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Transgender College Student Activists: the Intersections of Identities

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TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENT ACTIVISTS:
THE INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITIES

by

Les T. Johnson

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Urban Education

at

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

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ABSTRACT
TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENT ACTIVISTS:
THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITIES

by

Les T. Johnson

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 2014
Under the Supervision of Professor Shannon Chavez-Korell

Transgender students, sometimes motivated by their experiences of marginalization, other times driven to bring meaning to their lives, participate in activism on their college campuses in efforts to enact social change. This qualitative study sought to learn how transgender college students describe the intersection between their gender and activist identities, and the role other identities play at the intersection. Situated in the theoretical framework of intersectionality, I used data from interviews to construct narratives where participants describe the place where their identities meet. Learning more about the intersection of transgender students' gender and activist identities is significant to inform the work of student affairs professionals so that they understand the potential implications in encouraging trans students to engage in activism both on and off campus, and learn how to best support these students.

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DEDICATION

To Karis

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Every transgender student I know also identifies as an activist. How they participate in activism is as diverse as the story behind their identity as trans. Some educate others – both informally in their everyday interaction, and formally at conferences, or in the classroom as instructors or guest speakers. Others yell into bullhorns rallying large groups of people in campus protests. Sometimes their work involves leading projects aimed at improving the accessibility of campus programs and facilities. Some appeal to a larger audience using the Internet to spread their messages of advocacy for the socially marginalized. No matter the avenue, the students work enthusiastically to promote equity on campus, both for themselves and other transgender students, and for other oppressed groups as well.

What is the connection between being a trans-identified college student and campus activism? It makes sense that, for example, being marginalized by gender identity could motivate efforts to enact campus change. But how else do these identities intersect, and how is the overlap complicated by other sociocultural identities and experiences? Learning about the relationship between these identities lies in the narratives of the students themselves.

Statement of the Problem

As more and more students are coming out as transgender at institutions of higher education (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010), it is becoming evident that these students are marginalized on college campuses, both at the institutional level in terms of both policy and practice, and also by individual acts of prejudice and violence. Nondiscrimination statements that include protection for “gender identity/expression”

show campus commitment to gender diversity (Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005); however, only 420 institutions of higher education have adopted these inclusive policies (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2012). The physical spaces on campus segregated by gender – such as dormitories, restrooms, and locker rooms – are particularly problematic to students whose identity is outside the normative of male or female (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; McKinney, 2005). Medical care, sports, Greek organizations, and other campus services and programming can also be difficult to navigate for trans students because gender is highlighted as a significant factor affecting who can participate, join, or receive service. Transgender students are also subjected to hate crimes or violence due to their gender identity (Erbentraut, 2010; Rankin, 2005).

For marginalized students, including those who are transgender, the university can stand as a site of limited opportunities, increased attrition, and lower achievement (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). In addition to lower levels of academic success and graduation rates, the psychological impacts on transgender students can be devastating, from high stress to thoughts of self-harm and suicide (Bilodeau, 2009; Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011). And although working as activists affords students a multitude of benefits (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Revilla, 2004; Rhoads & Martinez, 1998), transgender students' engagement in activism also can lead to negative effects. These negative effects of engaging in activism include increased pressure of time or demands being placed upon them, which can lead to burnout and fatigue; disciplinary proceedings, fines, or criminal charges; and increased visibility of their gender identity (Renn, 2007) with a concomitant potential for discrimination or harassment (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Meyer, 2004; Rankin, 2003).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the intersections between college students' transgender and activist identities in the urban university context. I will employ a narrative approach because of its value in relaying the complexity of lived experience and the subtleties of identity. I am interested in knowing how their transgender identity informs their identity and work as an activist, and how, in turn, their activist identity challenges and shapes their transgender identity.

My study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do transgender college students describe the intersection between their gender and activist identities?
2. In what ways are students' transgender identities negotiated, challenged, or shaped by their activist identities?
3. How do transgender college students' gender identities affect their identities as activists?
4. What roles do other identities (e.g., race, social class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) play at the intersection of college students' transgender and activist identities?

Rationale and Potential Implications for Study

Learning more about the intersection of transgender students' gender and activist identities is significant because of the need to support trans students whose unique perspectives strengthen the university campus. Participation in activism can help reverse the effects of marginalization (a) at the individual level by ensuring engagement in

campus life, and (b) at the institutional level by contributing to positive change for students both within and outside the trans community.

However, it is important too that student affairs professionals understand the potential implications in encouraging trans students to engage in activist work. Information is needed to understand how to best support these students during their time in college. The stories participants tell will help us to understand the delicate balances between the factors of transgender identity, engagement in activism, and other sociocultural identities. Knowing more about the internal struggles transgender students face as they encounter these dilemmas will help inform campus personnel on how to better support these students as they move through their social and academic lives at the university.

In addition, this research is important in that it can lessen the gap in the literature around transgender college students, especially studies that take a strength-based perspective. By and large understudied, this research can help provide a voice for these students in the literature.

Key Concepts and Terms

In this section, I will discuss how the terms *transgender* and *activism* have been conceptualized by other scholars, and then define how I will use the terms in the context of my research.

Transgender Defined

The definition of the term *transgender* has changed throughout recent history and continues to evolve (Valentine, 2007). Virginia Prince (2005/1969) used variations of the term (e.g. *transgenderist*, *transgenderal*) to describe individuals who were in a distinct

category between crossdressers, those who wear clothing normally assigned to the opposite gender, and transsexuals, who use surgical or hormonal intervention to alter their bodies. In the 1990s, organizers began to use *transgender* to label an inclusive identity category on which to focus political activist efforts (Califia, 2003; Feinberg, 1992). Currently, transgender is used widely in the popular media, conceptualized as an umbrella term (Califia, 2003; Meyerowitz, 2002) inclusive of a range of non-normative gender identities, expressions, and performances including transsexual, genderqueer, crossdresser, androgyne, male-to-female, female-to-male, drag queen, and drag king, among others (Namaste, 2000; Valentine, 2007). Stryker (2008) considers the Latin prefix *trans* when conceptualizing transgender broadly as “movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place” (p. 1).

For this research, I use transgender in an inclusive sense in order to capture the breadth of identities under this descriptor. I adopt the position that transgender is an umbrella term to describe individuals who deviate from the gender (identity or expression) norms or conventions they are expected (based upon their birth sex, for example) to perform, in favor of another location on the gender continua, *and who self-identify as such*. It is a common practice for transgender individuals to only use the prefix *trans* (or trans*) to indicate their gender identity; therefore, I will use *transgender* and *trans* interchangeably throughout this text. I will employ the *cis-* prefix and refer to individuals who are not transgender as cisgender. Similarly, trans* individuals may choose to use pronouns to refer to themselves that do not match the pronouns one might expect them to use based on their gender presentation, sex designated on their legal

documents, etc. I will use the pronouns my participants prefer me to use when referring to them in the third person.

Activism Defined

Activism on the part of students is conceptualized by scholars in different ways, from being narrowly defined by discrete patterns of behavior, to being inclusive of a broader range of activities. In addition to *activism*, other terms referencing this type of student activity include *campus unrest* (Astin, Astin, Bayer, & Bisconti, 1975), *demonstrations* (Rhoads, 1998), *protest* (Light & Spiegel, 1977; Lofland, 1985), *rebellion* (Lipset, 1971), and *resistance* (Boren, 2001).

As an example of a more narrow definition, Boren (2001) addresses the history of *student resistance*, or the “flash points of rebellion” (p. 4.). These are the moments where students’ work against oppression culminates in a crisis that provokes institutional response. In his case studies of five examples of *student demonstrations* centered around issues of identity, Rhoads (1998) emphasizes the “visible” and “public” nature of these protests on the behalf of students. Although not specific to students, Lofland (1985) defines *protest* as collective action taken against institutions for the sake of change on a social or personal level. He classifies these into four types that differ in their level of severity, from the *symbolic*, which simply brings visibility to an issue, to the revolutionary *alternative institution*, which involves abandoning the old way and choosing a new path altogether.

On the other hand, in their study to develop a scale to measure an individual’s “activist orientation,” or propensity to engage in activism, Corning and Myers (2002) adopt a broader definition of activism as “various collective, social-political, problem-

solving behaviors” (p. 704). Activism, in their framework, includes a range of activities from lower risk or passive ones, such as working behind the scenes as a member of a campus committee, to riskier, confrontational actions like the mobilization of mass demonstrations. Their definition was intentionally broad as to allow their research findings to be applicable to the widest range of activist behaviors.

For this research, I, too, will use activism in its broadest sense, adopting the approach of Corning and Myers (2002). However, I will go one step further: in addition to collective behavior, I will include related efforts from the individual level *if they have the possibility of serving an emancipatory role in the lives of future transgender students*. Examples of this individual-level activism includes personal advocacy (e.g., engaging in private confrontation of an unfair university policy), serving as a representative of the trans community (e.g., being the “token transgender” that administrators use to vet inclusivity initiatives), or education (e.g., teaching others current language practices for addressing transgender individuals).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to establish a foundation for this research on the intersection of transgender college students' gender and activist identities by demonstrating the connections between (a) identity and identity development, (b) the experiences of transgender college students, and (c) engagement in campus activism. My literature review was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of transgender students on college campuses? What are the effects of these experiences? How do trans students affect college campuses?
2. What is the nature of campus activism? What are its effects both on participants and the campuses upon which the activism occurs?
3. What are the relationships between transgender identity and campus activism?
4. How does identity develop? In particular, what is the nature of transgender and activist identity development?
5. In what theoretical framework should a study into the intersections of transgender college students' gender and activist identities be grounded?

In addition, I will explore the literature around intersectionality, the theoretical framework for my study. Answering these questions will ground my research into how transgender college students describe the intersection between their gender and activist identities.

Search Procedure

To answer the questions posed above, I searched for books and journal articles containing empirical or conceptual work. For journal articles, I used the keywords *transgender, identity, student, activism, leadership, university, college, higher education,*

campus climate and *intersectionality* in all possible combinations using five databases: (a) Education Research Complete, (b) ERIC, (c) MasterFILE Premier, (d) Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), and (e) JSTOR. In initial searches, I limited the results to peer reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2012. I did this to be sure to include only research studies that reflected the current trends in education and met a high standard of academic rigor. I excluded irrelevant research such as that commissioned by an organization as a program analysis, focused on history, or generated within the context of a field not related to education. I did this, as these data would not necessarily address the broad scope of activism among transgender college students.

I searched for books in a similar fashion using the WorldCat library database. I used the same keywords (*transgender, identity, student, activism, leadership, university, college, higher education, and campus climate*), but expanded to include books written since 1990. I did this to include the “classic” work that no study of this kind should disregard.

In addition, I made note of other relevant research studies cited in the literature. I retrieved these articles by searching the Academic Search Complete database under the study’s authors and title. I also did a manual search of the recent issues (i.e. 2012-2014) of several key journals relevant to this study: *Journal of College Student Development* and *Journal of LGBT Youth*.

For each of the remaining literature, I analyzed the title, abstract (if provided), introduction, conclusion, and subheadings to look for work with a focus on the activism and leadership of socially marginalized student, specifically transgender students, at institutions of higher education. Because my study is about transgender student activists

at urban universities, it made sense to exclude books and articles involving K-12 students, community-based activism, or students in rural or suburban areas.

