughout this process as transgender students reflected on their "self" and discussed how their personal characteristics influenced their integration to college. Further discussion of limitations appears in Chapter Four.

Chapter Summary

The methods used for this research study allowed me to gain an in-depth picture and description of how each participant experienced their college transition and academic and social integration process. In addition, methods and techniques used provided a base for trustworthiness in this process. Through the data collection and analysis process, I had the opportunity to achieve a holistic understanding of how these transgender students were able to navigate through their college experiences. Continuing in the next chapter, I will share the findings from this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

As transgender populations continue to become more visible (Agans, 2007; Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005), institutions of higher education must recognize that transgender students are on our campuses (Newhouse, 2013). These students are navigating their college transition just like their cisgender counterparts, and they are doing so while exploring their own gender identities. As marginalized students on their campuses, transgender students must navigate policies or (lack thereof) while also balancing the academic expectations of college students. Many factors can impact success in college, and this includes gender identity for transgender students (Finger, 2010). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate transgender students at four-year institutions in the South. This study examined how transgender students navigated their college experiences, especially their first year, or for one participant, the first year that she was out as transgender. This study also examined how gender identity played a role in students' college transition to the campus community. Finally, this study further examined how transgender students integrated academically and socially into their college environments. This study was guided by an overarching research question with three sub questions:

Research Question:

How do transgender college students perceive their academic and social integration into college?

Sub-questions included:

1. How do transgender students perceive themselves within the college transition process?

2. What is their perspective of their university experience within their community (and within the southern region)?

3. How does gender identity play a role in transgender student acclimation to their new environment?

This chapter will introduce and give context to each participant, provide thick description of the location of each participant, examine the data collected, and review findings. Qualitative research utilizes thick description to provide information to assist in understanding findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study additionally employed a narrative approach to allow participants to share stories of their lived experiences (Cresswell, 2013). This approach was valuable as it allowed each participant to tell his/her/their story, and it allowed me as the researcher to play an active role as I worked to interpret their experiences. Narrative approaches require collaboration between participants and the researcher as their interactions allow for the stories to be told (Riessman, 2008). Category and subcategory information that emerged from the data analysis process will be detailed following participant and location descriptions. The categories and subcategories are included below:

Table 1:

Participant Categories and Sub-Categories

Categories	Sub-Categories
Category 1: Navigating Identity	- Names and pronouns - Gender/gender identity and other identities - Online, technology, and communications - Participant feelings and thoughts
Category 2: College transition and challenges	- People (peers, friends, family, professors, and staff) - Inclusion, acceptance, and support - Exclusion, attitudes, and reactions
Category 3: Environment, space, and climate	- Academic (classroom) - Social (events, meetings, social groups) - Policy, space, and awareness - The South
Category 4: Sympathizing with others	- Deflecting blame from institutions - Deflecting blame from people (peers, friends, family, professors, and staff)

Description of Participants

Participants were selected based on the following criteria. Participants must be

undergraduate students at a four-year institution in the South. Additionally, participants must

identify as transgender, which was inclusive of gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender

fluid, and genderqueer identities. Each participant provided demographic information (appendix

C) at the initial researcher/participant meeting. Participants were asked to include how they

identified their gender, race, and sexual orientation. They indicated their majors and were

provided the opportunity to select a pseudonym. Four participants committed to the process and

each participant brought a deluge of experiences, stories, and examples of their college transition

process. At the beginning of the data collection process, three participants were in their first

semester at their respected institutions. Two of those three were traditional First-Year students,

while the third was a new transfer student. The fourth participant was in her seventh semester,

but it was her first semester as an openly identified transgender woman. All participants were

asked to reflect on experiences about the college transition process. Data collection began in the

fall 2016 semester and lasted through the end of the spring 2017 semester. Due to personal

reasons and some difficulties navigating multiple aspects of being a college student, one

participant (Griffin) self-removed after phase one of data collection. However, he did permit the

use of data that was collected in phase one.

Meet the Participants

Ayla

Ayla is a 25-year-old junior in college. She is a first semester transfer student who

recently transferred from a local two-year community college. Ayla lives off campus and is a

commuter student. She identifies as a transgender woman and uses female pronouns

(she/her/hers). She is Native American and Hispanic. The intersection of these identities for Ayla

creates an interesting dilemma. Her Native American culture is open and accepting of

transgender individuals while her Hispanic identity is situated in a culture where masculinity and

femininity are defined so clearly that even words are either masculine or feminine. She identifies

her sexual orientation as asexual. She attends a four-year public institution in the South. At the

time of data collection, though Ayla identified as a transgender woman, she was not out to her

entire family. She was out to her grandfather, but only regarding her asexual identity. She was also only out to close friends, many of whom are a part of her online community. The ways that Ayla discussed her identities and shared her stories allowed me as the researcher to gain valuable insight into her experiences. Ayla is raw and authentic, and her sincerity in wanting to help people is endearing. Though she has encountered challenges along her academic journey, she is persistent in her endeavors. She is smart and funny and genuinely wants to connect with people. Ayla is a storyteller, and an excellent one at that.

Andrew

Andrew is a 19-year-old traditional First-Year student. Andrew identifies as a transgender man and uses male pronouns (he/him/his). Andrew is white and identifies as gay. He attends a four-year private institution in the South. Andrew is from another Southern state and lives on campus at his institution in a single room. Andrew studies Music. He is out to his family and close friends. Andrew is quiet at times and is often pensive before responding to questions. He wants to talk about his identity with others, but he is not always sure how to navigate those conversations. Andrew is funny and honest. He shared his experiences pertaining to his first year of college and coming out to peers and his family with a fair and thoughtful voice. Andrew is able to see from others' perspectives even when that means challenging moments for himself. He was easy to talk to, and I often found myself laughing with him during our conversations. He is a bright young man.

Danielle

Danielle is a 21-year-old transgender woman. She was in her fourth year of her

Undergraduate experience at the time of data collection; however, it was her first year out as a transgender woman. Danielle came out during the fall semester. She attends a four-year, public institution in the South where she is majoring in political science. Additionally, she identifies her sexuality as pansexual. Danielle is white and mixed race. Danielle lives on campus and has since she began college. She is knowledgeable about the world around her and is perhaps the most socially engaged on her campus of all the participants. Her engagement has helped her to navigate her coming out process as a transgender woman. She is educated on several transgender issues currently influencing the larger socio/political climate. Danielle thinks critically about her surroundings and the information presented to her. Throughout the process, Danielle informed me of several outlets for transgender resources. Her enthusiasm for learning new information is contagious, and the ways in which she articulates her thoughts and feelings are far superior than I could have hoped to do at 21.

Griffin

Griffin is an 18-year-old traditional First-Year student at a four-year public institution in the South. At the initial participant/researcher meeting, Griffin identified as gender fluid and used gender neutral pronouns such as they and them. However, at our first interview, Griffin shared that he now identified as a man and used male pronouns (he/him/his). Griffin identified his sexual orientation as pan/demi sexual. He is an art major and lives on campus. Griffin is kind and thoughtful. He is forthcoming with divulging experiences, stories, interactions, thoughts, and feelings. His honesty and vulnerability allow him to express himself both openly and authentically. Griffin is a gifted individual who speaks openly about his challenges in presenting as male. His gender identity development has been fluid throughout high school and into his first

year of college. He shared his truth with me in a way that showcased his courage and bravery in the face of multiple challenging factors.

Participant Institutions

Participants for this study were enrolled in two institutions. Ayla, Danielle, and Griffin attended Public University, while Andrew attended Private University. Descriptions for each institution are included below.

Public University

Ayla, Danielle, and Griffin all attend a four-year public, mid-size institution in the south. It is located in an urban setting and is one of the most diverse institutions in the state. For this study, this institution will be referred to as Public University.

Public University does not house an LGBTQ resource center on campus but recently opened a center for diversity. The center does not have a specific mission to serving LGBTQ students but rather has a mission to serve students of all forms of diversity. At the time of data collection, the main point of contact for this space was a graduate assistant who worked part-time in the center. Professional staff do not appear to be working in this space as of the date of the press release and the date of this study (Institutional Press Release, spring, 2017). Public University does have a Safe Space program, which is coordinated by staff and or faculty who are a part of the institution's diversity initiative. This program is open to all faculty, staff, and students. It is not a required training for staff and faculty. This program is designed to educate the campus community on issues and topics related to LGBTQ populations.

Private University

Andrew attends a four-year, private institution in an urban setting in the South. For this study, this institution will be referred to as Private University. Private University has a population under 5,000 students. Private University is also religiously affiliated. In terms of diversity and inclusion, Private University has statements on its' website pertaining to fostering inclusion for students, staff, faculty, and guests.

Private University has an office for inclusion and diversity, but it does not appear to have an LGBTQ specific center. The student involvement/activities office offers an LGBTQ allies program. In addition, there is an inclusion strategies page on Private University's website that lays out some strategic plans to becoming a more inclusive institution.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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This study explored the lived experiences of transgender college students and how those experiences were impacted by their gender identity, their college transition, and the community in which they integrated. Participants also reflected on how their academic and social integration was affected by their transgender identities. The data was collected in a four-phase process that included the following: initial meetings, which included the completion of demographic information; interview one; journal reflection one; the photo project; interview two; journal reflection two; and a good day/bad day journal, which was maintained throughout the data collection process beginning in the fall semester of 2016 and finished in late spring of 2017. Data analysis does not occur in a singular moment but rather with the beginning of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As participants completed interviews and reflections, I read through responses, as well as reviewed my notes, to analyze data throughout the entire process.

Using Reisman's (2008) thematic analysis as a guide, I used participants' spoken and written words to create themes or categories from the data collection process in addition to open coding. Coding involves grouping information from the data collection into small groups and then assigning a code to that set of data (Cresswell, 2013). Utilizing both electronic and paper files, I read and re-read through participant responses until I had a bank of phrases and words that were consistent themes throughout the responses. Participants' photos were also used in this process to provide a visual representation of how they were included and or excluded on their campuses. Photographs or images allow for shared experiences that can invoke feelings (Hodges, Keeley, & Grier, 2000). The use of photos allowed participants to express experiences, and share spaces or places that either made them feel included or excluded on their campuses. Harrison (2002) adds that photographs are way to tell stories and construct identities. As the researcher, this allowed me to view aspects of their campuses from the participants' eyes. Posters, classrooms, websites, and on campus employment spaces were a few of the photos shared. As a cisgender woman, these items, to me, seemed nothing more than as they appear to be. However, for participants in this study, these items and spaces were much more than what was seen on the surface level. Due to participant privacy and confidentiality, I have chosen to share only a couple of photos taken by participants.

Once the first stage of the coding process was completed, I organized codes into larger overarching categories that had similar patterns and/or ideas. The overarching categories included: navigating identity; college transition and challenges; environment, space, and climate; and sympathizing with others. The following includes a breakdown of each category along with the sub-categories, illustrated through the experiences of the participants.

Category 1: Navigating Identity

"And I have an image of me somewhere that's how I feel to be and I think if you could in

college just say, I'm a woman, this is my name here's some legal information that you might

need, but this isn't who I am, this is who I am, that would be the best. That would be the best of

all worlds." - Ayla

For transgender individuals, while coming out as transgender can be scary and rewarding, it can also be challenging (Teich, 2012). Participants in this study each provided stories about navigating identity, which included examples about their names and pronouns; their gender/gender identity and other identities; online, technology, and communications; and participants' feelings and thoughts.

Sub-category: Names and Pronouns

In *Some Very Basic Tips for Making Higher Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk about Gendered Bodi*es, Spade (2011) offers tips for higher education: allow students to self-identify names and pronouns; do not make assumptions; and in group discussions, allow for everyone to share pronouns. Spade's guidelines for higher education correlate to what participants in this study shared regarding names and pronouns. Each participant used a name and pronouns other than what was assigned to them at birth. At their respective institutions, there was no unified process within the institution's data systems for declaring another name or a place to include preferred pronouns. Here is what Andrew shared pertaining to name changes:

> Based on my experiences and the experiences of someone else I've talked to, I think the
>
> most trouble for transgender students at Private University comes from the administrative

level. It was a big hassle for me to get my chosen name on my student ID, and even then

it still has my legal first initial and then the chosen name.

The lack of opportunity for transgender students to self-disclose their gender identities, names,

and pronouns through the application process creates challenges for those students throughout

their college journey. Additionally, it does not provide a method of tracking for institutional

purposes. The ability to recognize that transgender students are on college campuses and having

data that proves this could allow institutions to allocate more resources to better serve this

population. Johnson (2015) notes "Rendering gender-nonconforming students illegible, thus

invisible, and finally nonexistent in data systems undermines their representation in data-driven

processes" (p.164). Meaning the importance for transgender recognition in our university

systems not only benefits the transgender students, but also the institutions. Institutions cannot

track students that are not visible in their electronic systems. Moreover, if institutions truly want

to create ways in which to best serve all students, the ability for students to self-disclose pieces

of their identities will aide in that process.

In this study, each participant contacted their faculty prior to the beginning of each

semester to inform them of their preferred name, which required participants to constantly

explain themselves to faculty. Participants said that faculty have been accepting of their requests

to call them by their preferred names and pronouns. Andrew was encouraged by his therapist to

reach out to faculty prior to the start of the semester. He noted, "I emailed them beforehand and I

got an email back from all of them saying thank you for letting me know and my professors have

been respectful of it." Alternatively, Griffin was hesitant at first and used his legal name at a pre-

semester college event because he "just wasn't sure about it yet." However, once he got to

campus and classes started, he began sharing his preferred name and pronouns, which at that time he identified as gender fluid.

While participants may have had to reach out to faculty prior to classes starting to share a piece of their identities, Ayla quickly found a positive sign when engaging in some research about her new campus. When exploring the possibility of studying abroad with Public University, she found that there was a unique opportunity: "And one of the really fantastic things was preferred name. Your gender." For Ayla, this was a positive example of an office including gender and preferred name options on forms. Previously, those options had been absent in her transfer student experience. Danielle, who came out towards the end of the semester, intentionally came out on social media on a Friday afternoon. She said she felt nervous but was also hopeful professors would be open. She said she "Emailed my teachers...fingers crossed they'd be cool with it." For the following semester, Danielle reached out in advance to let faculty know about her preferred name and pronouns. Overall, participants expressed sharing preferred name and pronouns with faculty was positive.

Sub-category: Gender/Gender Identity and Other Identities

We live in a world full of binary systems. From birth, we are assigned a gender that aligns with our sex. Singh, Hays, & Watson, (2011) found that when transgender students were able to define their own gender identity, it served as a basis for their resilience. A continued theme throughout data collection and analysis of this study was the discussion of gender, gender identity, and other identities participants encompass. For Griffin, starting off his first semester identifying as gender fluid was difficult because it was hard for people to understand. According to Griffin:

...most people who didn't know what I was talking about, they were willing to learn about it. But, um, there are a few people who still call me a girl …..which actually…..it feels worse now that I identify as male.

Griffin continued:

…um, there's a little anxiety that comes with it, because it's like, um, there's this little piece of hope that they see me as a guy. And it usually doesn't work out that way so then I have to go through that little anxiety inducing moment of saying hey, I use he him pronouns, I'm a guy. Or trying to bring it up in a subtle way like um, just mentioning something about being a guy and hoping they pick up on it. But, yeah.

Griffin's comments align with research that indicates transgender students are sometimes at risk of experiencing emotional distress. Griffin stated that when he had identified as gender fluid or non-binary, being misgendered did not seem to matter to him as much. However, he wonders if that is why he identified as non-binary for so long, suggesting that he was "running away from being a boy because I didn't want to go through that." It is important to note that I used gender fluid and non-binary when discussing Griffin, which is a reflection of the vocabulary Griffin used with me when he shared his gender identity. Griffin's gender identity was fluid throughout high school and into college. He explained:

….so then after a while I learned about non-binary genders and I was like, that must be what I am because being a boy didn't feel right and I'm definitely not a girl so I feel somewhere in the middle. So I identified as agender for a long time. I used neo-pronouns for a long time. They were ne/nis/nim. Neo pronouns are..um, I am not sure if they count as neo pronouns. Just gender neutral pronouns different from they.

For Griffin, the fluidity of his gender identity has been a process, which appears to have been greatly impacted by the world and people around him. When it came to his professors recognizing his gender identity, Griffin said "...it hasn't mattered to me that people knew I was trans or what my identity was." According to Griffin, this is because Griffin said he was not close to any professors yet. Griffin's statements echo what other participants also expressed in that there is an idea or hope that others would recognize them and respect them as the people they said they were. But also, that it can feel risky and vulnerable to be open about your transgender identity. Participants added the following: "There are a lot of trans people here….and we need to be acknowledged," Griffin stated. Griffin is pointing out that as transgender populations are growing on his campus, the discussions surrounding gender and gender identity, and the recognition of trans populations should not be disregarded.

Ayla added "As a trans student I am always afraid to be upfront about who I am." This statement correlates back to the concept of wanting to be recognized, but simultaneously moving forward with caution due to the uncertainty of how ones' gender identity may be received by others. Similarly, Danielle noted that "it was definitely scary when I came out because I came out (as transgender) in the middle of the semester." For Danielle, the way in which she navigated her transgender coming out process was strategic and how she chose to express her gender identity was well thought out. Ayla also mentioned "It's one of the big, that's one of the big things is like I look the way I look and sound the way I sound, so people tend to assume I'm normal." By normal, Ayla means that others still may perceive her to be male and that is intentional on her part by how she appears to others and how she sounds. "Because I can't say

this is who I am because that's not what the state recognizes," Ayla stated. In terms of assumptions, Griffin added:

> I wish more people asked about pronouns, I wish more people didn't assume gender. A lot of people look at me and see a girl. Unless you're trans, you might not have any idea how devastating it can be to be misgendered.

For Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin, the way in which their gender identity permeates their day to day experiences on their campuses, showcases the significance of how this process does not come lightly for them. It is a continued journey for each of them, in which they make choices every day of who, how, and when they share their gender identity.

Coming out as transgender may be a quick process for some, while for others it may take years (Teich, 2012). For Griffin and Danielle, navigating their gender identities has been a process they have been undergoing since high school. Many transgender individuals recognize their gender identities at a young age (Teich, 2012). This was the case for Danielle and Griffin. When friends did not see Griffin as male, he went back to identifying as female because he said it felt easier. Then he learned more about non-binary genders and thought "that must be what I am because being a boy didn't feel right and I'm definitely not a girl." As Griffin continued to explore his gender identity, he did not always feel understood even when he started college:

> I know a lot of people see different genders as people just trying to be special snowflakes or standing out from the crowd and I mean that was who I was….I wasn't trying to stand out or be special. I mean everyone special is a thing.

Danielle knew at 13 she was not cisgender. Throughout high school she developed more of a "traditionally masculine kind of persona." When Danielle came to college, she continued to

embrace that persona, stating "I came to college I guess I kind of went full force on that…..trying like to be this person that I really wasn't." Danielle continued, "...hey you gotta try to be this thing, cause that's what everyone expects you to be." For Danielle, it was an internal struggle of who she was compared to who others expected her to be. The process of coming out to oneself must happen prior to coming out to others (Teich, 2012). Danielle came out to herself about a year before coming out as a transgender woman to others.

A few participants also discussed other aspects of their identities and how that impacts their gender identity. "My mental health has played in my identity because I disassociate a lot so I don't have the biggest sense of self in the world," Griffin shared. After internalizing and processing his thoughts and feelings regarding his identity, Griffin purchased a binder, which is a clothing item placed over breasts to minimize the appearance, and began wearing it to classes and in front of friends. Then he officially came out as male. He even began using the men's restroom. For Ayla, being asexual and sharing that with her family came with a lot of pushback. Ayla first came out as asexual to family, and she revealed, "That's my orientation and everyone but my grandfather told me I was wrong." However, her sexuality is something along with her transgender identity she does not discuss with her family any further. Ayla also feels conflicted because part of her identity as a Native American person incorporates this idea of storytelling and being two spirited; however, she is also half Hispanic and that piece of her identity, from her perspective, is less inclusive to being transgender. Ayla clarified, "but I'm a storyteller…I write through the voice of a lot, of a million characters." She further added, "So I can easily slip into a different lens and say it doesn't, it doesn't need to matter to me cause this

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isn't who I am." For Danielle, when talking about her identities and how others perceive her, stated:

> I'm still the same person that so many of these people have memories with…
> like I don't know how to phrase it, but just, I'm still me. And I'm still a
> person like…here's what it is. I think being trans isn't my only identity…it's not
> the only thing about me. I'm so much more than that.

Danielle so genuinely expressed what others also think and feel, being transgender is not all of who they are, but rather a piece of who they are. Perceptions of her, as well as the other participants, should not be shaped solely by their gender identity, but also by other aspects, identities, experiences, and characteristics in which they encompass.

For Andrew, he found that casually bringing up his transgender identity when he first came to college was what worked for him. He says, "I don't remember why but I just casually brought up, oh by the way I'm trans so blah blah blah" (we both laugh…he says it very casually). Andrew acknowledged that he has an anxiety disorder, which also may play a part in how and what he shares regarding his gender identity. For instance, Andrew remarked, "I was going to tell her but I didn't" when he discussed telling his Resident Assistant.

While Andrew and Ayla considered who they should disclose their transgender identities to, Danielle stated that prior to coming out as transgender, she only told one person. Danielle added, "The only person I ever talked to about this before I was like kind of really coming out to myself last year, was another trans person." When Danielle decided to come out, she was intentional about surrounding herself with people who were supportive. Danielle, while the furthest along in her college degree, was the newest in terms of being out as transgender.

Navigating this piece of her identity was both positive and frustrating. Danielle elaborated, "I've kind of become kind of...not all the time, like a token transgender friend almost." Danielle also felt that while she wanted to talk about her experiences, sometimes others focused only on that. She clarified that "Just cause I'm a trans person doesn't mean that's it or that I am all trans people you know…...that's not all of who I am…...don't tell me you're proud of me for coming out, three months after I came out. That's not all I've done the past three months." Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin possess characteristics, hold beliefs and values that make each of them unique. While their gender identity is part of who they are it is not all of who they are.

Sub-category: Online, Technology, and Communications

The way that college students communicate has evolved due to technological advancements and the rise of social media. Similarly, for transgender students, communicating their identities via online settings has presented itself as a safer option for many. Many students come out online, often long before they come out to their families, friends, and classmates (Nelson, 2015). Students may be doing this out of fear that they will receive negative reactions from friends and family (Nelson, 2015). For Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin, this concern seemed to dictate their choice to come out online first. Each participant discussed their experiences navigating identities through online forums. They also discussed how they communicated their identities and how technology played an important role. Some participants participated in private social media groups for LGBTQ students once they started college, while others were involved in online platforms separate from their institutions. Griffin was added to an LGBTQ group on Facebook, which in turn made him feel that he could be out. He said, "I could

be myself." Griffin first came out as male when he was a freshman in high school, coming out first to his online friends.

Andrew also used online forums to look for resources before coming to college. Similarly, participants in Nicolazzo's (2015) study also utilized online spaces to engage with other transgender individuals. Andrew connected with other students from other institutions who shared their experiences as transgender students and shared how they communicated that to university staff and faculty before starting college. This online forum provided Andrew with information and ideas on how to navigate telling faculty about his gender identity.