Results of Review

The review revealed the struggles faced by college students who identify as transgender. Universities serve as sites where the binary system of gender is privileged, most not offering explicit protection for non-normative gender identities or expressions through their nondiscrimination statements. Transgender students face hostile climates and experience negative psychological impacts. These effects are more pronounced when compounded by other forms of oppression. People of color, women, individuals with disabilities, and those outside the gender binary who also identify as transgender have relatively lower levels of privilege among the trans population. The need to support all transgender college students in their academic and social lives on campus is clear considering research indicates the positive effects of diversity on the educational outcomes for all students.

Reviewing literature on college student activism revealed a long history of protests, rallies, marches, boycotts, sit-ins, tabling, and other efforts aimed at stimulating social change. Activism has implications at both the university and student levels. Positive effects to student activists include empowerment, meaning-making, personal development, and involvement in campus life. However, research also points out some negative aspects to campus activism. Students feel the pressure of time or demands being placed upon them. In addition, being active in social justice movements may bring unwanted attention to their marginalized identities.

Experiences of Transgender Students

Although research that specifically looks at the experiences of transgender college students is scant, these studies, along with anecdotal evidence, reveal that students who identify as transgender face discrimination, harassment, exclusion, and hostile climates on college campuses (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; McKinney, 2005; Rankin, 2003, 2005). Transgender students report feeling a sense of isolation or not belonging, or having to hide a key part of their identity out of fear for personal safety (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Meyer, 2004; Rankin, 2003). Psychological effects include distress, thoughts of dropping out, self-harm, or even suicide (Bilodeau, 2009; Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011).

Genderism. Based on his semi-structured interviews with ten trans students at two universities in the Midwest, Bilodeau (2009) developed the theory of “genderism” – institutional discrimination resulting from the privileging of a binary system of gender. Bilodeau organized his results around four themes to describe how the experiences of transgender students were influenced by genderism in the university context.

First, through social labeling, the students were assigned into one of two “gender” categories: male or female. Their membership in either of these categories was assigned without their consent, but at the same time, as transgender, their membership within that category was always questioned. The second theme, social accountability, revealed that rewards were given for conforming to the binary system of gender, while those outside of it were punished. This was most evident in the arenas of academics, employment, and sex-segregated facilities. The third theme reveals that privileging the gender binary led to the marginalization of students outside those boundaries. This privileging of the binary

influenced students' lives both within and outside the classroom by affecting relationships with faculty and peers, their work in student organizations, and plans for their future careers. The final theme revolves around the social isolation that Bilodeau's participants experienced, which had negative psychological impacts. Those outside of the gender binary felt invisible; the impacts of social isolation led some students conform to the gender binary, instead of continually explaining and justifying their existence outside of it.

Bilodeau's research revealed the challenges of the lived experiences of a diverse group (although all White and of European ancestry) of transgender students under systemic genderism in the university context. Implications relate to the need for universities to support a range of gender identities and expressions, not just those that fall into the gender binary. In addition to policy changes (e.g., adding "gender identity/expression" to nondiscrimination statement; allowing students to change their name and gender within institutional systems) and expansion of practices (e.g., ensuring gender inclusivity of facilities and programming; offering training on transgender identities), this research calls for a culture shift to one that embraces transgender scholarship.

Campus climate. Studies of transgender college students often are framed as inquiries into campus climate. In his 2005 phenomenological study of transgender students' perceptions of campus climate, McKinney collected data from 42 female-identified and 33 male-identified transgender students from 61 different colleges through the United States. Students completed surveys that contained eight open-ended questions on campus resources and support for trans students, as well as two questions about

whether their institution had a nondiscrimination policy inclusive of “gender identity/expression” and whether there was a LGBT center on campus. No race or ethnicity information was collected, and there was no analysis related to the size, location, or type of institution the students attended.

In terms of the closed-ended questions, none of the surveyed students indicated their institution’s nondiscrimination policy includes gender identity/expression, and only 33% of the universities had a LGBT center or office. Four common themes for both undergraduates and graduates emerged from the analysis. Both undergraduates and graduates agreed that faculty and staff were not educated on the needs and concerns of transgender students. Also overlapping between these two sets of students was the theme of inadequate counseling resources on campus for transgender students. Data from undergraduates also revealed a dearth of programming, as well as resources, for transgender students. The lack of adequate health care for trans graduate students affected these participants’ view of campus climate. In addition, graduate students cited a lack of opportunities to participate in campus organizations because of the organizations’ focus on the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. One limitation to note is that students were invited to be participants through a listserv. Trans students not subscribed to the list may have different experiences, which could yield different themes.

To add to the research of transgender college students, Dugan, Kussel, and Simounet (2012) looked at the differences in perceptions of climate, educational outcomes, and engagement in school (1) among different sub-identifications of transgender students, and (2) between transgender, non-transgender LGB, and non-

transgender straight students. Data were taken from the 115,632 surveys of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, which represents 101 institutions across the U.S. Unfortunately, researchers make a significant error when deciding to treat students who indicated “intersex” and “prefer not to say” on their surveys as transgender. The 91 “transgender” student surveys were matched with an equal number of surveys from both non-transgender LGB and non-transgender straight students. Because of small sample sizes the authors chose to base their conclusions on effect sizes.

For the group consisting of different sub-identifications of transgender students, analyses of the data using one-way ANOVAs showed significant differences on eta-squared effect sizes for 4 of 17 dimensions: two dimensions of engagement (i.e., faculty mentoring and leadership positions) and two of educational outcomes (i.e., socially responsible leadership and leadership efficacy). Post hoc analyses indicated female-to-male (FTM) students had higher means for the variables of faculty mentoring and socially responsible leadership. On the other hand, in terms of leadership efficacy, male-to-female (MTF) students had the lowest means when compared with other sub-identifications of transgender students. These results follow what one would expect when looking at the relative privilege binary-identified trans men possess (see Spectrum of Privilege section below).

Between the sample of transgender and cisgender (both LGB and straight) students, no significant differences were found in terms of the groups’ engagement in school. The authors concluded that any differences in engagement, although not significant, were likely due to individual practices and initiatives, rather than institutional-level factors. However, there were significant differences in perceptions of

climate and the educational outcomes between transgender and cisgender students (both LGB and straight). Referring to climate, transgender students reported experiencing more harassment coupled with a lower sense of belonging. Transgender students scored significantly lower for the educational outcomes of “possessing complex cognitive skills” and “socially responsible leadership.”

The results of this research supports its conclusions that climate for transgender students could be improved through an institutional audit of practices, building campus-wide awareness, formal training of university personnel, and forming offices to provide formal support to trans students. However, the authors also suggest colleges “assist transgender students in developing the necessary coping mechanisms” (Dugan et al., 2012, p. 733), the implicit message being that universities can elide their responsibility in eliminating harsh campus climates, putting the onus on trans students themselves.

Campus climate for transgender students is often included within studies that measure climate for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, looking at the LGBT population as a whole. Two such studies are significant to include in this review. The first, by Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010), looked at the experiences of 5,149 students, faculty, administrators, and staff who identify as LGBT, queer (Q), or questioning (Q). The research paid particular attention to the intersections of LGBTQ identities and race, and 26% of their sample represented people of color. In addition, the sample was large, and data from transgender respondents were able to be disaggregated from LGBTQ counterparts.

Overall, results indicated that transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) respondents were less likely to persist on campus. These individuals, including trans and

GNC respondents of color, reported experiencing more harassment, and also reported being excluded, isolated, and stared at, which they attributed to their gender identity or expression. In the context of the classroom or at work, transgender and GNC respondents were significantly less likely to feel comfortable with campus climate. As such, individuals who identify as trans or GNC were significantly more likely to consider leaving their college, and also avoided LGBTQQ areas of campus or coming out for fear of their safety. Results indicated that transgender and GNC individuals on campus did not perceive their institutions as providing enough support or resources, or response to reports of discrimination or harassment.

Similar results were obtained in a study of campus climate that sought the perceptions of campus members in different roles (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004). The study was designed to understand the climate for LGBT people from the perspective of students (both LGBT and non-LGBT), faculty, student affairs professionals, and resident assistants (RAs). The researchers distributed three types of surveys – one for non-LGBT/RAs, one for faculty and student affairs professionals, and one to LGBT students – at a Midwest state research university to assess the LGBT knowledge level, interest and involvement, attitude and behaviors of these different groups. Researchers note in their limitations section that “LGBT” was treated as a monolithic group, so there is no way to tell whether any participants in the LGBT student group identified as transgender. In addition, asking about “attitudes and behaviors” toward LGBT individuals, for example, may not accurately assess attitudes and behaviors toward transgender individuals in particular. The research is helpful in understanding the climate for LGBT people as a whole.

Factorial ANOVAs by group status, sex/academic class for students, and sex/discipline for faculty/student affairs professionals led researchers to conclude that these different groups had different perspectives with regard to climate for LGBT people. The respondents' personal characteristics impacted their perceptions. For example, LGBT students saw campus more negatively, had more knowledge and interest in LGBT topics, and participated in more LGBT-themed events. Student affairs professionals were more knowledgeable, supportive, and participatory than faculty. The personal characteristic of "discipline" (i.e. field of study) impacted results for faculty: those in the hard sciences were less apt to be involved in LGBT events. Across all groups, females tended to have more LGBT knowledge, interest, and involvement, and a more LGBT-positive attitude. Results led researchers to believe that because of the differences in how these groups perceive and create LGBT climate, universities need to tailor their programming to address specific needs. Programs for LGBT students and student affairs professionals, for example, do not need to address basic terminology, while LGBT programs for faculty may need to be required to ensure participation by this group.

Nondiscrimination policies. In response to evidence of experiences of discrimination, harassment, exclusion, and negative campus climate for transgender students, many universities have altered their nondiscrimination policies to include "gender identity/expression." Beemyn and Pettitt (2006) surveyed institutions that made this addition in 2005 or before to see if there were any resultant changes in the areas of gendered facilities, medical care, records/forms, and programming. Twenty-five colleges and university systems participated (University of California system campuses were surveyed as separate entities).

Results indicated few changes. There had been no effort to establish gender-inclusive bathrooms or recreation facilities, and only 2 of 25 campuses had implemented gender-neutral housing. In terms of medical care, there was no coverage for the cost of hormones. Students at 6 of the 25 institutions could change the gender listed on their records without needing proof of gender reassignment surgery. Programming, which is relatively easier to change, specific to transgender students had been implemented at most institutions (20 out of 25). The implication of this research is that *all* colleges have work to do to bring their practices in line with the protections promised in their nondiscrimination policies.

Visibility. The experiences of transgender college students are often influenced by the visibility of their non-normative gender identity. Although not specific to college students, the results of Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) national, mixed-methods study support this idea. In their research, trans people who were "out" or open about their transgender identity (i.e. visible) experienced more harassment (40%) and feared for their safety (58%) compared to those who were closeted or out to only a few friends. Because of this, participants said they purposefully hid their gender identity, either often, in the case of MTF, or sometimes, in the case of FTM. Of the college students who participated in this study, those who identified outside the gender binary, such as genderqueer, found it particularly problematic when it came to conforming to the many gender-segregated policies and practices on campus.

Rankin (2003) sent surveys to fourteen universities across the United States in an effort to learn more about the experiences of and climate for LGBT people on campus. Of the surveys returned (n=1669), 71% indicated that transgender people were the most

likely to be harassed. Fifty-one percent of respondents hid their gender or sexual identity to avoid harassment, and 19% feared for their safety because of their gender or sexual identity. Respondents hid their identity by not hanging around LGBT areas of campus (10%) and avoiding disclosure of their gender or sexual identity (34%). One limitation of this study is that “transgender” is used as a gender identity (i.e., survey instrument asks “What is your gender?” with allowable responses being either male, female, or transgender), although some transgender people, especially those who fit within the gender binary, would identify their gender identity as “male” or “female,” rather than “transgender.”

Again, although data on transgender students were aggregated with LGB student data, a grounded theory study of three LGBT student organizations at Elkhorn University (Meyer, 2004) indicated the challenges of visibility on campus. Data in the form of field notes from participant observation, memos/reflections, and 15 in-depth interviews indicated tension between LGBT student organizations around three themes: unity/difference, commitment/apathy, and empowerment/disempowerment, with the latter two emphasizing the concept of visibility as the point of contention. Both within and between organizations, participants who served as leaders of the organizations saw their active and visible participation at group events as commitment, and saw members who were not out (i.e. in the closet) as apathetic. Students who were not visible members of these organizations noted the difficult balance between being active in the group when not out as LGBT socially. The empowerment/disempowerment theme also played out as tension around visibility. On one hand, participants noted how it was empowering to see other LGBT-identified students, but how being visible led to being faced with the idea of

being outside the normative of gender and sexual identity. Participants found this disempowering as it led to exclusion at non-LGBT events (Meyer, 2004).

Psychological effects. In the study by Effrig, Bieschke, and Locke (2011), researchers looked at the rates of harassment/discrimination and psychological health of transgender college students, both those seeking mental health treatment (clinical) and those not in treatment (nonclinical), compared to those of students who identified as men or women. The clinical sample consisted of 27,616 participants, 40 of whom identified as transgender, while the nonclinical sample consisted 21,686 participants, 68 of them being transgender. Data were gathered through the Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms (CCAPS) and Standardized Data Set (SDS) surveys.

The first part of the research studied the difference of distress (self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts) and victimization (unwanted sexual contact, and experiencing of harassing, controlling, or abusive behavior) between both samples (clinical and nonclinical) of transgender students, as well as between transgender and cisgender students. Results indicated that treatment-seeking transgender students had significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation. Researchers did not find significantly different rates of self-harm, suicide attempts, or victimization between the clinical and nonclinical samples of transgender students. However, the data revealed that trans participants, both clinical and nonclinical, had significantly more distress and victimization in all areas than non-transgender participants.

The second part of the study looked at the mean differences between transgender and cisgender participants within respective clinical and nonclinical samples on the CCAPS subscales, which includes items such as depression, eating concerns, substance

use, anxiety, hostility, and distress. Extreme differences in sample sizes between transgender and cisgender samples made analyzing significant differences impossible, however there were two instances of noteworthy mean differences. First, the mean scores of clinical transgender participants were notably higher than their cisgender counterparts on the Family Distress CCAPS subscale. Second, nonclinical transgender participants' mean scores for Family Distress and Generalized Anxiety were higher than those of nonclinical cisgender participants. Although this study is limited by small sample sizes (and the idea that “transgender” is the opposite of the “traditional gender identity” (p. 154) of men/women), results of this study indicate higher rates of psychological distress and victimization for students who identify transgender.

The research reviewed illustrates the experiences of transgender students on college campuses, environments where adherence to the gender binary comes with privileges (Bilodeau, 2009). With a hostile climate (Brown et al., 2004; Dugan et al., 2012; McKinney, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010) and little protection in the way of nondiscrimination policies that explicitly name “gender identity/expression” (Beemyn & Pettitt, 2006), transgender students struggle with deleterious psychological effects (Effrig et al., 2011) and the need to negotiate their visibility (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Meyer, 2004; Rankin, 2003) on campus. If marginalization is any indicator of motivation or need to participate in campus activism, it makes sense that transgender college students are engaged in this work.

Spectrum of Privilege

The heterogeneity of the trans population supports the notion that individuals within the group possess different levels of privilege. Just as outside trans communities,

the effects of racism, classism, sexism, etc. influence the experiences of transgender individuals with multiple, intersecting identities. For example, when compared to transgender men, who are largely ignored, trans women are overly sexualized, seen as in need of psychiatric help, and negatively portrayed in the media (Serano, 2007, 2012). Pearce (2012) discusses how individuals with non-binary genders (e.g., agender, third gender, gender fluid, genderqueer, etc.) are considered "not real," and therefore lower on the spectrum of privilege under the trans umbrella.

In a study by Meyer (2010) of two groups of LGBT hate crime victims - White, middle-class versus poor/working class people of color - semi-structured interviews were conducted with 44 participants in New York City. Results of the study indicated that the group consisting of poor/working class LGBT people of color experienced more violence than White, middle class group. In addition, the poor/working class people of color rarely sought professional help post-victimization, and often described hate crimes as a widespread issue since they knew of others who had experienced hate-motivated attacks.

Data indicate that violence, harassment, and discrimination are perpetrated against transgender women and LGBT people of color at disproportionately higher rates. For example, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2014) show 89% of anti-LGBTQ and HIV-affected homicides are of people of color, with most of the victims being transgender women. Surveys of nearly 6,500 transgender people indicate higher rates of unemployment, police harassment, denial of healthcare, homelessness, and violence for transgender people of color (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011).

Transgender Students as Diversity

Supporting transgender college students in their academic and social experiences on campus not only benefits these students, but the entire campus community. Research indicates the importance of diversity to college students' educational outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) used data from surveys both at a single institution (University of Michigan) and a national sample of 184 universities to determine the impact on educational outcomes of interacting with racially and ethnically diverse peers in informal settings. Results indicated positive effects of interaction with diverse peers on learning outcomes, such as intellectual engagement, active thinking, personal development, and academic skills. Interaction with diverse peers had positive effects on the democracy outcomes too as surveys indicated students' preparedness to work in multicultural society after graduation as a result of their college interactions with diverse peers.

Astin's (1993a) national study of undergraduates across 217 institutions of higher education supports these conclusions. He looked at change outcomes of 25,000 students from 1985 to 1989 with the goal to determine effect of diversity on students' values, behavior, and academic success. Results indicated that emphasis on diversity on the part of the institution as a whole and by faculty as a group not only promotes cultural awareness and racial understanding among students, but also positively affects their overall satisfaction with campus life. When students directly interacted with diversity – through curriculum, participation in extracurricular workshops, or socially with peers – it had positive effects on a range of educational outcomes, including retention, overall satisfaction, personal development, empowerment, and participation in campus activism.

A longitudinal survey of 10 public institutions in 1996 and two years later looked at the effects of racial diversity on cognitive, social, and democracy outcomes in college students (Hurtado, 2003). Data from surveys; classroom-based studies; interviews; student focus groups; and an examination of institutions' policies, practices, and curriculum around diversity showed the positive outcomes of diversity on students. Especially important was the quality of interactions with diverse peers, for when faced with conflict, the positive outcomes in these students are undone. However, with frequent and quality opportunities to interact with diverse peers came an increase in cognitive skills, ability to communicate, self-awareness, propensity to engage in social activism, and democratic thinking. The study (Hurtado, 2003) also noted the ability of an institution to produce these outcomes by infusing multiculturalism into curriculum and campus programming.

Transgender students represent one form of diversity, especially if one considers the breadth of gender identities and gender expressions included this category. The literature clearly supports the notion that interactions with diverse peers have positive impacts on the educational outcomes, retention, personal development, and overall satisfaction of college students (Astin, 1993a; Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Although these studies focus on racial and ethnic diversity, one could infer that interaction with peers with diverse gender identities, including transgender students, could have similar positive effects.

Campus Activism

The college campus is an atmosphere of critical thought, political activity, and intellectual endeavor. Students, upon entering the university, become bound by its

institutional rules, yet, at the same time, are taught to think, question, and challenge the status quo. The university serves as a site to practice these newly learned skills (Boren, 2001), and when combined with students' newfound freedom and time, makes the college campus a breeding ground for activism and social change.

Brief history. College campuses serving as the epicenters of activism (Light & Spiegel, 1977) is not new. It is a worldwide phenomenon with historical beginnings in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. In the United States, in the years between the American Revolution and the early 1900s, there is evidence of student activism being directed at universities' policies and practices with regards to issues like food, religion, discipline, curriculum, and governance (Lipset, 1971). In the mid 1800s, students in Northern universities organized antislavery demonstrations and abolitionist movements (Boren, 2001; Lipset, 1971).

In the 1920s, activism efforts organized at the national level with the formation of the National Student Forum, which in 1926, along with other student organizations, got folded into the larger umbrella of the National Student Federation (Boren, 2001). The following decades saw the creation of the National Student League and the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE). The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society organized in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their missions were to fight for social justice and against racial segregation through nonviolent actions (Boren, 2001; Rhoads, 1998). Anti-war demonstrations occupied the efforts of student activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Boren, 2001; Rhoads, 1998). These decades saw the rise of a more radical set of practices, which often led to students being

suspended or expelled from the university, outbreaks of violence, or arrests (Vallela, 1988).

The 1980s were a decade of less tumult, partly because of a change in how universities responded to the demands of activists. During the activism protesting apartheid in South Africa, for example, campus administrators chose to negotiate with students before any violence or riots broke out (Boren, 2001; Rhoads, 1998).

Characteristic of the 1990s were identity-based student groups engaging in activism focused on specific issues (Rhoads, 1998; Vallela, 1988). For example, ethnic minorities worked for the creation and expansion of ethnic studies departments at their universities, while women and LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) groups fought the forces of sexism and homophobia, respectively.

Forms. Activism takes many forms. Marginalized students respond by forming a critical mass before rising up against oppressive forces – from instigating violent riots to holding peaceful demonstrations (Boren, 2001). Students do this at the university level, in response to issues with tuition, policies, tenure, admissions, or curriculum, and also far-reaching issues that deal with politics, the military, the economy, or identity (Vallela, 1988). Rhoads (1998) describes the forms activism takes by saying students have “sat in, taught in, took back, closed down, bombed, fasted, marched, and rallied” (p. 7).

Promoting social change on college campuses includes the familiar organizing of protests, rallies, marches, panel discussions, and boycotts, but also *tabling* where activists set up a table and provide information and printed materials on their cause to passersby, or educational discussions, or *teach-ins*, characterized by their participatory nature (Vallela, 1988).

Effects. College student activism has implications at both the university level in terms of policy and practice, and personally to its beneficiaries and participants. On one level, activism functions as a way to raise campus awareness and drive social change. Social movements bring about palpable change for the intended recipients of the activist efforts. At the individual level, engaging in activism has both positive and negative effects.

Individuals who participate in activism while in college continue to feel its influence long after graduation (DeMartini, 1983; Light & Spiegel, 1977; Vallela, 1988). DeMartini (1983) reviewed data from seven studies with participants who worked as free speech, antiwar, and civil rights activists in the 1960s. Common across the reviewed studies was the participants' continued liberal/radical beliefs, as well as participation in the political process beyond the college years. This study stressed the equal importance between the immediate consequences of social movements in terms of positive change and the long-term effects on participants themselves.