For Ayla, her involvement in second life, which is an online virtual world where people can create a persona to be whomever they want to be, helped her to navigate her identity. She stated, "uh I don't know how you'd do it, but in second life you can push a button and be anything more or less." She still navigates her identity through online forums and remains very active in second life. It was in second life where Ayla "started being a woman," and she was met with openness and acceptance from her online community, which validated her. Ayla has continued to be involved with second life and works as a tutor there. She described, "I help students of all ages, genders, nationalities to …uh, I speak Spanish and a little bit of German so I use that there, it helps me keep a hold of those languages and grow better at them." Ayla further added that "Second life just makes..it's easy to slip into whatever shoes you want to be in." Ayla's experiences in online settings have been positive, which brings her back to her real campus experiences. She states, "I just wish that everyone was met as who they are." Online spaces seem to be a place of acceptance and support for each participant, and for Ayla, these

spaces have provided her the opportunity to explore her identities and share her stories with others.

In relation to online communication on campus, Ayla took a screenshot of Public University's website for student organizations. For Ayla, there was no clear messaging on this page that she had opportunities as a transgender student. She added that it took some "digging" to uncover opportunities. Perhaps this online component that made Ayla feel not represented, is odd for her as it was and is online spaces and forums in which she feels most comfortable. It seems institutions could find ways to replicate what appears to be happening in online private forums, and include messages in online public forums that show they as institutions value transgender students.

In addition to online communication, all participants expressed a desire to want to talk about their transgender identities, though they do not always feel safe to do so. "A common thing for trans people is to want people to talk about it," Andrew mentioned. He added, "A common thing for trans people to want people to talk about it and probably cis people to think that trans people don't want to talk about it." Andrew continued:

> I don't know this for a fact but I feel like they might think that they can't talk to me about it. And sometimes I want to talk about it. And I want to say this is…just casually say talk about it, but I feel like it might make them uncomfortable or something. I don't know, like….in my email it said feel free to ask me any questions or whatever so I got…I didn't get any questions in my email responses but I think it would have been interesting to. Cause I'm sure they have questions and I'd like to be able to answer them. But I don't know what they are.

Andrew describes a very basic human need in wanting to connect to others. He, like the other participants, want to talk about their identities, even though it can be uncomfortable too. They are not always sure how those conversations start or whom is responsible for initiating those conversations. In terms of communicating with others, Ayla started to realize as a storyteller, she can "speak from any angle" and that she wants to start being herself. She noted, "This is who I am, this is what I identify with." Danielle also embraced this idea of being herself and as mentioned previously, came out mid-semester on social media. The idea of storytelling in online spaces is at the forefront of transgender student strategies. The concept of sharing who you are with others, some of whom are strangers, behind the safety of your computer or smart phone is appealing for these students. The question should not then be why are they relying on online communication to share their stories, but why are they not feeling safe to share those stories in real life.

Sub-category: Participants' feelings and thoughts

Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin all discussed the ways they communicated their identities. In addition, there was a common theme relating to what they felt and thought during their college transition process regarding their gender identities. Griffin explains that "When people gender me correctly, it feels amazing." However, feeling good was not the only feeling that was discussed. "I did have um, well, … it's kind of weird cause I'm, unless it's with friends I feel awkward just flat out talking about it," Andrew added. For Andrew, it is a balance of finding what feels comfortable for him. He wants to discuss his transgender identity, but it can also feel uncomfortable at times. Danielle shared two examples in her good day/bad day journal that were only days apart when she experienced opposite emotions. "I went to a party with some

other queer people at my institution and felt 100% comfortable." A few days later, however, she wrote, "Nothing in particular; I just can't bring myself to get out of bed because I just don't want to deal with it all today." These entries highlight the emotional roller coaster some transgender students can feel due to their surroundings, their experiences, and their own internalizations of gender identity.

For most of the participants, being misgendered came with its' own set of feelings and thoughts. When it came to being referred to as male, Ayla said "I don't, it doesn't bother me (laughs) anymore, I mean it bothers me" (laughs and I laugh too). She then added, "But so it's I mean uh, so psychologically that's been a little demoralizing." On one hand Ayla recognizes that she is misgendered and while she states that it is ok, she ultimately reveals that it is not ok with her. In fact, in many of our interactions, Ayla spoke in such a way. At first, she would say that something was fine, but then she would quickly follow up and reveal that it was not fine. This is reflective of how she has experienced her gender identity in a society that tells her what to be when she knows that is not her truth. In one of her good day/bad day journal entries, Ayla noted that several members of the LGBTQ group that she belongs to still feel minimalized as a community by the institution. When Ayla thought more on her experiences at Public University, she said, "They're not ignoring me as a trans student, but it feels like they are…….it feels like I'm being marginalized even though I know that's the wrong thing to be feeling." This statement is powerful as it exhibits Ayla's internal conflict of what she feels compared to what she thinks she should feel. Additionally, it indicates Ayla's internal struggle, which reflects what she experiences externally on her campus.

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Category 2: College transition and challenges

"Being on campus and having this place that I can actually be myself and I can feel comfortable

correcting people...it's really important to me." - Griffin

Starting college can stir a bevy of emotions from feeling excited, to nervous, to intimidated, to overwhelmed and stressed. Stress can affect students' health and academic performance, and when it's too much, it may lead to First-Year student attrition (Dixon Rayle & Chung, 2007). While institutions strive to create streamlined experiences for new students, there still seems to be a lack of support in assisting diverse populations with their college transition (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Participant interviews, journals, and photo assignments reveal patterns about the people who played a role in the college transition process, notions of inclusion and exclusion, and attitudes and reactions of those they encountered through their college transition.

Sub-category: People (peers, friends, family, professors, and staff)

With the growing diversity on college campuses, faculty and staff must do more to engage students that no longer represent as mainly heterosexual males (Quaye & Harper, 2014). In this study, faculty, staff, as well as peers and family played a role throughout the participants' college transition process. From peers to professors to family, these individuals either served as support or, on the contrary, were reminders of the lack of awareness people have about transgender college students. When discussing interactions with peers, Griffin stated that "There was no backlash towards me, which I really appreciated because I know if I had done this in high school, it would have been worse." Griffin added that "Like the people here are my kind of

people…..I feel like I can easily make friends here." Griffin seemed to have friends and peers with whom he was comfortable sharing his identity. While Griffin's first encounters with peers were positive, he acknowledged that he hadn't really made connections with any of his faculty members. While this may be true for many First-Year college students, the absence of faculty connection, we know from research mentioned previously that there is added importance for students in marginalized populations to find mentors and systems of support.

Ayla attempted to connect with classmates and offered to help them with homework, but many classmates had not taken her up on this offer. She admits that being a bit older than traditional First-Year students and lacking common interests likely played a role in her inability to connect to classmates. While Ayla attempted to find the good in most people, she encountered folks on campus that did not feel the need to understand others. Ayla found that "People seem to be comfortable, saying how uncomfortable they are with things outside of their binary normative." However, she also added that when professors attempted to use her preferred name and make her feel welcomed, she greatly appreciated the effort. Ayla also shared an experience where a professor called her out for wearing a safety pin in class. She was wearing the safety pin in an effort to show support for marginalized populations. While that professor did not necessarily call her out as a transgender woman, he did make light of the safety pin movement. Ayla also shared an experience where a professor refused to learn an international student's name and said the student's name incorrectly each class. One day, Ayla spoke up to the professor, stating that he needed to learn this student's name. Ayla had and has an incredible ability to empathize with other identities. Maybe it is because of her own experiences, maybe it

is because she is a story teller, or maybe it is because she has a strong understanding of what being oppressed can feel like, but Ayla speaks honestly about her experiences and compassionately about those around her.

Danielle added, some interactions with peers that made her "cringe a little bit" and made her "heart sank." Danielle explained, "There's this guy who was in the fraternity that I was a part of and he was kind of known in the fraternity for being the homophobic person." This peer in her fraternity shared a story about two former fraternity members and referred to them as "brother/sisters." This did not resonate well with Danielle, and she later left that fraternity. Moreover, Danielle shared in her good day/bad day journal that a close friend had recently been speaking poorly of her in respect to her transgender identity. It is not uncommon for friends of transgender individuals to be initially supportive, but after reflecting on the news, become uncomfortable and/or distant (Teich, 2017). While these interactions and moments of reflection were uncomfortable and disappointing for Danielle, she acknowledged the positive experiences she had while coming out as transgender, elaborating that "People have been supportive and happy for me…..My boss has been nothing but helpful and supportive and happy for me." Danielle worked in two offices on campus and took two photos for her photo project that focused on people. Due to participant confidentiality, I did not include the photos here. One of the photos portrayed peers who misgendered her, and the other photo portrayed peers who she viewed as real friends. These peers engaged Danielle in conversation while recognizing her as she sees herself. Similarly, Andrew also stated that, "for the most part people have been respectful." While Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin found positive connections to peers, Ayla added that "there

aren't a lot of people, I mean I don't have a lot of friends here." Ayla continued that as a transfer student and being somewhat older than some of her classmates, part of the reason there may be a missing connection is due to lack of common interests.

Relating to family and how family played a role, Andrew said that it took some time for him to share his transgender identity with family. When adults experience transition, support can be one aspect that assists adults in that transition (Schlossberg, 1995). For Andrew and Ayla, family was not quickly a system of support. Andrew stated, "Um most of my siblings are ok with it…I do have one brother and his wife are not…accepting of it." He also added that his mother handled it better than his father. Andrew's aunt was a transgender woman who passed away in recent years, and he felt that his dad might be apprehensive about Andrew's transgender identity due to challenges he saw his own sister face. For Ayla, her grandfather was the only supportive person in her family. While she did not discuss much of her identity with her family, she noted that her grandfather told her, "I've seen, I've seen that this is how you live your life and that's nice." For Ayla, her grandfather was and is the only person who has expressed support of her identity.

Sub-category: Inclusion, Acceptance, and Support

As adults move through periods of transition, support offers individuals assistance as they navigate their transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Griffin's college transition was much better than he thought it would be. Griffin stated, "I don't know, when I saw Public University and I decided that this was the place I wanted to go. I decided that because I knew it was an accepting place." Griffin's initial experiences on his campus were positive and validated his choice for enrolling at Public University. Inclusion was important for Griffin as he

transitioned into college and decided how and to whom he would come out. For Andrew, he was aware of seminars for queer advocates on his campus, and these events served as a reminder of how his institution continues to work towards inclusion. "I feel like ..I mean being here, I've had a positive experience," Andrew stated. He also noted though in recent times, spring 2017, with the national climate for transgender people, that he wished his institution did more to show "they're standing in support." Andrew means that under the new national political administration, and with the discussion of transgender students' rights at the top of the new administrations' agenda, there was not much expressed in terms of recognition or support from his university's administration.

Ayla took it upon herself to seek out areas of support and inclusion, stating "I...as a trans student I made it my priority to seek out the student groups that are welcoming of that." She noted that she participated in the LGBT group's Transgender Day of Remembrance, stating "I was a part of that." This day allowed Ayla to be involved and participate in an on campus event which honored and recognized individuals whose identity was shared with Ayla. Outside of Ayla's inclusion with the campus LGBT group, she stated that "it's not, it's not a bad thing, but I don't have a lot of support besides my professors who are usually pretty good about it." Andrew shared a photo of an LGBT campus organization poster that he saw several places on campus. The poster represented inclusion, which is important for Andrew. Similarly, Danielle's photo project showcased a picture of an outdoor space on campus where she felt included. The reason this particular area represented inclusion for her was because of the other people who inhabited that area. She said that the people who spent time there were open and did not judge others.

Danielle added that she felt very supported by the staff members she interacted with who worked very closely with Public University's student populations. However, on an administrative level, she added, "I think there could be more support on the administrative level. Cause I haven't seen a lot." She shared an example of how an administrative person, whose role included overseeing all students, was invited to speak at her campuses LGBT organizational meeting. This administrative person had committed several weeks prior to attending the meeting, and the group's members were looking forward to being able to ask questions and discuss what they'd like to see more of on campus. However, 45 minutes prior to the meeting, this administrative person cancelled and never followed up to reschedule the visit. Danielle commented:

> I feel like that is super indicative of how little he really cares….
>
> ….it's not that he is sending the message that he doesn't care about the LGBT community….but he is sending a message that he doesn't care about the LGBTQ students on campus.

Danielle's realization seemed to happen in real time. In one breath she stated the administrator was not sending the message he did not care, while in the very next moment, she stated the opposite. Danielle felt that this administrator very clearly sent the message by his actions that he did not care about the LGBTQ students on campus, which in turn are a part of the greater LGBT community to which she referred. Though Danielle has encountered moments that are challenging and frustrating, she also shared moments that validated her as a part of her campus community:

> I certainly take more notice of specific times my campus shows inclusion (the other day, I

was in the financial aid office and they were VERY accommodating) and times where I

feel like I have to coast under the radar. I suppose I just expect to be in an awkward or

exclusive situation at all times, and so I'm pleasantly surprised when the opposite occurs.

Danielle's admission indicates the low expectation that spaces are inclusive to her as a

transgender student. However, her statement also highlights the positive impression her

institution leaves when its' staff are accepting and accommodating.

Sub-category: Exclusion, Attitudes, and Reactions

Transgender students often lack privileges associated with gender because they identity

outside of a heteronormative binary, which means they can be subject to exclusion,

discrimination, and harassment (Beemyn, 2005; Burdge 2007). In this study, participants shared

stories of support and also moments without support, be it unintentional. Additionally,

examples of exclusion were shared along with attitudes and reactions they experienced. If

college campuses lack resources, spaces, and options for students to share identities outside of

the binary, transgender students may experience feelings of exclusion (Adams, 2015). When

Ayla was asked to talk about what it feels like for her being a transgender woman on campus,

she said, "It feels like there's so much resistance and opposition to that…..I fear for my physical

safety." It is a fair assessment that the recent presidential election did not do much to ease fears

of exclusion and negative reactions towards ones' gender identity. Griffin stated, "I felt excluded

after the election…...The results brought out a lot of people who I didn't expect to see that much

here." Ayla commented that though her institution is public, and much of the campus community

is fairly progressive, not everyone is. Ayla's comments indicated that though her community is

perceived to be liberal and progressive, she still experiences, interacts with, and navigates spaces every day in which individuals themselves may not share the same views as her institution is perceived to have.

Griffin discussed the importance of others' reactions when someone is being misgendered, stating "I don't think I should be the only one correcting people….if you know someone is out in that space and it's a safe space, you should be correcting other people." He was not the only participant to share this sentiment. His statement demonstrates that those who fall within the social normative, even if they themselves are inclusive, should do what they can to correct others who are speaking negatively or incorrectly of others. Griffin further noted that such corrections should occur even if the person being discussed is not present. Similarly, Ayla shared an experience in which she felt excluded early on in her semester. She was early to class and the professor had yet to arrive, and "The students were railing on everyone from transgender people to gay people and it was like..it it was like…," she continued, "the least mature of the students are going to deal with people who are off the binary spectrum who are different in not so great ways." This validates participants' concerns in how, where, and who they share their identity with. As well as, this reinforced their concerns that safety is not always assumed despite the overall perceptions of their campuses which were fairly positive.

Category 3: Environment, space, and climate

"*It's about keeping trans people out of the public cause you know if we can't use the bathrooms then we can't come out anyways.*"

-Andrew, agreeing with Laverne Cox's statement pertaining to anti-trans legislation

Participants in this study reflected on how their experiences were shaped by the

Institutional and regional environments, the physical spaces on campus, and the current political climate of our nation. For transgender students, the current climate can be especially negative (Martin, Broadhurst, Hoffshire, & Takewell, 2017). The following sections examine the sub-categorical findings as they pertain to environment, space, and climate.

Sub-category: Academic (classroom)

Part of creating welcoming environments for new students is how institutions assist with their integration to college (Newhouse, 2013). Part of that integration piece is a student's academic integration. Persistence in First-Year students is tied to both academic and social integration (Braxton, Hirschy, & McLendon, 2004; Clark, 2005; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Reynolds, 2013; Roos, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1990, 1993, 2006). For these participants, experiences in classroom environments made an impact on how they perceived their campus environments. Andrew shared that he was enrolled in a First-Year seminar that focused on beauty and image, and most of his classmates were women. Andrew referred to the professor's lecture, stating, "and she was like, cause she was ..she had.. in class making generalizations like what we all go through…." The professor overgeneralized about what all the women in the class experienced, possibly assuming that Andrew was a woman. However, Andrew continued, "And she was like I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable with that." He added, "It was nice that she was making an attempt." Andrew appreciated that his professor acknowledged that she had misgendered him in class.

As a music major, Andrew also had to navigate speaking to his advisor and teachers about his voice changing. "I mean I was a soprano before and now I'm a baritone now, so there's

a significant difference in my voice." But Andrew said, "She (the professor) didn't think it was an issue." For Andrew, those academic experiences were positive reminders that his faculty supported and valued him. He mentioned that he had been misgendered before, and sometimes when he was misgendered, instead of using the correct pronouns, the professor would say his name. While the professor might not realize the significance of these interactions, it seemed to express to Andrew that the professor still may experience discomfort in using Andrew's pronouns. From a larger view point, this reflects the continued issues transgender students face when it comes to faculty and staff who lack awareness or cannot overcome their own discomfort, which I would argue stems from gender norms and heteronormative systems and spaces.

Ayla, too, did not have entirely positive experiences with faculty. She shared, "I wish that more faculty were willing to just come into class without any expectation about..I mean this is wishful thinking too … any expectation about what their students are going to be as students." This revealed a reoccurring theme with Ayla, which was her desire to be accepted by administrators and in the classroom as she is. Ayla also took a photo of a classroom on her campus for her photo project. This photo represented more than just what you see in an academic setting. For her it represented all the bureaucratic measures that prevented her from being able to be who she was in an academic setting.

Figure 4: Classroom Photo

Sub-category: Social (events, meetings, social groups)

While academic integration is an important component in a students' transition to college, equally important is a students' social integration. Students find a variety of ways to integrate into their college environments, including activities, clubs, groups, and meetings. For the participants in this study, they also found social integration through clubs, groups, and meetings. Ayla discussed one of the social groups at Public University and how there was a large diverse contingency in that group. This was important to Ayla. However, other than the LGBT organization, Ayla felt there were not a lot of social opportunities for her in which to be involved. Similarly, Andrew, who deals with anxiety at times, had some trouble at the beginning of the semester. He stated, "Uh, I, I have trouble …it's very easy to get holed up in your room." Andrew further noted, "That's one thing I've noticed and trying to work on, cause I noticed I've

been doing that instead of getting out and doing things." One of the ways Andrew tried "getting out and doing things" was through his involvement with gender identity groups. Andrew found social integration through an LGBT group on campus and also a queer bible study in his community. When he first began college, he attended an organization fair. He was misgendered by a female student who tried to engage him about sorority life. Andrew learned that there was a social sorority on campus for people who are into music. Though he did not join, this group was rumored to be inclusive of transgender men, another student had told Andrew. This was an outlet for Andrew if he had wanted to explore this opportunity.

Griffin participated in a pre-semester camp for new students, which meant his social engagement commenced prior to the start of classes. When commenting on his community, he said, "I see it as a really diverse community and for the most part, a really accepting community." Griffin added, "All the safe space stickers help." In addition, when Danielle first came to college, though she was not yet out, she felt there were a lot of "small close-knit communities" and it seemed "like a cool place to be." Danielle also participated in pre-semester involvement opportunities that helped her connect quickly to social opportunities. Griffin commented that he felt campus was a place where he could be comfortable and be himself. One example Danielle had pertaining to social integration was an experience which she reflected on as very gendered:

> ..definitely, especially like joining Greek life. That's obviously like the most gendered thing out of everything. So that's some of the more apparent things so it's just like oh, like
> I am going to join this group of other men and we are all going to be brothers. You know things like that so, it's like all about being a real man …you know just reinforcing all of

that so, it was definitely maybe the most obviously reflective of what was going on in my

head at the time.

This was one of the earlier moments for Danielle in recognizing something in which she belonged

was reinforcing what she was trying to be…a man, which was in conflict with what she was truly

feeling internally.

Sub-category: Policy, Space, and Awareness

One could argue that having policies in place does not always solve the problems or

issues at hand. However, one could also argue that the lack of policies, especially pertaining to

students' rights, sends a message that those students are being disregarded. As Danielle put it

when we reviewed Public University's anti-discrimination policies in the student handbook,

"Well, I feel looked over." Public University's Student Handbook, which is posted online, has

some inconsistent messaging. While the first page recognizes the institution as a multicultural

community with a diverse make up of students, staff, and faculty, it does not include gender

identity or gender expression in its' list of populations which the university will not tolerate

discrimination against (Student Code of Conduct, 2017). Next, the section describing violations

of the student code of conduct states that harassment of any person will not be tolerated.

Similarly to the section above, gender identity and gender expression are left out. In addition,

gender is excluded from this passage as well (Student Code of Conduct, 2017).

While this exclusion of gender, gender identity, and gender expression could be an

accidental oversight, it could also be perceived as intentional. Either way, transgender students

are excluded. After discussing these policies, Ayla said, "I think that...the student handbook, the

way it words it leaves it in the hands of the authorities to determine what constitutes

harassment." She added, "It always bothers me when anyone, in my identity or other people's identities are left out of protection for any reason." Ayla's observances signify one of the main issues with this student handbook policy; the lack of inclusion of transgender students leaves a gray area for those in power to decide which populations of students are protected from harassment.

Other codes of conduct demonstrate similar issues. Andrew attends Private University, and their Code of Conduct states:

[Private University] fully supports and fosters a policy of non-discrimination on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran's status. (Student Code of Conduct, 2017)

Private University includes gender in this section but not gender identity or gender expression. However, Private University also states:

Discriminatory Harassment - Verbal or physical conduct directed toward an individual solely because of his or her gender, gender identity, transgender status, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, creed, age, disability, citizenship, and/or presumed or actual sexual orientation that (a) stigmatizes the individual as known by the speaker to invoke violence or imminent harm, or (b) is of a continual nature such that it creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working, academic or campus environment or (c) unreasonably interferes with an individual's work or academic performance. (Student Code of Conduct, 2017)

Private University acknowledges gender, gender identity, and transgender status as identities of protection. This messaging seems to be in line with the US Department Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission's wording pertaining to discrimination and harassment. This sends a clear message to the campus community and aligns with their strategic mission to be an inclusive institution. When I discussed this with Andrew, he also reminded me how the housing staff at Public University were accommodating when he inquired about housing options. He decided on a single room, but stated that "it says something about students of opposite sex cannot live together unless it has to do with gender identity." Andrew took this as a positive step on his Housing Department's efforts to recognize students' gender identity and how that could impact their housing decisions.

In addition to on-campus policies, participants acknowledged the ever-changing national political climate. When their academic year started, President Obama was still in office, and the previous eight years included the forward movement that his administration had worked to achieve for transgender people and their rights. Towards the end of their first semester though, the political climate in the United States was suddenly very different. Ayla stated, "We have a charged atmosphere between the left and the right." She continued, "Changing political atmosphere…… the changing political spectrum is changing rapidly at the moment." Andrew added, "I feel like a lot of what's happening especially like bathroom stuff, it affects trans women a lot more adversely than it affect trans men." Ayla profoundly stated that "progress is a thing that ebbs and flows...as much as you move forward, it can easily move backwards." Ayla's statements reflect her recognition of the heated climate in our country, especially with policies or guidelines intended to protect specific populations. Danielle added, "Trump has, not necessarily spoken out against transgender people but has made it clear to the community that he's not supporting them." It should be noted that this comment was made early in Trump's presidency.