Rhoads and Martinez (1998) researched the Chicano studies movement at UCLA, both in terms of changes made through protest activities and the significance it held for the activists. As a retrospective case study with data from interviews, informants, and document analysis, the research revealed changes at both the institutional and individual level that resulted from the sit-ins, demonstrations, and hunger strikes borne from the UCLA Chancellor's refusal to create a Chicano studies department. In the end, the Chicano Studies Center was created. Although not technically a department, the Center could hire its own faculty, which was one of the main reasons activists demanded departmental status. Personal benefits to the activists included having a chance to

challenge status quo, forcing the university to take steps toward reflecting larger multicultural society, and empowering and legitimizing Chicano culture (Rhoads & Martinez, 1998).

In a five-year grounded theory study of Chicana and Latina activists of a UCLA group called Raza Womyn (Revilla, 2004), participants described the empowerment that comes with fighting against injustices. However, as a result of their activist work came the deflating knowledge of how privilege and power create the oppressive conditions in which they live. Rather than abandoning their activist efforts because of this newfound knowledge, participants in this study used it to fuel continued engagement in social change efforts. Activism allowed them not only to bring meaning to their educational experiences, but also to forge connections between their education and their lives more broadly, and to recognize the connections between themselves and other marginalized communities (Revilla, 2004).

At a more general level, participating in activism at the university means a higher level of involvement in campus life, which benefits the college student (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, Astin's (1975) theory of college persistence states that the likelihood that students will drop out is inversely proportional to their involvement on campus. In other words, the more involved, the less likely they are to drop out. Using longitudinal data collected through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, which represents over 1,300 institutions and 500,000 students, Astin (1993b) studied the change in undergraduates as they move through college. Involvement in academics, with faculty and with peers, had positive correlations with learning and academic performance. Interacting with peers had positive ties to being engaged in leadership opportunities and

social activism. In addition, students were more likely to participate in campus protests if they involved themselves in campus life through volunteering or attending racial/ethnic awareness workshops.

Other literature also supports this conclusion. Tinto (1993) states that with limited social interaction, students are left feeling isolated in their daily lives. This isolation, from difficulty finding others of similar social backgrounds to interact with or unwelcoming, unsupportive faculty, is one reason why students drop out of college. The more marginalized the students, the more profound the effect of attrition (Tinto, 1993).

Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) found involvement in school led to positive advancements in students' personal development. Involvement on campus not only made them more satisfied with their college experience while on campus than uninvolved students, but it extended to their lives after graduation to promote active participation in civic life. Acting as leaders on campus led to increased concern about social issues in the broader context. To cultivate involvement on the part of underrepresented students, there is a need for colleges to offer support through bringing these students together, training, and recruitment of underrepresented faculty.

Using data from nearly 8,000 African American students from 192 institutions of higher education who completed the College Student Experience Questionnaire between 1990 and 2000, Flowers (2004) analyzed how variables of student involvement influenced gains in social and academic development. Overall, the research revealed that involvement had positive effects on educational gains in these students.

Students also report negative consequences to engaging campus activist work. For example, students are at risk for feeling the power the university holds over them by

when it imposes sanctions for engaging in activist work. Vallela (1988) describes the possible consequences, which include local disciplinary proceedings, tickets for trespassing, or criminal charges for disorderly conduct. Findings of Vaccaro's (2011) phenomenological study of queer activists of color who work in campus groups composed predominantly of Whites indicate that these participants experienced a number of negative consequences, including an increase in demands being placed upon them, limited social support, and lack of limit setting and self-care. Participants felt pressured for time, which limited their ability to participate in other extracurricular activities. Although they understood the need to set limits and engage in self-care, they persisted in their activist work out of a sense of obligation to help others. Over time, increased demand on their time, coupled with little support and self-care, put participants at risk for burnout, fatigue, and the need to dial back their responsibilities.

Activism for the benefit of transgender people opens participants to scrutiny of their gender identity, whether or not they identify as transgender. Increased visibility of gender identities outside the normative sometimes exposes these activists to discrimination, prejudice, exclusion, violence, etc. In the study reviewed above, Beemyn and Rankin (2011), data indicated that transgender people who were "out" or open about their transgender identity (i.e. visible) experienced more harassment (40%) and feared for their safety (58%) compared to those who were closeted or out to only a few friends. Because of this, participants said they purposefully hid their gender identity, either often, in the case of MTF, or sometimes, in the case of FTM (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Parallels of the phenomenon of activism leading to visibility occur in other marginalized communities as well. For people with disabilities, being perceived as

“incapable” or “helpless” is one hindrance to their participation in movements working toward social change (Scotch, 1988). Scotch (1998) writes that the stigma of being seen as “disabled...can serve to discourage both self-identification as a member of an excluded group and the likelihood of political action flowing from that identification” (p. 161). Taylor and Raeburn (1995) report that the lesbian, gay, and bisexual sociologists they surveyed identified their participation in identity politics as leading to discrimination in the workplace. Engaging in “personalized political resistance,” in the form of researching, speaking, mentoring and other scholarly pursuits, resulted in visibility of their marginalized sexual identities. Professional consequences of this activism-turned-visibility included prejudicial treatment in hiring and promotion, lack of recognition for their scholarship, and harassment (Taylor & Raeburn, 1995).

These studies were chosen to demonstrate the roles college student activism has on those engaged in it and on the university as a whole. Activism can push institutions to take more strides in toward reflecting larger multicultural society (Rhoads & Martinez, 1998). For participants themselves, with activism comes empowerment (Revilla, 2004), better educational outcomes (Astin, 1993b, 1975; Flowers, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and advancements in personal development (Kuh et al., 1991). Negative effects on students engaged in activism include disciplinary actions brought by the university, but also fines and arrests by outside agencies (Vallela, 1988). But there are intangible effects too such as increased time commitments and pressure to help others at the expense of self-care that have very real consequences for student activists (Vaccaro, 2011). In addition, the nature of activism brings increased attention to its participants. When those individuals are marginalized, increased scrutiny of their identities may be an unwanted

side effect (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Scotch, 1998; Taylor & Raeburn, 1995). Despite negative consequences to those who engage in activism, with its longstanding role at the university, it is likely campus activism will have a place on college campuses for years to come.

Identity Development

One of the most seminal theories in social identity development theory is William Cross's Nigrescence Theory (1971, 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The theory has been revised and updated as research has advanced the theory, with the most current version of the theory being the Expanded Nigrescence Theory (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Cross and Vandiver (2001) seek to explain the development of a Black social identity (as opposed to personal identity; in reference to other group members) in their Expanded Nigrescence theory. Their theory addresses both identity development as a result of normal socialization that occurs in one's lifespan, from infancy to adulthood, and also development as a result of an encounter, or an experience that catalyzes change.

The stages of developing a Black identity start in a period known as Pre-Encounter, where an individual is disconnected from Black life and culture through either assimilation (identifying only as American), self-hatred (hating Black people/culture), or miseducation (accepts attitudes held by dominant culture about Black people/culture). The next stage, Immersion-Emersion, represents a transition period between Pre-Encounter and engagement in Black life and culture. Extremes characterize this stage: individuals present either as anti-White or exclusively focused on Black culture. When individuals not only accept, but have pride in, their Black identity, they are said to have reached the Internalization stage. Individuals who have internalized their Black identity

may continue to put their focus on Black culture and empowerment (Nationalist), see themselves as both Black and American (Biculturalist), or have at least two other identities that have become important in their overall makeup and everyday interactions (Multiculturalist). Those in the Internalization stage exhibit pride in their Black heritage and culture, but are able to work alongside people of diverse identities.

The expanded theory of Nigrescence is useful in framing how activists with marginalized social identities move from organizing their identity around assimilation, miseducation, or self-hatred, to a level of deep engagement in social struggles and cultural life. Cross's model has been extended by a number of scholars to apply to other cultural groups (e.g., feminist identity, Asian identity, Latino identity, LGB identity, etc.), and serves as a useful framework for thinking about transgender identity development.

Transgender identity. Several researchers have proposed models of transgender identity development, which have similarities to the expanded theory of Nigrescence (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The studies reviewed below are particularly useful in providing a foundation for this research in that engaging in activism plays a role in the process of developing a transgender identity. In one such study (Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997), interviews with a non-random sample of 65 male-to-female individuals led researchers to generate a four-step transgender identity development process. Participants represented a diverse sample, described as consisting of 19 crossdressers (2 of them for fetishistic purposes), 41 transsexuals (whom researchers subdivided by surgical status), and 5 gender radicals, the latter group comprised of individuals who, through various means, challenged the notion of gender as binary. Early on, participants felt their gender identities in terms of difference. They were pressured to

act like boys and, thus, kept their cross-gender thoughts and behaviors secret. Further development led participants to self-identify as transgender. Self-identification as transgender was often brought on by finding others who had similar thoughts and feelings, or by learning the language that described their feelings. As adults, social messages of the stigma around cross-gender thoughts and behaviors persisted, often motivating transgender participants to come out to themselves. After self-identifying, participants moved toward coming out to others and displayed more publicly feminine expression. This stage of the process was characterized by fear of how others would react to and cope with their transgender identity. Researchers noted that the individuals in the transsexual groups had less control over their coming out as they had to disclose their transgender identity to therapists or physicians in order to obtain permission for a physical gender transition. Finally, participants would enter a time of finally being able to “be themselves.” For transsexuals and crossdressers in the sample, the desire to be accepted as women in social interactions became paramount, this indicative as “final arrival at their desired self” (Gagné et al., 1997, p. 501). Only the five gender radicals continued to identify as transgender, assisting the community by running a support group, publishing a newsletter, or simply by being visible.

Bockting and Coleman (2007) propose transgender identity development happening in five stages, which they base on Coleman’s (1982) gay identity development model. The five stages are pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, intimacy, and identity integration. Like in the study by Gagné, Tewksbury, and McGaughey (1997), the first stage is characterized by cross- or transgender feelings and facing consequences not conforming to societal expectations of gender expression. The second stage, coming

out, is when people acknowledge their transgender identity to themselves and others. Feelings of fear and rejection are prevalent during this stage of coming out. Transgender people in the exploration stage delve into their new identity by going through a process of learning and experimentation. Meeting others, either in person or via the Internet, is also common. Toward the end of this stage, feelings of shame are replaced by pride. With this comes “enhanced participation and activism” (Bockting & Coleman, 2007, p. 196) in the trans community. The fourth stage is marked by the transgender person establishing intimacy with others. With a new gender role, intimacy may require the person come out twice: first as transgender, and again as gay or lesbian, in the case of same-gender attraction. In the final stage, identity integration, the prominence of the transgender identity may fade into the background as parts of a person’s life, public and private, cohere. Self-acceptance and a positive self-image prevail in this stage. Bockting and Coleman (2007) emphasize that not everyone will go through the same stages, nor necessarily in a linear fashion. Much is dependent upon a person’s personality, support system, local community, level of resilience, etc. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) caution against thinking of stage models as being hierarchical; the final stage of these models do not represent a point that must be achieved, nor one that is attainable by everyone.