Bathrooms have become one of the most significant topics of debate pertaining to campus spaces for trans individuals. In late fall of 2016, Public University created gender neutral restrooms. Though gender neutral restrooms are not located in all buildings on Public University's campus, this move demonstrated another step towards campus inclusion. "They're opening transgender bathrooms in two of the buildings. Two buildings more than they had. It's more than zero," Ayla stated. While Ayla found out about the transgender restrooms, she couldn't find any information on the website about where they were going to be located. Ayla felt this was a move by the university to attempt to demonstrate inclusion without really making further strides to meet transgender students' needs.

At Private University, it was unclear if there was a university-wide movement towards gender neutral restrooms. However, Andrew's photo project portrayed both a men's restroom sign and a unisex sign. The former, initially made him feel excluded; though, he said later in the semester he felt comfortable using the men's restroom. However, the latter image made him feel comfortable and included from the beginning. Andrew's unisex bathroom photo is pictured below.

Figure 5: Restroom Sign

It is critical to note that participants made no mention of diversity and/or inclusion centers when discussing space. As previously mentioned, Public University and Private University do not host LGBTQ specific centers. While each institution houses a diversity related space, neither institutions' diversity related spaces were mentioned by participants. The shortage of LGBTQ spaces on Public University and Private University's campuses is representative of higher education in the United States; only 5% of four year institutions in the United States are home to LGBTQ centers that are staffed by professionals (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014).

As participants reflected on their experiences, they expressed that awareness could be improved. Ayla said, "Um, and I think that college is the time where it's not that they should know it but they should be willing to change their perceptions and come to know it." Ayla means that while she may understand that students are coming in with beliefs and values, college is the space and place where individuals are challenged on those beliefs and values. She added, "I think one of the things the university could do better….that wouldn't necessarily open itself to any great political backfire from either side is to just like, make more of an effort to train the staff, professors, maybe even students." Danielle echoed "I think overall there is a lack of information

and lack of research." Danielle and Ayla's comments both indicate room for growth on their campuses regarding the exploration of policies that would allow for more inclusive spaces on their campuses. As Ayla noted above, universities are the place in which difficult discourse can and should occur. Andrew submitted the photo below and was pleased to see it on campus, in an attempt to bring more awareness to his campus.

Figure 6: Transgender Visibility Poster
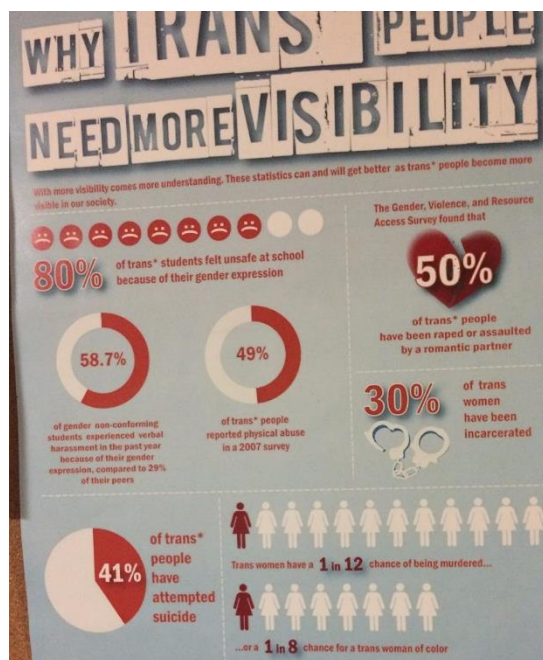
Sub-category: The South

For students who are considered sexual minorities, such as transgender students, they can also experience additional challenges because of their gender identity (Rankin, 2005). Campus climates are not always open and accepting spaces for transgender students, and this lack of inclusion can appear to be more apparent in areas that are perceived as more conservative and/or religious (Coleman, 2016). While sixteen states and Washington DC have official anti-discrimination protections, none of these states are located in the South (Teich, 2012).

Furthermore, the South currently is host to a large number of the current anti-LGBTQ legislation (Martin, Broadhurst, Hoffshire, & Takewell, 2017).

All participants in this study attended universities in the South. Participants acknowledged that though they lived in the South, they were located in a fairly progressive city, "It's one of the bluest cities in the deep south….this isn't really a deep south university" Ayla noted. Additionally, participants recognized that individuals living outside of their city limits might not be as accepting. Danielle admitted that while she is ok on her campus, she did not feel always feel comfortable or safe when she left campus, and she sometimes felt "on your guard." Andrew stated, "I'm currently in the liberal bubble of the school." Similarly, Danielle noted:

> As far as state politics is concerned, I don't see any drastic change happening…..even though we have a governor from the democratic party, whose platform generally tends to be more inclusive of transgender people….I just think being a democrat in (this state) is not the same as being a democrat in Colorado.

Danielle added, "There's still a lot of social attitudes that (this state) democrats have that aren't as inclusive of the LGBTQ community." Danielle elaborated, "As far as like being at a university in the south I think that there is still...yeah like I said, just like this looming presence of ehh you know am I going to be accepted." Though Danielle experienced doubt and concerns regarding her acceptance, she also acknowledge being in a city in the South was more freeing. Danielle compared her current community to the smaller town where she grew up. At the time of this interview, four transgender women were murdered the week leading up to our meeting, three of whom were in the state in which Danielle resided. Furthermore, two of the three murders were

in the city where Danielle lived. Danielle said, "Murders have like been on the rise…...That's

scary, that's scary." She also stated:

> There's a lot more of the not as um, comfortable or I don't know what the word is...just
>
> not feeling as safe or as accepted or kind of just always on your guard at that point. But at
>
> school there's definitely… that tension is gone, so I think that not the university itself, but
>
> being in an area that's surrounded by people who are surrounded by more people that are
>
> not as accepting is why it has been difficult...

All participants noted that their campuses provided a more inclusive space that did not

necessarily reflect the outside community, especially in the nearby rural areas of the South. This

recognition of others and their communities allowed each participant to be thoughtful in the way

in which they articulated their interactions and stories.

Category 4: Sympathizing with others

> *"I'm not going to be mad at those people, they just don't know." - Danielle*

In Berlant's *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (2014), she states the

only thing that is clear with compassion is that it involves a relationship between those who are

the "sufferers" and those who witness the suffering. In addition, the focus is on those who are

witnesses and how they experience compassion (Berlant, 2014). For the purpose of this study,

one might assume that those experiencing feelings of compassion are the institutions and the

people who make up those institutions. However, what I observed throughout this process is that

while each participant could share times when they felt scared, forgotten, ignored, or excluded,

they could also see from the perspective of those whose actions made them feel in such a way.

Sub-category: Deflecting blame from institutions

When discussing policies or lack thereof or the university administration, participants often returned to the notion that it was not the institutions fault or that they (institutions) did not know any better. In discussing her experiences when she first transferred to Public University, Ayla shared some logistical challenges she experienced and issues she had changing her name and sharing pronouns. Though it was challenging to navigate, she said, "and I'm not going to say otherwise cause that might cause trouble for the organization." She did not want to make a big deal about how her name appeared. Though her name and pronouns were important to her, she did not want trouble for the organization, which included a campus office and Public University in general. Ayla added, "I know that the university does its best and that broaching further lines does open themselves up on a wider spectrum. And I know that people are doing their best." She concluded, "I think that they (Public University) are doing their best and that means more to me than the bureaucratic non-sense that they can't change." Ayla acknowledges that the efforts in which she sees on behalf of her institution are not going unnoticed, though the larger system to which her institution reports does not always show support for transgender populations. Danielle concluded, "Often times, my campus makes me feel included in a way that the rest of the world does not, so it's hard for me to critique its faults." Ayla and Danielle's sentiments are reminders of the back and forth balance of feeling thankful for what their university is able to do for them, while still finding fault in so much that the institutions are not doing.

Sub-category: Deflecting blame from people (peers, friends, family, professors, and staff)

On a micro level, participants also reflected on experiences with the people who comprised their institutions. Griffin explained, "I know it's out of them not understanding, not

purposely misgendering me." Griffin openly shared how misgendering could be devastating, but he also empathized with those who misgendered him. When discussing people who are close minded, Ayla added, "It's easy to understand their perspectives." What Ayla most likely means is that she, growing up in heteronormative communities, is attune to the social and gender norms of which many of her peers were raised. Andrew further noted that "I feel like it might make them uncomfortable or something." Similarly, when Ayla discussed her name change and pronoun options further, she kept going back to this notion of not making trouble for others, "But uh, but I mean and I don't, I don't want to cause any trouble for the people." She continued, "Like it's not through any ill of their own." At one point in our discussion, Ayla said that she did not mean to offend me when she talked about cisgender people. In a space where I was asking her to voice her thoughts and experiences, so that her experiences can be shared with others, she still had moments of concern for offending me. I laughed and told her the last thing she needed to do was to apologize, but is that not what women do, we apologize. "It's hard to be challenged out of that normal spectrum," Ayla commented. Ayla and Danielle both shared similar thoughts regarding others and how they perceived others ability to be accepting or implement change. They wrapped up our discussions with these comments, "I try to understand it from the angle of the people who may or may not be implementing the changes," Ayla. "I guess it's not like really anyone's fault they've never been taught how to act," Danielle said. Danielle wrapped up one conversation with the following:

> Um I don't know, so like there's like so much to being transgender that most people don't know and I don't know if there's anything wrong with that specifically. I can't really blame people but also it's like very frustrating because I have to feel like I have to

explain myself a lot you know, and I don't know if that means that everyone should have

a full comprehensive education about you know what transgender people are, and what

their experiences can or sometimes can be. But also it's just overall kind of frustrating

because people will say things like… will ask me questions and I'm like I don't even

know how to answer this because it's not like a question that really pertains to what's

actually going on with me. So like, I don't know its its hard to explain..

This reflection, highlights Danielle's frustration with the lack of knowledge from others all while

unable to place ownership on who is responsible for their education. Ayla and I had some follow

up conversations pertaining to this topic. In a follow up correspondence with Ayla regarding her

experiences in respect to the above mentioned sections, she clarified her experiences further. In

doing so, she articulated what it was like for her as a transgender person who sometimes felt she

did not have a choice but to sympathize with others:

> ..our shift of blame away from others isn't always because we want to let them go without
>
> saying something, or that we want to be understanding. More often it's that society
>
> sanctions our discomfort, when we speak up for it; asking someone to please not
>
> misgender us can get everything from a 'Oh, I'm so sorry!' to the much less delightful,
>
> 'But, aren't you a guy?' And we have to accept both of them - while the latter might offer
>
> us a teaching moment, if the person decides to do nothing, or to continue misgendering
>
> us, we have no avenue socially to fight against that. The common argument from people
>
> is, 'Oh, they just don't know any better.' or, 'Oh, don't blame them, it's society's fault,'
>
> and while many times we want to be mad and stand up for our individual realities as

transgender people, we simply are not allowed to. I think, by necessity, living a

transgender life is one of almost overbearing understanding, in an almost sad way - when

it's not, anger and vitriol can easily seep into our persons, because we're so often the last

people thought about when discussing rights, from protections against hate speech and

transphobia to physical rights like what we do with our bodies, where and how we serve

our country, and what bathrooms we need to use.

Ayla so articulately and authentically expressed here the reality she and her fellow participants

go through so frequently. In a country that seems to find excuse after excuse as to why

transgender individuals should not use this restroom, or cannot fulfill this job, or should not be

included on anti-discrimination policies, what reaction should Ayla have when society dictates

so much else of her life. While several pockets of this country are standing in support of

transgender individuals and rights, the perception of what is being done compared to what could

be done, leaves much room for improvement.

Ayla continued:

Similarly, I think that's one of the coping methods that we use, is to try to find some way

in which we can make it work, where people accept us for who we are - as an author, my

method has always been to pretend I fit the role of male, and that works for me, while

that doesn't for so many other people…...As trans people, we almost can't let it bother us,

unless we're at a specific point during transition, and even then we're expected to be

tougher about these things than anyone could reasonably expect from a cisgender

individual. Why, then expect it from us?