Based on semi-structured interviews with two students at a large, public university in the Midwest, Bilodeau (2005) found themes that allowed him to build a transgender identity development model based on one proposed by D’Augelli (1994) for LGB people. Although this study is limited by it having only two participants, the findings are similar to other studies where transgender identity development parallels other on previously proposed stage models. The first process involves exploring beyond

the notions of a traditional gender. In his study, participants found themselves negotiating a range of identities, often experiencing internal turmoil when those identities seemed to conflict (i.e. being transmasculine and a feminist). Taking on a transgender identity is the next process. It is during this stage that participants sought out the support of positive role models. After developing a personal transgender identity, participants in the study took on a transgender social identity. This meant finding a support network, including from campus LGBT organizations. Next, participants in this study came out to parents and other family members, which sometimes brought upheaval to those relationships. In the context of being university students, the fourth process of D'Augelli's framework, developing intimacy, was not discussed by the participants. However, participants did talk about entering a community and their commitment to social activism. Both participants actively challenged transphobia in their everyday lives, and showed their commitment to social change and activism through their "social justice focus" and by being "vocal and visible" (p. 41).

Activist/leadership identity. In addition in trying to explicate transgender identity development, researchers look to understand how students develop activist/leadership identity. In the literature on college student leadership, one step along the path of being a leader means taking on an active role enacting social change to the benefit of humankind (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). Leaders often express their passionate commitment to a cause through engagement in service, activism, or politics.

The link between leadership and activism is clear in the research of Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005). In their grounded theory study of 13 students at a large, Mid-Atlantic university, they sought to understand how leadership

identity developed. Analysis of series of interviews and field notes revealed a set of processes that students go through in each of six stages in developing a leadership identity. The stages are (a) awareness of the existence of leaders, (b) exploration/engagement in organizations, (c) leader identified, where students discover that groups are comprised of leaders and followers (d) leadership-differentiated, where leaders are seen as coming from anywhere within the organization, (e) generativity, where students become activists, and (f) integration/synthesis of leadership into everyday life.

Komives et al., 2005 identified a set of processes that recur in each of the six stages. Initially, participants in this study influenced by several experiences that initiated their leadership development journey. The first of these influences was an adult or peer mentor. Participants would also join organizations motivated by the possibility of making friends, but would learn skills along the way. In addition, the participants learned more about leadership through reflection (i.e. journaling, conversations) or through formal training or retreats. These factors would influence their entry into the second process. Developing self, the second process, was marked by a development in terms of participants' confidence, skills, sense of efficacy, motivation, and self-awareness. In becoming more aware of his identities, one participant in this process worried his being gay would interfere with his ability to garner respect from his followers. Further development into process three brought changes in how participants would interact with groups. The fourth process involves learning from the group and teaching its new members, working collaboratively, would bring a sense of belonging. Change in how participants would see themselves and others was the theme of the fifth process. When

first getting involved in groups, participants saw themselves as followers dependent on a positional leader, but this view begins to change. Entering the sixth process means a broadened view where participants accept that leadership can come from anywhere within an organization, not just the top. The interdependence of all group members is realized in this final process.

The literature includes numerous examples detailing the cyclical processes of activist/leadership and personal identity development in students. For example, Harper and Quaye (2007) conducted a phenomenological study of the experiences of high-achieving African American students who held leadership positions in campus student organizations. Their sample of 32 African American undergraduates attended one of six predominantly white universities in the Midwest. Participants revealed that although they worked primarily from within student organizations dedicated to support Black and other minority students, their commitment was to all marginalized student populations. Through their work at these organizations, these participants learned how to work, value, and communicate with students who were different culturally, while maintaining efforts to improve the experience of other Black students. Researchers conclude these students represent the final stage in development of a Black social identity (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Urrieta (2007) conducted observations and life history interviews with 24 participants to discover the identity production Mexican Americans go through in the process of becoming Chicano activists. In combination with a reinterpretation of their upbringing, identity development occurred as a result engaging in study of their cultural history, but also by participation in contentious activism and assuming positions of

leadership on campus and in the community. The role activism and leadership played in this identity production process continued to influence participants as they made a commitment to raising consciousness in others through careers in education.

In a grounded theory study of 35 Palestinian students attending Israeli universities (Makkawi, 2004), experiences of discrimination and inequity created a sense of national identity that was cited by participants as the reason for engaging in campus activism. Activism, in turn, played a role in further development of national identity. Female participants in the study noted the development of both their national and gender identities along two axes, and saw activism as a method for consolidating the two. Participants in this study described the effects activism had on their personal development in terms of an increase in their interpersonal skills and ability to lead.

Theoretical Framework

The literature presented thus far gives us a glimpse into the processes for transgender and activist identity development, and the potential impacts on transgender college student activists. Asking the participants in my study to describe the place where their transgender identity and activist identity meet suggests a theoretical framework that specifically addresses intersections of identity.

Intersectionality

The theoretical framework useful in guiding this research is that of intersectionality. This theory was first conceptualized with the premise that oppressions based on sex, race, and class, and later sexual orientation, are interlocking, cannot be separated, and are experienced simultaneously by those on the margins of those categories (Combahee River Collective, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991). Since then,

intersectionality has been expanded to help understand multiple group membership for both oppressed *and* privileged identities (Cole, 2009). What is formed at the point where the multiple axes of identity intersect is a new identity, no longer recognizable as its constituent parts. The newly synthesized identity shapes individuals' experiences (Parent & Moradi, 2013), and, if formed from marginalized identities, triggers "distinctive forms of oppression" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 378) different from that experienced along one axis. For the college student participants in my study, it is the intersection of their transgender and activist identities – along with other social identities – that is under investigation.

Intersectionality is a particularly useful lens for this research because of its origins in describing activists. Those with multiple, overlapping marginalized identities experience racism, sexism, classism, etc. in ways that make their struggle for social and political change unique. The needs of individuals with intersectional identities are not attended to by groups fighting for justice based on a single marginalized identity category (Combahee, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) call this exclusion "intersectional invisibility" (p. 378), theorizing the phenomenon occurs when identities do not align with the "prototypes" of their respective groups. They use the example of an African-American woman: she is not the prototype of African-American, which is that of a man, nor the prototype of a woman, which is a white woman. Not just subjugated based race and not solely on sex, individuals with multiple oppressed identities are "marginal members within marginalized groups" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 381). Analysis and interpretation based in intersectionality will ensure the group is not essentialized to one shared identity (i.e. transgender), which overlooks

within-group differences and interactions between identity categories (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007).

Intersections of Transgender and Activist/Leadership Identity

There are a handful of studies where the development of student activist/leadership and transgender identity is explored together (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a, 2005b; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Although intersectionality is not explicitly named as the theoretical framework for the research, I include the four studies below as examples of research that look at the intersection of students' transgender (or LGB or queer) identity and activist/leadership identity.

Understanding how social identity interacts with leadership experiences of college students is the purpose of one study (Renn & Ozaki, 2010) involving semi-structured interviews of 18 student leaders at a large Midwest university. Participants – eight of whom identified as LGB and/or T – cited three motivations for becoming involved in identity-based groups on campus including previous experience in leadership, to engage in the social aspect of college life, and to be with peers who were exploring similar identities. Despite limitations around sample size and makeup, researchers uncovered several factors that affected participants' experiences of leadership in identity-based organizations. First, there was a cycle where involvement would generate a greater salience of social identity, which led to more public visibility. Greater visibility would bring about further involvement, starting the cycle again. Also, being involved in leadership had both positive and negative effects on participants' academics. At times, involvement meant being overburdened with time commitment, which hindered academic progress. However, sometimes leadership experiences helped participants learn how to

manage their time, and stimulated further interest in exploring their identities through academic work. Finally, other groups in the university context affected their experiences with leadership. Differences in identity politics and competition for finite resources meant conflict between groups on campus.

All participants in the study saw leadership as positional, although researchers admit that their recruitment efforts may have influenced this response as they only sought positional leaders for the study (Renn & Ozaki, 2010). One finding that stood out, however, was the difference in how participants thought about the interaction of their social and leadership identities. Participants with little interaction between these two identities were said to be on parallel paths. All the LGBT participants ($n=8$), however, were on merged paths where there was no separation between their leadership/activist identities and their LGBT identities, although no participants in the study initially sought or expected to be leaders in their respective identity-based groups.

In a study by Renn and Bilodeau (2005a), 15 LGBT-identified leaders from three universities in the Midwest participated in research that looked at the relationship between LGBT identity and involvement in campus activism and leadership. The diverse sample participated in open-ended interviews, which were analyzed using grounded theory methodology against the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model developed by Komives, Longersbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006). The researchers found that involvement in identity-based organizations on the campuses led to a development of both the leadership and LGBT identities of the participants. All the six LID stages were represented by these participants, although not every participant exhibited development through all six stages.

The first stage, Awareness, where the participants recognized the existence of leadership, was sometimes coupled with coming out as LGB or T (Renn and Bilodeau, 2005a). In the next Exploration/Engagement stage, participants learned new skills as they experimented with leadership. With these came a sense of confidence. Stages three and four, Leadership-Identified and Leadership-Differentiated, respectively, involved participants in this study moving from seeing leadership as positional (stage three) to recognizing that leadership can come from anywhere in the group (stage four).

Participants started to see their engagement with the group as important and meaningful, and commitment grew with continued involvement. Stage five, Generativity, was when commitment to the group turned to passion. It is during this stage that participants were very active, keeping the group going and helping others get develop their skills and capabilities. Seeing the wider purpose and making a lifelong commitment to the work of the identity-based group marks the six stage, Internalization/Synthesis. Participants of this study continued to strengthen their confidence in this stage.

In another study by Renn and Bilodeau (2005b), focus was on the participants' LGBT or queer identity development. This case study looked at the intersections between engagement in leadership activities and LGBT/queer identity in seven undergraduates at Michigan State University involved in planning the 2002 Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference (MBLGTACC). Data from interviews and observations were analyzed using D'Augelli's (1994) identity development model. Findings indicate that planning the conference helped participants come out of the closet as LGB and/or T, leaving internalized phobia behind. Conference planning led to the establishment of supportive and positive social connections, which

helped participants further solidify their LGBT identities. Although this study did not address the fourth or fifth process of D'Augelli's model (coming out to parents and achieving intimacy, respectively), the sixth process, that of entering the LGBT community, was evident in these participants. They made a commitment to participating in activism and started to see social justice work more broadly, reaching across many marginalized communities. Although limited to participants at one institution, findings indicate that the identity-development processes interact with each other, rather than occurring sequentially in stages. For example, developing an identity as an activist committed to a larger community (the 6th process) helped these participants establish personal and social identities as LGBT (processes 1-3).

Finally, Renn (2007) explored the interactions between gender/sexual identities and leadership identity. Renn used a grounded theory methodology using data from interviews with 15 students at three institutions of higher education in the Midwest: Research University ($n=8$), Regional University ($n=5$) and Liberal Arts College ($n=2$). From the data, Renn (2007) developed an involvement-identity cycle, which starts with students' involvement in LGBT student organizations leading to them taking roles as leaders. Increased involvement in leadership activities led to more visibility of their LGBT identity, which, in turn, further entrenched them in leadership. Through this cycle came an inextricable link between participants' leader/activist and LGBT/queer identities. The merged identities fall into four types that differ along two dimensions – approach to sexual/gender identity and style of leadership. Participants exhibited either LGB identity (i.e. not heterosexual) or queer identity, marked by the desire to challenge norms and

break down categories of gender and sexuality. Along the other dimension, participants were either positional leaders or activists who lead to transform.