Point taken, Ayla. This translates at the college level, when institutions place barriers to success

for transgender students, where often they work to diminish those barriers for cisgender students.

But as, Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin have noted, they do what they can do in their given

circumstances, understanding that at the end of the day it is hard to place blame on their

institutions and the people who make up those institutions.

Chapter Summary

From Navigating Identity to Sympathizing with Others, participants shared examples

from inclusion to exclusion to the blurry in between. The emerging categories highlighted the

consistent patterns that appeared in each participant's own personal narrative. This study

examined the experiences of four participants. It is important to note that though common

themes emerged, each participant's experiences are unique. Those experiences share insight into

how each participant's transgender identity impacted or was impacted by their college transition

process and their perceptions of their environment. In this next chapter, I will discuss

implications of the findings as it pertains to connections to the conceptual framework,

connections to the research questions, recommendations for practice, and implications for further

research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate transgender college students in the south. The guiding research question throughout this study was, how do transgender college students perceive their academic and social integration into college? The following section discusses the findings organized by their relation to the study's conceptual framework, their relation to the research question, recommendations for practice, and implications for future research.
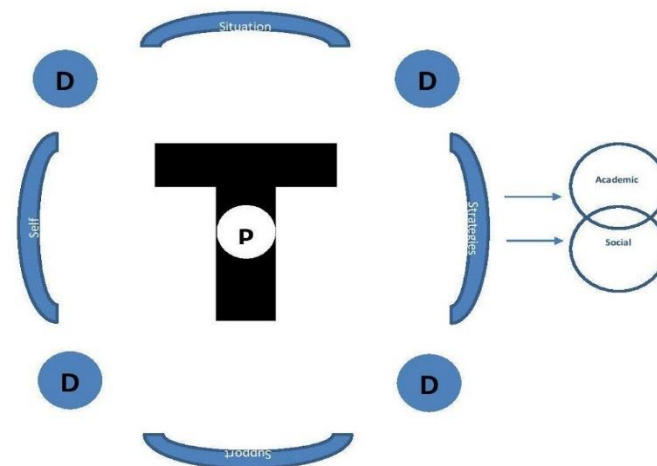
Discussion of Findings

The examination of First-Year college student transition, persistence, and academic and social integration has been widely studied (Braxton, Hirschy, & McLendon, 2004; Clark, 2005; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Reynolds, 2013; Roos, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1990, 1993, 2006). However, the study of transgender college students and how gender identity plays a role in their transition to college has not received the same amount of attention. Through a four-phase data collection process and subsequent analysis, the following categories emerged: 1) navigating identity, 2) college transition and challenges, 3) environment, space, and climate, and 4) sympathizing with others. Further discussion below, highlights how the participants and the findings are woven throughout the conceptual framework and the research questions which guided this study. Also discussed further are recommendations for practice as identified from the findings as well as gaps in the research or areas of growth for research surrounding transgender students.

Relation to Conceptual Framework

Findings outlined in Chapter Four connect closely with one or more of the three theories that made up the conceptual framework for this study. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995), minority stress theory, and academic and social integration theory provided a framework through which findings were interpreted. Below is a reminder of the visual representation for the conceptual framework used for this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

T = Transgender Student

D = Distal Stressors (external) – Minority Stress Theory
P= Proximal Stressors (internal) – Minority Stress Theory

Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies – Transition Theory

Academic and Social Integration Theory

Transition Theory

Schlossberg (1981) defined transition as an event or non-event that can result in a change regarding roles, relationships, and/or a routine (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) focuses on the four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies.

Situation

Situation focuses on the following: who or what caused the transition, and is the transition within the control of the person experiencing it (Anderson et. al, 2012). When students start college they encounter a variety of changes from people to academic settings to housing accommodations (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). For this study, the situation causing each participant to experience transition and changes to their environment looked different. For Ayla, Andrew, and Griffin, the transition was experienced through the lens of being a transgender student at a new institution. Andrew and Griffin were traditional First-Year students navigating their transgender identities as they also explored their new environments as First-Year college students. Ayla was a First-Year student at her institution as well; however, she was a First-Year transfer student, meaning it was her first year and first semester at a new institution, but not her first time in a college setting. Though a little bit older than the age of a traditional First-Year college student, she still found herself in a new setting, with new systems and policies to navigate. Ayla was experiencing life at a four-year institution, which was also new for her as she had transferred from a two-year institution. Danielle was not a First-Year student; however, it

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was her first semester and first year being out as a transgender woman. While Danielle had previous experiences at her institution and the benefit of institutional knowledge, she found herself with new opportunities, challenges, and experiences centered around her transgender identity.

Self

Self focuses on the characteristics of the person in transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Each participant had their own unique characteristics and experiences that assisted them as they journeyed through their first semesters and/or first year of college as transgender individuals. For example, Ayla who is both Native American and Hispanic, relied on her strength in storytelling. Deriving from her Native American heritage and her skills in creative writing, she was able to shape her story as she transitioned to a new institution. For Danielle, she had been at her institution for three years before coming out. As an involved student, she had developed as a student leader, and this position arguably served her well as she began navigating a new chapter in her college career. Griffin relied on previous experiences of being out as a transgender individual in high school to assist in how he navigated his college transition.

Support

Support refers to the family, friends, relationships, and networks or communities that the person in transition had access to (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Danielle had been at her institution for three years already; therefore, she had created several systems of support for herself through her involvements in organizations and campus employment. When Danielle came out as a transgender woman, even though she was met with a mixture of responses, it was, for the most part, a positive experience. She had peers and staff on campus

who were supportive, and she noted that her supervisor had been especially supportive throughout this process. For Griffin and Andrew, this piece of their transition was a bit more difficult at first because they were new to their respective institutions. Andrew had not yet cultivated systems of support at his institution prior to enrolling. However, Griffin was able to connect to support networks through his involvement in a pre-semester college transition program for First-Year students. Griffin also felt that Public University was a place where he could make friends. Andrew was new to both his campus and the community surrounding the institution.

Ayla was cautious when sharing her identities. When she shared her asexual identity with family she was met with resistance, with the exception of her grandfather. Ayla tried reaching out to classmates, but she stated that she had not found support outside of her participation in an LGBTQ organization. Andrew also noted a lack of overwhelming support from his family at first and admitted that his mother was handling it better than his father. Participants also relied on support from online communities and forums. Ayla was quite active in Second Life while Andrew relied on online support systems for advice on what to do at his new institution. Online communities were positive resources for Griffin and Ayla as well.

Strategies

Strategies are the skills and coping mechanisms the individuals develop to assist in times of transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). A strategy participants employed prior to their semesters starting was to email professors ahead of time. Through email correspondence, Andrew was able to reach out to professors to introduce himself and share his preferred name and pronouns. For Danielle, coming out in the middle of the semester as a transgender woman

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meant that she had to contact professors well into the academic year. Danielle intentionally came

out on a Friday afternoon on social media, allowing herself and others the weekend to process

the information. In the following semester, Danielle contacted professors ahead of time and was

met with acceptance. She also added that she only came out to one person the previous year, and

that was another transgender person. Andrew was not quite sure how to share his identity with

others, so his strategy was to casually bring it up in conversation with others.

Minority Stress Theory

Minority stress occurs when minority populations experience high levels of stress related

to stigmatization or marginalization based on their minority identity (Meyer, 1995, 2003).

Meyer's research focused on two factors of stress in LGB populations: distal stressors and

proximal stressors. Distal stressors are external factors that affect a person. For example, a distal

stressor includes experiencing discrimination or prejudice. Alternatively, proximal stressors are

internalized (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Transgender individuals can be exposed to harassment and

discrimination (distal stressors), and those experiences can negatively affect their self-concept

(proximal stressor) (Breslow, Brewster, Velez, Wong, Geiger, & Soderstrom, 2015). Mounts,

Valentiner, Anderson, & Boswell, (2006) found that First-Year students who had developed

friendships or felt they had support, had lower levels of anxiety and depression. This connects

the importance of support systems (transition theory) to the low amount of proximal stress

(minority stress theory) transgender students may experience.

For each participant, distal stressors varied from not being able to use their preferred

name on college applications, to being misgendered by peers, faculty, and staff, to overhearing

other students talk disparagingly about marginalized populations. Griffin described being

misgendered as "devastating." The distal stressor of not being accepted as male affected him internally, a proximal stressor. For Danielle, she internalized this idea of acceptance from others. Friendships can be an important factor in college student belonging (Fass & Tubman, 2002). One of Ayla's worst experiences in a classroom occurred during her first semester. Prior to the professor arriving, students were making jokes and disparaging remarks about transgender and gay individuals. For participants, distal stressors, such as hearing insults from other students, affected how they felt internally about their identities. Those insults also affected how and to whom participants disclosed their identities. For Ayla, this meant fearing for her physical safety. Even when peers, staff, and faculty unintentionally misgendered participants, it caused feelings ranging from devastation and demoralization to vulnerability.

Academic and Social Integration Theory

Academic and social integration can influence a student's persistence (Tinto, 1975). Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon (2004) added that the commitment of the institution to student welfare, communal potential, institutional integrity, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial adjustment, and the ability to pay are all factors that affect a student's social integration. Integration into ones' community can help students develop a sense of belonging. Students who feel like they "belong" at their institutions, are more likely to experience positive adjustment (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). In addition, the more integrated students are academically and socially on their campuses, can contribute to their persistence (Tinto, 1975).

Academic Integration

Each participant reported different classroom experiences related to their gender identity. While the participants received no pushback from professors when they disclosed their identities

prior to the semester starting, there were instances where they felt excluded in the classroom. Ayla was called out by a professor for wearing a safety pin, which represented that she identified as an ally for marginalized populations. The safety pin became popular during the immigration ban discussions in early 2017. Though the faculty member was not exposing Ayla as a transgender woman, it did indicate, perhaps, a lack of understanding of the challenges some marginalized populations face. Andrew shared examples of being misgendered in the classroom as well, but he also shared that some of those professors followed up after class to apologize. He found that despite starting hormone treatment, which changed his voice, his music faculty were supportive and worked with him so that he was able to persist academically as a music student. Danielle and Griffin each reported acceptance from faculty when they disclosed their identities.

Social Integration

It is an important part of the college transition process for students to engage in college life outside of the classroom (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Social integration started early for a couple of participants. Griffin's participation in a pre-semester transition program for First-Year students helped him to connect with other students and campus resources. He also joined an LGBTQ Facebook group that helped him to feel confident in being out on his campus. All of the participants were able to connect to LGBTQ student groups on their campuses; though, involvement in other social groups varied for each participant. Danielle had been involved in a fraternity prior to being out as a transgender woman. However, non-inclusive commentary from a particular member made her feel that the group was not the place for her. Overall, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin found positive connections through social integration, while Ayla struggled

to make those connections. Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin reported that living on campus

contributed to their social integration experiences.

Relation to Research Question

The guiding research question throughout this study was, how do transgender college

students perceive their academic and social integration into college? Three sub-questions assisted

in guiding this study:

1. How do they perceive themselves within the college transition process?

2. What is their perspective of their university experience within their community
   (and within the southern region)?

3. How does their gender identity play a role in acclimating to their new
   environment?

Question 1: How do they perceive themselves within the college transition process?

For each participant, the ways they perceived their academic and social integration

differed. For Ayla, as a new transfer student who was very focused on a smooth academic

transition, she found success in the classroom despite a couple of negative interactions with some

peers and one faculty member. However, her social integration was slightly less engaging. She

found it difficult to form connections outside of the LGBTQ organization. When students are

socially integrated as well as academically integrated, they can experience additional support

from friends and faculty (Tinto, 1975). Danielle's social integration looked very different as she

was already cemented into student life before she came out as a transgender woman. Andrew and

Griffin, as traditional First-Year students, relied heavily on early engagement with peers and

online communities to connect socially. Those online communities were positive spaces that also provided them with ideas for communicating with professors about their identities.