The four resulting identity types are LGB(T) Leader, LGB(T) Activist, Queer Leader, and Queer Activist (Renn, 2007). The first identity type, LGB(T) Leader, represents out lesbian or gay students (this type contained no bisexual or transgender students) who have a traditional view of leadership and work within the confines of the system. LGB(T) Activists, although viewed sexual orientation similarly, approached leadership with the desire to disrupt systems that marginalize people, not just those who are LGBT-identified. These activists usually had more experience than LGB(T) leaders, and often worked collaboratively to enact social change. The third identity type, Queer Leader, did not occur in this study's sample. Renn questions whether students could ever exhibit traits of this identity type, but includes it nevertheless as a theoretical possibility. Finally, Queer Activists had merged their LGBT and leadership identities. All transgender participants fell within this identity type. Not only did participants of this identity type challenge normative approaches to sexuality and gender, but they also worked to transform systems completely. Queer activists had a "sense of urgency" (Renn, 2007, p. 324) to their work. They saw connections with other marginalized communities, and fought to make change through committee work, engagement in politics, and by organizing protests.

Renn cautions against seeing the queer identity as more developed than that of LGB, but does describe the activist/transformational leadership style as more advanced than the positional one. Data indicate that during the course of the study, six participants

shifted from one identity dimension to another, for example from being LGB to queer, from leader to activist, or both (LGB Leader to Queer Activist).

The author lists a number of implications for this research that revolve around how advisors best interact with LGBT leaders (Renn, 2007). First is how advisors can use identity as a way to attract students to be involved in campus leadership and activism. The diversity of how students think about their LGBT identity or leadership styles might need to be explained to students as they express a desire to become involved in an identity-based organization. Finally, advisors need to make clear the links between visibility of LGBT/queer identity and involvement in leadership, and the potential risks to being out on a college campus.

Gaps in the Literature

The most obvious gap in the literature is studies that specifically look at the identity and activism of transgender students, although in studies of LGBT student activists, some samples contain participants who identify as transgender. This study is thus important in that it specifically addresses this gap by *only* inviting participants who are transgender-identified. This is important in that there are unique ramifications specific to transgender students as their gender identities are often met with resistance at every level of university life. Finally, intersectionality as a theoretical framework has guided research of individuals marginalized by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability status, but no studies to date have applied this theory to transgender college student activists.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to learn more about the connections between the experiences of transgender college students, engagement in campus activism, and identity development. The review showed that transgender students are marginalized on campus on multiple levels, including personal interactions, and by institutional policies and practices. These experiences have negative implications for the academic, social, mental, and physical health of these students, but it is also these experiences can motivate transgender students to engage with social activism and leadership opportunities. Activism can not only be a catalyst for campus-level change, but as with other forms of involvement, has positive effects on students' learning, skills, and personal growth and identity development. Supporting transgender students at institutions of higher education is important, not only for the students' growth and lives, but also for the student body as a whole. Interactions with diverse peers, with trans students representing one form of diversity, improve the outcomes for the students involved.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Stories serve as a way for us to organize, find meaning, and make sense of experiences in our lives. As a form of qualitative research, narrative inquiry uses these stories – the events that transpired, the characters involved, the context, and consequences to action – in order to understand individuals’ experiences. Narrative studies are marked by small sample sizes, but despite the inability to generalize to a larger population, “any narrative is significant because it embodies – and gives us insight into – what is possible and intelligible within a specific social context” (Chase, 2005, p. 667). Because narrative research is particularly well suited for research into identity (Riessman, 1993), I chose it to study the intersection of students’ transgender and activist identities.

Narrative Inquiry

There are two approaches to narrative inquiry: analyzing the stories that participants tell by looking for themes across their narratives, or forming a narrative from participants’ descriptions or stories of their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes these two approaches, and privileges the latter, where coherent stories are constructed from the data. Data are looked at as a whole, but revealed through details of thought, feeling, and action that are woven into a story to help us understand the participants’ experiences.

Narratives are unlike journalistic reports in that they do not have a one-to-one correspondence with what actually took place. Instead, narrators add their interpretations during the course of telling their stories. The narrative form is good at relaying the complexity of lived experience and the subtleties of identity. A narrative study looks at

experiences as a whole through time: not *just* at the personal level (how the participant felt, what the participant thought) and not *just* at the social level either (with the participant representing one agent within a social context), but as a blend of the two (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Stories told at one time with one researcher in a particular location will differ from the “same” story told at another time, place, or with another researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe narratives as in constant flux; as they are “lived, told, relived, retold” (p. 9) narratives – and the identities participants construct through them (Riessman, 2008) – are always taking on new shapes. In their telling, past experiences are reinterpreted, which changes participants’ view of the future (Connelly & Clandin, 2006). In this way, narrative inquiry is a natural choice to study this topic as my study participants are in constant negotiation with their activism and take on fluidity of identity.

Chase (2005, 2011) notes that simply giving participants opportunities to talk about their experiences provokes positive change within them, both in terms of healing, and through the empowerment that comes by allowing these marginalized individuals a chance to have their voices heard. Several participants thanked me for allowing them to be a part of the research and giving them the opportunity to tell their stories.

Because stories are a familiar medium, audiences are often able to relate to them; this connection can create empathy and may provoke social action (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2008). As others read participants’ stories and begin to understand their circumstances, I hope they may move to enact revisions to policies and practices that burden these and other trans students.

Study Design

Participants

This research relies on the voices of transgender students who work as activists on their college campus. In order to participate in this research, participants had to: (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) be enrolled in an urban college or university (undergraduate or graduate level), (c) self-identify as trans, and (d) engage in campus activism.

Context

The research participants for this study were recruited from urban college campuses in the Midwest region of the United States. For this study, I defined an urban college or university as a one that is located in an area with a large, dense aggregate of diverse people (Wirth, 1938). I situated this study in the urban environment because cities, although still representing spaces that enforce rigid gender rules (Doan, 2007, 2009), have historically served as places where marginalized populations, such as transgender people, have flocked. Urban areas present opportunities to meet others with similar identities; promote tolerance for diversity; allow for anonymity; provide resources, social opportunities, and support groups; and serve as centers for social activism and political organizing (Doderer, 2011). Because of the overall limited number of potential participants – college students who are both transgender and activists, *and* willing to participate in research – I was open to participation by students from both public and private, two- and four-year institutions, although all participants ended up coming from one of two public, four-year universities.

Sample

I employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) by selecting “information-rich cases” (p. 169) – participants who could best help me understand the research problem and provide insights to my research questions. First, I specifically sought participants who occupy different places under the trans umbrella, and who represent a range of courses of study, ages, genders, abilities, cultures, races, and ethnicities. Second, I looked for participants who engage deeply in activities that promote social change, such as, but not limited to, advocacy work, formal education of others, rallies, protests, or who have leadership positions at identity-based organizations in an urban university campus context. A diverse sample was important because of the intersectional frame of this study. Nine individuals contacted me expressing interest in participating. Of those nine, two did not complete the consent form and chose not to move beyond this step. Although I had designed an email questionnaire (Appendix A) to obtain information about participants’ identities and engagement in activism in order to construct a diverse sample, three of the participants did not complete the questionnaire. Ultimately, the sample size for this study was comprised of the seven remaining individuals who had expressed interest, regardless of their responses to the questionnaire.

Recruitment

Recruitment took place in several ways. First, I asked two university staff members to distribute an advertisement (see Appendix B) across the University of Wisconsin system through LGBTQ listservs and to members of the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. Those same university staff members passed along information about the study to individual students they believed to fit the criteria I established. Second, I sent the recruitment advertisement via email to over 15 LGBT

student organizations at public and private universities in the Great Lakes region of the Midwest, as well as two LGBT activist organizations. As people responded, I used snowball sampling (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Patton, 1990) to find other individuals. Snowball sampling for this study involved asking participants to give a copy of the recruitment flier to other people they know who might have had an interest in being part of the research. I did not intentionally recruit individuals who participated in my previous research studies, although one participant in this study participated in previous research of mine.

After potential participants contacted me, I responded with an email asking them to complete the short questionnaire that (a) verified they met the eligibility criteria, (b) asked questions about their transgender identity, other identities, and engagement in activism, and (c) assured their willingness to review and sign the IRB-approved consent form. I responded to any questions they had about the consent form or study. Once I determined their eligibility and alignment with the diversity requirements of my desired sample, we scheduled an initial meeting/interview. At this initial meeting, I asked the potential participant to review and complete the IRB consent form, and responded to any additional questions they had about the research.

Incentives

An incentive was offered to participants. At the completion of all research activities, I made a \$25 cash donation to the non-profit or campus-based organization of their choice. Participants chose whether this donation was given in their name or anonymously.

Data Collection

My source of data for this research was one-on-one interviews. I used these qualitative data to construct a story of the intersection of students' transgender and activist identities. I conducted three interviews with each participant over the course of the Fall 2013 semester. All participants consented to having the interviews captured with the Zoom H2 audio recorder. Interviews took place at a location chosen by the participants, including their apartment, online via Skype, or at their university's library. The purpose of the first interview, in addition to obtaining informed consent and responding to any questions the participant had about the research, was to learn more about the participant, in particular their trans identity. The goal of the second interview was to learn about who the participant is as an activist. Finally, the third interview focused on the intersection of participants' trans, activist, and other identities. Although the focus of each interview was different, the theme of intersectionality spanned all three interviews.

Paget (1983) describes the interview as a "search procedure" (p. 88) where researchers look for information, as they would through a library database, from their participants. Narrative researchers generally begin by inviting participants to become narrators (Chase, 2005), and facilitate their storytelling by asking broad, open-ended questions (Riessman, 1993). Although I had prepared an interview guide with five to fifteen questions per interview (Appendix C), along with specific probe questions to encourage further conversation, my role ultimately ended up being one of a listener. With three of the participants, there were sessions where I did not refer to my protocol during the interviews. During these sessions, participants launched into storytelling

without prompting immediately upon sitting down in the interview space and I kept the conversation going by asking for examples, clarification, or other probing questions.

As Chase (2005) recommends for narrative inquiries, my entire interview was framed by an overarching question (a) designed to get at what I want to know and (b) that promoted continued storytelling on the part of the participant. That overarching question was: How do you as a transgender college student describe the intersection between your gender and activist identities? I began initial interviews with easy-to-answer questions (e.g. How old are you? What is your major?) “with the intent of starting a pattern to the conversation, establishing the subject’s ability to answer, and putting the respondent at ease” (Dilley, 2000, p. 133).

I let participants speak without the interruptions characteristic of interviews adherent to a standardized set of questions (Riessman, 1993). As participants continued to tell their story, the interview quickly changed into a joint construction as my interpretation was incorporated into the unfolding narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Answers to initial questions led to other, new questions, and the interview continued to evolve (Paget, 1983). At the end of each interview, I checked in with the participant to see how they were feeling, gave them the opportunity to ask me any questions (Josselson, 2007), and described the focus of the interviews to follow.

Eliciting extended, storied responses in interview situations was something I anticipated having trouble with simply because of my limited experience in narrative inquiry. Because of this, I tested my interview protocol and approach with a local transgender activist (one who cannot participate in this research because she is not a college student) to practice evoking replies in the form of stories. As a result of this test,

I learned that adopting a conversational style might better elicit data in storied form. In addition, it forced me to think about adding probe questions that begin, “Tell me about a time when...” or “Tell me a story about a specific instance when...”

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warn that even after all the interviews are completed, researchers often realize during the writing stage the need to go back to the participants and collect more data. I did request further information from two of the participants.

Data Analysis

Analysis does not begin once data are collected, but occurs at every step of a narrative study. It is an ongoing, iterative process that is continually evolving as stories are selected, re-formed, ordered, and turned into a larger narrative (Bold, 2012; Frank, 2012). From the very beginning when I selected my research topic, to when a reader cozies up with a copy of my dissertation, analysis involves looking at the narratives and interpreting their meaning.

Riessman (1993) describes five stages of interpretation in narrative studies: attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, and reading. The first and second stages, *attending* and *telling*, and the fifth, final stage, *reading*, are outside the control of the researcher. Narrators choose (attending) what to talk about (telling) in their stories; readers make their own interpretations upon perusal (reading) of the final narrative. It is the third and fourth stages of interpretation that are guided by the researcher. My decisions around these stages – *transcribing* and *analyzing* – are described below.

Transcribing. After the interviews were complete, I transcribed the audiotaped sessions into written text. In order to represent interviews in a way truest to their original

form, I denoted the pauses, false starts, and word repetitions on the part of the narrator, as well as any of my questions, interjections, or other vocalizations. The narrator's emotions, such as laughter, uncertainty, disbelief, or anger, were also noted.

True to the lens of intersectionality, I then rearranged the transcripts into three columns, with each column containing interview data of one of three types of stories (see Figure 1). The first column contains stories where participants' transgender identity, including its intersection with other identities, is most prominent. The third column is the stories where participants emphasize their activist identity, either in isolation of or intersecting with other identities. The middle column contains the stories where the transgender, activist, and other identities of participants intersect. Background or other contextual information remained as in the original transcripts, in a single column that stretches across the page. The three-column transcript was a preliminary way of visualizing the location and intersections of identities of the participant while maintaining a cohesive transcript of each interview in its entirety.

Analyzing. My analysis of the transcripts involved a process of narrative reduction (Riessman, 1993) where the data were transformed into restoried stories (McCormack, 2004). The benefit of this type of re-forming of participants' stories is that the narratives are grounded in context, contain details that demonstrate complexity of experience, and are open to multiple interpretations on the part of readers (McCormack, 2004). For this study, the data in the middle column, which directly address intersecting identities, were reconfigured into another story, enhanced by data in the first and third columns, and contextualized with information from the page-wide column. Together, these serve as the foundation for the stories that comprise the final narrative. Selection of

these parts took place on three levels: in *what* was said (a turning point, key events, epiphanies, etc.), in *how* it was said (omissions, emphases, sequence, etc.), and its contextual importance (Paget 1983; Riessman, 1993).

<p>Stories where transgender identity is most prominent placed in the first column. (Data where other identities intersected with transgender identity were placed here.)</p>	<p>Stories where transgender and activist identities intersect placed in the middle column.</p>	
<p>Background information or stories related solely to identities outside of transgender/activist placed in a page-wide column.</p>		
		<p>Stories where activist identity is emphasized placed in the third column. (Data where other identities intersected with activist identity were placed here.)</p>

Figure 1. Sample transcript format

Riessman (1993) urges researchers to consider how much raw data are revealed to readers as opposed to how much of the story will be researchers' interpretations of the participant's narrative. This balance is weighted more on the former where the participants' stories were left intact, recognizing, however, that even these interpretations don't represent *the* truth. I did not conduct an analysis where the narratives are parsed into themes and then compared across cases. In this type of thematic analysis, the stories appear in their raw form, broken into sections by theme (Riessman, 2008). Instead, I

looked at the stories as whole, which allows for consideration of the context and my interpretations as seen through the lens of intersectionality.

My analysis was guided by the desire to understand the intersections between college students' transgender, activist, and other identities, as well as my position relative to the research (Bold, 2012). It is important to consider my influence on the data analysis and final narrative. The stories that participants chose to share were influenced both by the immediate context, including our relationship, as described above, as well as larger social context (Bold, 2012). My analysis was affected in the same ways – relationship with the participant, by the time and place of the data gathering, and by my own experiences that affect how I interpreted the participant's words and behaviors.

Final Narrative

I organized the results into a final narrative comprised of the stories of each research participant. The stories are written in first person to allow readers to connect with the participants in a more personal way (Coulter & Smith, 2009). The participant narratives produced through this research contain the same elements as any other story: plot and scene. Plot and scene serve to develop relationships between seemingly discrete elements of a story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Meaning that was not apparent when data were in their raw form is revealed as experiences were organized into stories. Plot introduces the element of time, including the past, present, and future (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). Time in a narrative study is bounded. For my research, the period of time I investigated is the college years of my participants, although their past and future are referenced in their descriptions of the present.

Scene is the place where the events play out, where characters interact. Scene consists of the physical environment, and is influenced by the broader social context. In this research, my participants' stories take place on their college campus and among friends and colleagues, and tended to be contextualized in three "locations": the place where emphasis was on their transgender identity; the place where their activist identity was most prominent; and in a complex, overlapping space where their transgender, activist, and other identities intersected, yet were constantly shifting in their balance.

The final narrative is not simply a collection of separate stories with focus on the details of each participant's experience, but insight into how their meaning as a whole contributes to knowledge on the intersections of their identities. I introduce the participants and their stories, use an inductive approach to draw connections between them, but leave interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations for future research to the final chapter.

Ethical Considerations

In my research, I have an ethical duty to ensure appropriate relationships with my participants, and also to arrange for their consent, confidentiality, and well being, all while maintaining solid scholarship in terms of the accuracy and validity of my interpretations and conclusions (Josselson, 2007).

Relationships. In narrative inquiry, the relationship between researcher and participants should be one rooted in trust and equality (Chase, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It is important to pay attention to researcher-participant relationships because of the power differences inherent in these pairings, especially being mindful of their potential to devolve into ones where the researcher exploits, interferes with, or plays

savior to participants (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Narrative inquiry often yields a close connection between the researcher and the participant, especially when they have experiences in common (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and I expect that the duration of this study will strengthen the relationship between us. Because many transgender individuals are in the habit of regulating social information about their identity in efforts to avoid prejudicial treatment or discrimination, as is the case with others with “stigmatized” conditions or identities (Goffman, 1959, 1963), establishing a solid relationship between us was key in getting deeper into the sensitive aspects of their experiences (Deyhle, Hess, & LeCompte, 1992; Josselson, 2007).

I started to build these respectful relationships during our first interview where I explained my position relative to the research topic and my interest in it. I began each interview talking about my own journey as a transgender person: about being born female, starting a gender transition at age 34, and facing situations that inspired me to become an activist. I also spoke with participants about how the focus of my activism shifted away from trans-related causes as the salience of my identity as a parent grew. I revealed that this shift, made possible by my ability to pass as a cisgender man, was deliberate in order to lower risks to my family. Making explicit my transgender identity and involvement in activism seemed to be important in not only explaining my motivation for pursuing this research, but because it affected how I relate to my participants. The initial interviews were particularly important for participants who I did not already know, as it set the tone for future encounters.

My relationship with the participants determined what happened during interviews too in terms of what meaning was generated and what knowledge was

constructed. Mishler (1986) describes balanced relationships between researcher and participant as a component of ensuring that research interviews are not simple verbal exchanges where I ask a question and the participant answers the question, but rather contextualized discourse that allows for more natural conversation.

Confidentiality, consent, and wellbeing. In addition to considering my relationships with participants, it was important to ensure that participants understood my commitment to their confidentiality, consent, and wellbeing. The transgender population is particularly vulnerable to social, physical, legal, psychological, etc. risk. As is true in other settings, at the university, transgender people are likely to experience discrimination in the classroom, prejudicial treatment by peers, difficulty navigating systems divided by gender (housing, healthcare, recreational sports, etc.), or biased treatment in the workplace. Using pseudonyms was a first step toward confidentiality and minimization of these risks, but more important is maintaining the security of the audiotapes and research documents, as they contain other information that could yield the identities of the participants (Deyhle, Hess, & LeCompte, 1992). I created a codebook for names, locations, organizations, etc. so that all identifying information could be excluded from the final narratives, but could be reconstructed (by me), if need be, in the future (Josselson, 2007).

Consent is an ongoing process that involves not only participants' understanding that their participation is voluntary, and that they are welcome to discontinue the research at any time (Appendix D) (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), but also knowing that they will have an opportunity to contribute to what happens to the data after the interviews are over. To address the latter half of this process, I made available to participants their interview

transcripts, the draft narrative, which included my interpretations, and the final product. One participant requested to review the interview transcripts and suggested minor revisions; five of the seven participants requested to read the drafts of their narratives.

Consent and confidentiality are major factors that contribute to participants' wellbeing. Knowledge of the ability to withdraw from the study at any time and of their anonymity can allay anxieties they might have about embarrassing themselves or jeopardizing relationships with friends, colleagues, or student organizations, on top of the aforementioned risks, such as physical and legal ones.

Validation

The concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are often used in qualitative studies to evaluate trustworthiness of research. Because of its highly interpretive, dynamic nature, Riessman (1993) defines parallel methods for validating narrative research: correspondence, coherence, persuasiveness, and pragmatic use. In my study, I employed these four methods to ensure the trustworthiness of my research.

Correspondence. Correspondence, similar to member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), involves taking raw data, in the form of transcripts and observation notes, and my interpretations as draft narratives, back to participants to ensure they correspond to what participants actually said *and* meant. Throughout the interview process, I approached the participants with the question, *Did I get it right?*, and respectfully listened to their feedback. However, I acknowledge that narratives are constantly shifting, and that ultimately the decisions related to analysis and conclusions are mine. Josselson (2007) notes that participants have mixed reactions to reading researchers' interpretations

of their stories, sometimes upset by not seeing their exact words, and sometimes delighted to get a new perspective on their experiences.

Coherence. One aspect of improving the validity of a narrative study involves making sure the participants' goals, what the narrators do linguistically to get their point across, and the themes that run through the data match. The more coherence that exists between these elements, the more a reader can trust the researcher's interpretations. For example, during the description of how it feels to be involved in activism while keeping their transgender identity secret, I might hear metaphors such as *I was stranded on a deserted island*, or comparisons to events that commonly evoke loneliness. At the same time, I would expect the themes of loneliness, isolation, and withdrawal to occur throughout the narrative, not just in that one story.

Persuasiveness. In order for a narrative study to be persuasive, the interpretation must be reasonable based on the available evidence. An important aspect of ensuring persuasiveness is also to consider alternative interpretations.

Pragmatic use. Determining a narrative study's pragmatic use shifts responsibility to others as they decide whether the research provides a solid enough foundation on which to base their future work. I would be able to defend the decisions I made throughout my study if other researchers wanted to validate the research for themselves.