Question 2: What is their perspective of their university experience within their community (and within the southern region)?

Participants had positive experiences regarding their perspectives of their university experiences overall. Participants recognized that while still situated in the South, they were in a more urban area and at institutions that made them feel welcome on some level. With that said, each participant commented that more could be done to make these experiences better. However, the social and political climates after the 2016 presidential election were not lost on them. With increasing incidents of harassment and murder against transgender individuals in the state where the participants resided, especially considering that transgender women of color were targeted, participants were aware that their safety was not guaranteed. This notion of feeling unsafe or afraid of violence was present in other research centered around transgendered individuals as well (eg. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). While each participant had experiences that made them feel included at their respective institutions, each participant also shared moments of exclusion.

Question 3: How does their gender identity play a role in acclimating to their new environment?

Acclimating to a new environment while also exploring how gender identity may affect that process was a process that participants had to navigate. For Danielle, her gender identity was concealed until the first semester of her fourth year of college. She acknowledged that her college transition process was fairly smooth. That process may have looked different for her had

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she came out as transgender as a First-Year college student. For the other three participants, the role their gender identity played early in their acclimation to college centered around names and pronouns. From applications, to housing, to class rosters, Ayla, Andrew, and Griffin had conversations with staff and faculty either early in the semester or prior to the start of the semester. However, having staff, faculty, and peers recognize them by their preferred name and pronouns was not the end of how gender identity played a role in their acclimation to a new environment. Throughout the entire data collection process, participants shared stories and examples of how their gender identity was embedded in experiences of acceptance, inclusion, and exclusion.

Recommendations for Practice

After data collection and analysis, ideas surfaced from participant experiences which could serve as a basis for creating more inclusive and accepting places and spaces on college campuses. Recommendations for practice include: inclusion of gender identity, preferred names, and preferred pronouns on college applications; exploration of institutional online platforms as a resource for transgender students; and increased campus awareness and trainings for faculty, staff, and administrators regarding transgender populations.

College Application and Class Rosters

The first recommendation comes early in a college student's experience: the application. One of the biggest challenges institutions are facing, is how to be more inclusive to transgender populations (Tilsley, 2010). Creating an application that allows for students to self-identify their gender identity and preferred name would allow students to state that piece of their identity, if they so choose. This option also has the potential to lessen the number of times a student has to

self-disclose that piece of their identity each semester to professors. Furthermore, this information could also be used to inform institutional decisions, to assist institutions in best understanding the needs of transgender students. Beemyn, Jones, Hinesley, Martin, Dirks, Bazarsky, Javier, & Robinson (2014) suggest the following guidelines for documentation:

- Change software to enable students to use a name other than their legal first name on campus records, including course and grade rosters, directory listings, unofficial transcripts, advisee lists, and other documents.

- Where not specifically prevented by law, allow students to use a name other than their legal first name on campus ID cards and diplomas.

- Enable students to change the gender marker on their campus records upon their request (i.e., without a letter from a therapist or doctor and without the need to change other documents).

- Change software to enable students to indicate the pronouns they use for themselves that would appear on course and grade rosters and advisor lists. Suggested options: she, he, ze, and they.

- Have an easily accessible web page that details the policies and procedures related to changing names and gender markers and indicating pronouns on campus records.

- Enable students to self-identify their gender on forms (p. 3).

With the addition of the above-suggested practices, institutions have the opportunity to obtain the actual number of transgender students on college campuses (or at least of those who

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choose to self-identify). This information can be used to inform institutional decisions, policies, and practices pertaining to transgender populations, such as housing policies and health services. The University of Vermont developed a method in which students were able to disclose pronouns and preferred names that appeared on class rosters (Tilsley, 2010). Inclusion of such information also sends the message that institutions recognize transgender students and are working to maintain and improve inclusive practices.

Online Forums

In addition to discussions about names, gender identity, and pronouns, participants had an abundance to say pertaining to their online experiences. Online forums, online groups, and online spaces like Second Life provided space for these participants to share their identities, connect to others, and these spaces allowed them to feel safe to communicate with others. If transgender students are utilizing online resources, institutions might find it beneficial to create similar opportunities. Kasch (2013) conducted a qualitative study of 35 undergraduate students, exploring their presentation on the social media platform Facebook. In his findings, he discovered that those students had what he called a "curated self," which was a digital version of themselves which was separate from their physical self (Kasch, 2013). If online forums are resources transgender students are using already to share a version of themselves and to find resources, then creating online forums moderated by the student's institution allows the student direct access to resources and people.

Hass (2006) stated, in order for university personnel to help create campus community amongst college students, it could be beneficial to explore online forums. In addition, the participants in this study discussed that they would like to have opportunities to talk about their

identities. Often though, they are not quite sure how to engage in those conversations, and they

do not always feel safe in those conversations. Higher education professionals must rethink how

we can use online platforms to engage transgender students to continue to learn about themselves

but also learn about their new college community (Nicolazzo, 2016). Online forums have the

potential to assist transgender students and higher education professionals in starting and

continuing those conversations.

Increased Awareness

Participants also discussed the need for cross campus awareness and support. Each

participant could identify persons who assisted them in their college transition and have been

supportive as they journeyed through their first semesters as out transgender students. However,

there still seemed to be a need for support from the administration. More often than not,

institutions do not act unless a student speaks out (Tilsley, 2010). As opposed to reactionary

support, there is a need for proactive institution-wide support of transgender students. Creating

support groups specifically developed for transgender students, institutions show commitment to

transgender populations and an increased awareness to the campus community (Seelman, 2014).

This support means that the university administration needs to recognize how binary gender

norms can make it difficult for transgender students as they integrate into campus life (Beemyn,

2005). Support and awareness can be shown in a variety of ways, some of which are clearer

inclusions of gender identity in anti-discrimination and harassment statements and creating more

inclusive physical spaces. If institutions are unable to create transgender specific support groups

and/or more inclusive physical spaces, there are additional ways in which they can create

awareness and support. Institutions can implement trainings, campus conversations, and workshops that address transgender populations and their needs (Seelman, 2014).

Rebecca Lucas, who is an Associate Professor at Maryville College, created tips for trans inclusivity at her institution. Lucas's tips mirror much of what participants would like to see within their campus environments. Lucas (n.d.) suggests:

- Confront and examine **personal biases, prejudices, and preconceived assumptions** you hold about transgender and non-binary individuals.

- Master **trans-terminology**, learn basic concepts and vocabulary, practice using gender neutral pronouns--they/them/ze/zir.

- Become familiar with **support services** of interest to trans/non-binary students.

- Examine **curricular topics** covered in your course. If not included, seek out opportunities to include diverse problem sets, scenarios, examples, case studies.

- Determine how you will take **attendance** on the first day of class. Your official roster may not reflect chosen names for your trans students (calling roll from official roster may "out" someone.)

- Use the **pronouns and chosen name** requested by your students--in class, in written communications, and outside of class.

- Challenge **transphobic remarks** (and others that denigrate marginalized individuals or groups--racist remarks, homophobic remarks, xenophobic remarks, sexist remarks, ableist remarks, ageist remarks, etc.).

- If you **misgender** someone, correct yourself, apologize, and then move on.

- Respect transgender and non-binary **students' privacy.**

- **Reflect** on the semester. What practices were successful? Where do you need more practice?
- **Attend** campus/community opportunities, faculty/staff forums and trainings, and other trans-related events.
- **Take advantage** of the diverse campus community. Spend time outside of class with a student, staff person, or faculty member who identifies as transgender or non-binary.

Additionally, showcasing transgender students engaged in all aspects of campus life can highlight opportunities available to transgender students. Illustrating transgender student engagement and opportunities on websites allows for other transgender students to see someone who is representative of a population in which they belong. When institutions offer programs such as orientations and workshops, there is often a lack of information specific to transgender populations (Seelman, 2014). If institutions are stating that they are inclusive spaces that recognize diversity, more can be accomplished to display that as opposed to just saying they recognize diversity. Institutions can validate transgender students' experiences by enacting policies that have clear statements regarding transgender students, showing students like them as participants in advertising materials and websites, and promoting that they are as much a part of the campus community as their cisgender counterparts. Spade (2011) argued that such policies do not always bring transgender people the outcome they need; instead, what is needed is a continual process where everything's effectiveness is always questioned. Incorporating transgender students as part of the process in creating more awareness and inclusion on campus

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is integral for institutions. Nicolazzo (2016) identified a "trickle up approach" to diversity and inclusion, recognizing that marginalized populations often are left out of the conversation or are not included if they are not visible on their campuses. What's more, institutions that do include transgender-specific policies are often still rooted in the gender binary systems (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Which reinforces gender norms, which can leave non-binary and gender fluid students feeling excluded. When institutions do house transgender inclusive policies, transgender students want to see what accountability looks like for individuals who trespass such policies (Seelman, 2014). Much work is still to be done on creating and implementing policies and spaces that are truly meeting the needs of students across the spectrum of gender identity.

As mentioned before, space is important. Renn and Patton (2011) state that environments influence people and can be key for student learning and student development. For both institutions in this study, there is a First-Year requirement for living on campus. This could be somewhat problematic for First-Year students who identify as transgender, if information regarding housing policies, procedures, and roommate selection does not outline options for them. Housing policies should be clear and inclusive of transgender populations. Bathrooms on campus that are gender neutral should be found in more than one or two buildings on campus. While each institution in this study does offer gender neutral restroom options, transgender students should not have to walk across campus to fine one.

Limitations

Though this study took place over two semesters and incorporated a four-phase data collection process, limitations exist. Limitations are things not within your control as a researcher (Simon, 2011). One of those limitations for this study was the number of participants.

While the intended participants needed for this study was 3-5, four participants started the process and only three participants completed the entire process. Griffin's early departure from the study may reflect the lack of transgender specific support his campus offers. While the number of participants does not diminish their experiences, it can be difficult to state that their experiences are reflective of all transgender college students in the South. However, while there are common themes that appeared in each of their stories, the findings in this study are a reminder that there is not a singular experience for transgender college students. In addition, the setting for this study was in an urban area of the South. Transgender students at rural institutions in the South might have quite different experiences than those students in this study. Morever, much of this study focused on their gender identity. Though participants did share other aspects of their identities, there was not an in-depth exploration of those intersectionalities and how other identities might have further affected their academic and social integration.

Transferability

Thick descriptions of participants and data collection sites are an important component for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While readers consider this research and reflect on how it may translate to their campuses or environments, it is wise to consider context. For example, much of the policy mentioned is focused on the South. For colleges and universities that are host to anti-discrimination policies that are inclusive of transgender students and gender identity, those sections may not appear to be relevant. However, I would challenge readers to proceed with caution. Policy inclusion is certainly one method to display an institution's commitment to transgender inclusion; however the ways institutions enact these policies compared to how they are stated are not always aligned. Institutions should not rely on policy by

itself as an indication of their commitment to diverse populations (Ahmed, 2012). Furthermore, while situated in the South, both Public University and Private University are located in urban areas. Participants addressed and recognized the "liberal bubble" in which they live and how other institutions in different areas of the South might pose differing experiences. Lastly, I caution readers against making overgeneralizations of all transgender populations. There is not a one size fits all for transgender student integration, acceptance, and inclusion. Just as there is not a one size fits all approach for cisgender college students. To continue to best serve and create more opportunities for transgender college students to allow them to be themselves, institutions can push onward by incorporating transgender students into those conversations.

Implications for Future Research

This research examined experiences participants had on their campuses, within their academic and social communities. While this research highlighted several areas that consistently wove in and out of stories from all participants, it also highlighted some gaps or areas of growth for future research. The following illustrates areas in which further research is needed. These areas include research surrounding intersectionality, transgender student resilience, online communities, and non-binary and gender fluid identities.

Intersectionality

The lack of intersectionality exploration, while a limitation of this particular study, simultaneously poses a great opportunity for future research. There is not currently a wealth of research regarding intersectionality of identities and how race and class might also affect LGBT students (McDermott, 2011). Adams (2015) states that when transgender students have an intersection of identities, sexual orientation, race, ability, etc., their "minority stress matrix" can

become even more compounded. Intersectionality of transgender students is an area that should be further explored. Additionally, Nicolazzo (2016) noted that "trans* oppression" and "sexism" are important frames from which to view the intersectionality of transgender individuals. Ayla spoke often of her Native American identity. Native Americans view transgender populations differently than the heteronormative society. Anthropological reports have shown that Native Americans often recognized gender beyond the binary of male and female (Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001). The term "two-spirit" has been used by Native American populations and can refer to either sexual orientation or gender identity (Adams & Phillips, 2009). Exploring transgender individuals that also have Native American identities is a future area of research as well.

One of Ayla's strategies she used as she integrated into Public University was her ability to tell stories and take on others' perspectives. Aspects of that may be from her experiences as a transgender woman, but aspects of that are most likely derived from her Native American heritage. In addition, the participants of this study identified with other diverse populations; Ayla is half-Hispanic and Danielle identified as white and multiracial. Individuals who hold multiple social identities, intersect in a variety of ways (Eliason & Schope, 2007). Nicolazzo (2016) added it is important for higher education to pay more attention to transgender students with intersecting identities such as transgender students of color, transgender students who are living in poverty, and transgender students who have disabilities. Students with more than one marginalized identity, may experience additional barriers in their transition to college. Moreover, in a 2011 report of transgender discrimination, Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling found that transgender individuals who also were a racial minority had higher rates of harassment and assault by police officers. Research regarding transgender college students of

color could illuminate additional experiences and challenges their white transgender counterparts may not experience.

Along with the intersections of race, all participants in this study had sexual orientations that were outside the scope of heterosexuality. Ayla identified as asexual, Andrew identified as gay, Danielle identified as pansexual, and Griffin identified as pan/demi sexual. Their gender identity and their sexual orientation identities position them in sexual minority categories twice. This leaves much room for continued studies that explore the intersections of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Transgender Student Resilience

There is further need for future research focused on the resilience of transgender students. As mentioned previously, much of what has been studied surrounding transgender populations focuses on deficit framing. Little has been researched surrounding the resilience transgender students develop from experiences on their campuses (Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2013). However, transgender students have existed on campuses for years, and while they were largely invisible, they experienced challenges and learned to cope and persist through college. A gap in research suggests that higher education could learn from the experiences of transgender students that lead to their resilience. Nicolazzo (2016) noted resilience for transgender students should not be evaluated solely on their persistence. This means institutions have to step outside their quantitative definitions of success, and explore the narratives of transgender students. Understanding transgender student resilience is beneficial for university staff, faculty, and administrators (Singh, 2013). And, while it is important to understand ways that transgender

narratives are still missing from the landscape of higher education, it is equally important to share those narratives of success and perseverance.

Online Communities

Research regarding online communities is growing. However, there is still a need to examine more deeply how online communities create space for transgender individuals. Participants in Nicolazzo's (2016) study commented that online spaces were safe and comfortable, and they utilized YouTube as a way to learn about other transgender people's' stories. Similarly, Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin all navigated online spaces prior to coming out in real life. Gray (2009) found online communities are validation for transgender individuals in that there are other transgender people in the world that share similar experiences and stories. This area could be explored more deeply and could provide a greater opportunity for learning more about how transgender individuals communicate their identity with online peers, how they create their online identities, and how those online identities affect who they are in their everyday lives.

Non-binary and Gender Fluid Identities

For the purpose of this study, I used transgender as a term to represent transgender people that identify male to female or female to male, as well as to represent non-binary and gender fluid identities. As you recall, Griffin who identified as male, began this research process identifying as gender non-binary and used they/them/their pronouns. Even in Griffin's own words he discussed the confusion he encountered from others pertaining to his non-binary identity. As research continues surrounding transgender populations, it is important to

distinguish specific research pertaining to non-binary and gender fluid individuals. Gender and societal norms permeate educational settings (Pascoe, 2007), including higher education (Bilodeau, 2005, 2009). This permeation can impact students in how they express (or not) their gender identity. Nicolazzo (2016) stated, "….educators must ask themselves questions about how gender influences their actions, attitudes, behaviors, dress, policies, and practices" (p. 144). In order to better understand students with non-binary identities, college personnel must explore their own gender biases and the ways in which they perpetuate gender norms. As educational settings seek to create inclusive environments, they still have much to learn regarding gender diversity (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012).

Institutions that house LGBTQ offices, clubs, or organizations may assume all students, under their perceived notions of transgender identities, are being supported. However, often times campus personnel may not recognize or understand what non-binary and gender fluid means. Students who identify as non-binary do not always feel supported or recognized within transgender or LGBT groups on their campus (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Furthermore, these individuals who may not identify as a transgender man or a transgender woman, can experience a lack of support in their community (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Continuing research that focuses on non-binary and gender fluid student experiences will allow institutions to be more inclusive to all students who reside under the transgender umbrella.

Conclusion

This narrative study produced findings that were woven into the conceptual framework through transition theory, minority stress theory, and academic and social integration theory. Additionally, guided by research questions, findings produced several recommendations for

practice, ideas for continued research, and identified limitations. Through data collection and analysis, four categories emerged from participant responses: 1) Navigating Identity, 2) College Transition and Challenges, 3) Environment, Space, and Climate, and 4) Sympathizing with Others. Within each category, several sub-categories were identified as well.

Institutions of higher education must recognize the ever-growing presence of transgender students on their campuses. Moreover, institutions have the ability and responsibility to create policies, spaces, and opportunities that allow transgender college students to have a supportive academic and social integration process. There is much still to be discovered of transgender college students and how their perceptions of gender identity affect their integration into college life. Participants in this study are part of a growing community that seeks to continue the conversation on how we create inclusive spaces for transgender students, how we assist them in their academic and social integration, and how institutions' actions can match their words.

This conversation continues on and the lived experiences of transgender students like Ayla, Andrew, Danielle, and Griffin, offer up poignant perspectives on how we as a higher education community can do better to incorporate their stories into everyday life on our college campuses.

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Appendix A

Sample Recruitment Email

Dear [FIRST NAME],

Do you know a college student that identifies as transgender? If so, please share with them this opportunity to participate in a research study that is being conducted this fall: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Transgender College Students at four year Institutions in the South.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences transgender college students have at institutions of higher education.

You or someone you know may be eligible for this study if you are a college student and you identify as transgender.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review the enclosed information, and respond to Christy Heaton at heaton.christy@gmail.com or call at 504-444-2151.

It is important to know that this letter is not to tell you to join this study. It is your decision. Your participation is voluntary.

You do not have to respond if you are not interested in this study. If you do not respond, no one will contact you, but you may receive another email in which you can simply disregard.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[PI SIGNATURE AND NAME]

[CI SIGNATURE AND NAME]

Appendix B

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR ADULTS

Dear ____,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Dr. Alonzo M. Flowers III, in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations at the University of New Orleans (UNO).

I am conducting a research study regarding the experiences of transgender college students at four year institutions of higher education. I am requesting your participation, which could involve the following during the fall 2016 semester:

- ➤ Initial meeting
- ➤ Semi-structured interviews that will explore the students experience on their college campuses as it relates to their transgender identity
- ➤ Photo assignment – students will be asked to take pictures on their campus that either make them feel included in their community or make them feel excluded in their community
- ➤ Reflection Journals – students will be asked to keep a journal where they will be asked to reflect on their experiences on their college campuses as it relates to their gender identity

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Participation in this study may bring up emotions and or experiences that you have had in the past as a transgender college student that may have been negative. If you do not want to talk about these experiences or stop discussing them, you may do so without question at any time throughout the process.

The results of the research study may be published and/or presented at a conference, but neither your name nor your institution's name will be used.

By participating in this study, you may have the opportunity to share information that can help institutions of higher education better understand and meet the needs of transgender student populations. You also may experience growth and develop within yourself and how your transgender identity affects other aspects of your life.

All transcriptions, audio tape recordings, and journals will be kept in a confidential location known and accessible only to the researcher. After transcriptions have completed for audio recordings, the tapes will be erased and destroyed. Any handwritten journals will be converted to an electronic file through transcription by the researcher. Hand written journals will then be shredded.

Lastly, participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (504) 444-2151. You may also contact Dr. Flowers (Principal Investigator) at (504) 280-1031.

Sincerely,

Christy E. Heaton
Co-Investigator

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

_____
Signature

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans, (504) 280- 3990.

Appendix C

Demographic Information – Initial Meeting

- Name
- Age
- Identities
    - Gender
    - Race
    - Sexual Orientation
- Year in School
- Major

Appendix D

Interview 1 Questions – Semi Structured

- Please start by telling me about your first year college transition experience at your institution?

  o Were there challenges? If so, what were they?

- How do you think your experiences have been shaped by your transgender identity?

- Describe your perceptions of your campus community?

  o Do you feel included as a transgender student? Why/why not?

- Can you share a time where you felt excluded?

- What is something you wished faculty, staff, and administrators better understood about you as a transgender student?

- What is something you wished your peers better understood about you as a transgender student?

- Do you feel your campus communities understand transgender populations? How so or not?

- Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E

Journal Prompts

Good day/bad day:

Throughout the data collection process (fall 2016 and spring 2017) participants will be asked to keep a journal where they document a positive or a negative experience that happens to them on their campus. Students do not need to write lengthy responses, simply a phrase or sentence regarding what happened.

Phase two journal:

Following the initial interview in phase one, participants were asked to write a journal entry addressing some of the thoughts and feelings that surfaced in the initial interview. Prompts were based on the review of responses from participants initial interviews and previous journal reflections.

Phase four journal:

In the final phase, participants will be asked to write a reflection journal regarding the research process. After discussing their experiences, have they become more aware of their campus community? Are they more aware of feelings of inclusion and exclusion? What do they feel could be different about their campus environments, both in and outside of the classroom?

Appendix F

Questions - Interview 2

1. Have you felt being at a university in the south has affected your experiences as a transgender student? Positively or negatively? How so?

2. What are your thoughts on the changing political context for transgender individuals? Has the context of our current political climate affected you?

3. Based on your experiences on campus, how has your institution responded to the changes impacting transgender individuals?

4. Are you aware of your campus's stance on anti-discrimination? Does it include you as a trans student? *If they know, they may not know. I know what they are and will discuss with them.*

5. Since we first spoke, how has your experience on your campus as a trans student been this semester?

6. You mentioned last time, that you wished individuals were more open to accepting you how you see yourself. Is that still the case or do you feel now that you have spent more time at your institution, it's happening more? How so?

7. Any other experiences or comments, you'd like to share?

Appendix G

Photo Project

Participants were asked during phase two, to take photos on their campus of areas, places, spaces, etc. that either make them feel included or make them feel excluded. Students were asked to use their phones and email me the photos or, they could upload photos to a google document that was shared with only me.

VITA

Christy Heaton is from Jacksonville, Illinois. After finishing high school, Christy attended Illinois College and graduated in 2001 with a Theatre/Communications degree and minors in History and Spanish. After college Christy traveled and worked abroad teaching English in Japan. She returned to the US and pursued her Master's degree in College Student Personnel, graduating from Western Illinois University in May 2007. For nine and a half years, Christy lived and worked in New Orleans, LA. She served as the Director for Orientation and First Year Programs at the University of New Orleans. Christy is currently the Director of First-Year Experiences at the University of Colorado Denver. Her research interests include First-Year college student transitions and transgender college student experiences.