In addition to the four ways of establishing validity in narrative studies, I undertook other efforts to establish the trustworthiness of my research. First, although objectivity is not possible within the qualitative paradigm (Patton, 1990), I made my theoretical lens, relevant personal history, and relationship to the participants explicit in

an effort to lend understanding for the interpretations I take from the research. In addition, I maintained an audit trail of records related to my study, including raw data such as audio files of interviews and original observation notes, analytical memos, and personal communication with participants.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The seven individuals who participated in this study are diverse in how they identify within the broader category of trans (Table 1). All the participants are from large, public, four-year universities, and six out of seven participants are undergraduate students. The graduate student is a doctoral candidate. As evident in the narratives, the participants represent a breadth of ages, genders, socioeconomic classes, cultures, religions, races, and ethnicities. They engage in activism both informally, through one-on-one education, for example, as well as through formal programs or campus organizations.

In the following narratives, participants describe the place where their trans and activist identities meet, as well as the ways their other identities come into play at that intersection. Their stories reveal the complexity of their lived experiences and the nuances of their identities. Each narrative is written in first person to allow readers to make connections with the participants (Coulter & Smith, 2009).

Table 1

Demographic Information of Research Participants

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Trans Identity</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Pronoun</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Other Salient Identities</u>
Jae	Androgynous	Multiracial Person of color	24	ze/zir/zim	Communication (Minor in German)	Androgynous Brony Furry Queer
Ash	Agender	Jewish White	21	Does not use third- person pronouns (uses 'Ash' instead)	Women's Studies (Minor in social work)	Class privileged Culturally/ethnically Read as cis man U.S. born
Arden	Genderqueer	White	25	they/their/them	Art History (Minor in Classics)	Ally Privileged Upper middle class
Sal	Trans	White	35	he/his/him	English	Academic Butch Male Queer
Jack	Trans	Korean American	45	he/his/him	Information Science (Certificates in Healthcare Informatics, Digital Arts & Culture)	Adopted Nerd/Geek Old
Steve	Non-binary conforming	Brown Punjabi/Indian	19	they/their/them	Spanish Education	Androsexual Education privilege Sikh
Luka	Gender fluid	Italian Jewish White	21	they/their/them	American Culture	Monogamous Pansexual Survivor Upper class background

Note. Identities presented are ones participants described during interviews. They appear using the participants' language/phrasing and in alphabetical order. All identified under trans* and activist umbrellas, and as students. Every participant is an undergraduate student with the exception of Sal.

Narratives

Jae

There are a lot of identities that are salient and important to me.

I'm androgynous, always in the middle. I don't see myself as a man or a woman. I see myself as pretty. I wear both men and women clothes; sometimes I put on my face, and other times I go Plain Jane. I always get double takes: is that a man or a woman? I do identify with the trans community. There is a big difference between sex and gender, however. I cannot stress that enough. Personally, I'm happy with my biological sex. I have no plans to transition. I can't say that I won't transition; I just don't plan to right now.

I use the men and women bathroom, and people are shocked when they see me going in or coming out. Some people pretend I'm not there. People assume that because of the way I'm dressed they know what to expect from me. There was these girls earlier in the semester who were joking and pointing at me.

"Could those pants be any more tight ... or curvy?"

"Hashtag: he looks like he's going to be the next mass shooting."

"Hashtag: I don't want to be the next statistic."

I'm also a person of color. I use that term because it's easier than multi-racial. People think I'm Middle Eastern; sometimes they think I'm Hispanic. Or Samoan. My thing is just ask. My parents told me my mother was part Irish, French, and Black, and my father is part Black and some other type of European white. Supposedly.

I say my sexual orientation is queer because it's vague, open, and left up to interpretation. It gets looped together with my gender identity under queer.

Predominantly, my sex partners have been all male. I do have interest in women, but only as play partners. Not sexually.

I'm also a Brony, an older person who's a fan of My Little Pony... outside the normal demographic. But it more than just fandom: it's about challenging society's gender roles and the expectations that come along with them. And a Furry. A Furry is someone who has an anthropomorphic persona. It's another way of expressing yourself or role-playing. Some people see it as a sexual fetish; some just put on a fur suit and hang out. I can't afford a fur suit right now.

I also do drag. I don't really consider that a gender identity, just more an expression of gender. My second year at university, I found out about the drag show. It was a big moment for me. My drag mother passed on a few of her items and gave me my first outfit. Really a pretty big moment in my life. People said that that's when they saw me at my happiest. I like to be pretty, if that makes sense. As long as I feel pretty, I'll feel happy.

There is an overlap between drag and activism: drag is an expression of gender, an expression of how you see your inner self. Activism is an expression of how you see or want the world to be. So they are both different expressions of yourself, in a way – what you want yourself or the world to be.

So I'm an activist. I have a summer internship working with several non-profit organizations. I'm going to be making phone calls, raising awareness, going to events. One organization addresses pollution affecting fresh body waters. Lake Michigan is getting more and more terrible every year. As a kid, I used to put on jammers and go

swimming in the lake. Last time I looked at it, I thought, "I'm not going to jump into that!"

Activism to me means putting aside my personal needs or thoughts and doing something for the greater good. I believe in trans rights, but at the same time I believe if there was something that was going to make the trans community progress more, I would step down and support that – become part of the group, in a way. I think it's about focusing on the bigger picture, and not just your own personal needs or wants. Or it should be.

I feel that if I were to disappear there would be ten other people to take my place. I really do not feel like my being itself is really a necessity; I'm more a resource that these organizations can use. I am more than happy to give as much as I can to them.

My trans identity gave me an in into activism, and it's what drives me. I definitely have a personal opinion when there's something trans- or LGBT-related. Being trans, I'm more motivated to do something related to human or trans rights, versus the environment, like I'm doing this summer. I do believe in cleaning up the earth and going green, but it's not something I'm focused on because it's not one of my key identities. It's my identity that keeps me engaged in it on the long term.

I use my androgynous look to my advantage in activism. Being visibly transgressive is a conversation starter a lot of times; the whole shock factor really gets people's attention. If I want to talk with them about an issue, I can see them thinking, "You look interesting with your pink wig, furry vest, and nice jacket. I want to talk to you!" Since I study communication at school, I can pick up more on body language. If they seem interested in what I'm talking about, I can continue. If they start to walk away,

I can leave them alone. Based on my education and me being me, this is where I fit in terms of being an activist. Of course, it depends on where you are. If I'm trying to get signatures in a Republican suburb, first of all, I'm not going to be alone, and I definitely won't go in drag. Even just walking around those areas with my skin color. I don't really want to get shot.

That brings up the challenges I find. Facing people who have opposite views of you or want to be verbally aggressive is hard. Time is a challenge too. I'm actually sleeping a lot less because I'm getting involved in stuff. I'm balancing school, activism, student orgs, and a relationship right now. Multi-tasking is a big important part of being a university student, but especially being an activist who's juggling more than just school.

I also face microaggressions or racism or other isms on a daily basis, but even in the activist or LGBT communities, those are still there. You know that saying, "How can you spit on someone when you're being spit on?" There's ignorance everywhere. Even in a progressive community, that's still there. I'll hear somebody who is white and queer-identified say, "I'm not racist but..." or "I'm not prejudiced but..." thing. It's like they don't realize that if you say the word 'but' before it, it negates what you're about to say. "I'm not racist, but..." means you are racist. It makes me feel like my identities are fighting within myself. Some of them complement each other, but others are like *I'm over here* and this one is ten miles that way. Things like my interest in BDSM and my feminist identity clash; being a person of color and queer definitely clash.

But I think I'll always have these thoughts and beliefs about the way the world or things should be. Helping others is part of the motivation, of course, like if I can get someone to smile or better someone's day, personally or indirectly, it's always a benefit. I

feel like activism is going to be a part of my life for a long time. That would just be awesome. I feel like it's my life calling. You could ask anyone why they do anything or chose their career path, some might have straight answer. Some might say it was convenient; some might say it's what they wanted to do. I generally feel like it's what I wanted to do and it's just my choice to get involved in the community and better the world. I used to see people who were really open and out about their sexual or gender identities, and it gave me the courage to come out of my shell. *Hey, I can be an activist and myself at the same time! This is really a space where I can really be me.* That's what the university and being an activist is really all about.

Ash

Just a warning: I don't feel like my story is linear. It's like this time was this, and this time was this. I'm so young so my activism has only played a part in the past three years. That's it. A little less. And my trans identity: it's only been two years. In that time, I've realized that class privilege is present in everything I do. I know that. That one is very salient because I don't think about it that much; I don't have to. Class privilege has allowed me to do everything I've done. I lived in a wealthy town, and went to the number one public school in New Jersey, which allowed me to easily get into university, and not face all these barriers. I can afford to do my activism work in both having time because my basic needs are taken care of – I don't have to work – and because it gives me access to spaces I wouldn't have otherwise.

I identify as culturally Jewish, because it had an influence on my life. I grew up conservative. We ate kosher style; I went to Hebrew school growing up; I had a Bar Mitzvah. I grew up pro-Israel and we always talked about Palestinians are terrible, evil

people. I learned that the U.S. needs to support Israel and the Jewish homeland is our homeland. But then I came to school. I took a class my first semester about the Arab-Zionist conflict. As it turns out, Palestinians have a narrative that's kind of important. They are not terrible people; they are not evil. Actually, they have a legitimate complaint! There's this huge thing going on that I'd learned the complete opposite. So my first year was spent deconstructing and unpacking that, and trying to unlearn the things I'd learned about Israel. Within the Jewish community, I can't have this conversation; there doesn't seem to be space to criticize Israel within our community. My complicated relationship comes down to this: I'm Jewish, White, wealthy, and U.S. born. In the U.S., although being Jewish is also a target identity, I still hold this privilege, this political power and societal power, just like I feel like a lot of Jewish people do. Social justice is built into our religion – heal the world – but I'm not into this savior positioning: *everyone needs our help; we know what's best.*

So I do activism around my own identities. Every time I tell someone that I don't use gender pronouns, and then inevitably need to explain what that means, I consider that activism. It's educating people. For a while, I was only using gender inclusive bathrooms so I had to go on adventures to find them. That led me to take that as a super serious issue. It puts a personal value and stake in it for me. It's good and important motivation. I know how much I get hurt by transphobic, cissexism stuff. At the same time, I try to translate it into how other people get hurt. Not necessarily in the same way, but it's like an empathy thing: I feel pain so I know what it's like for them to feel pain. I enact allyhood by checking in with people, making sure they're okay, and comforting and supporting who's being affected, versus going after the person who is causing the harm.

It's gentler. I think of allyhood as micro: very personal and one on one. Then advocate and activist are macro. You advocate or lobby toward an administration. Activism is radical, picket line, boycotting stuff. I am calling myself an activist now. That's a newer thing for me. As I'm processing the difference between the three of them – ally, activist, advocate – I think it's related to how angry, tired, frustrated I am with things. I've been doing stuff for three years, like fighting sexism, racism... the isms. I'm pretty tired, especially seeing how they all connect, intersect, overlap and play with each other.

Part of my problem is that I got into social justice relatively early in my college career, my first semester here. When people are talking about race, gender, and class privilege – some of the "101" stuff – I am thinking more intersectionally, more deeply. I have a whole array of identities that I can talk about, but in my classes, no one else is there. I am at a different point on the map of social justice. So I'm not learning in my classes. People just aren't where I'm at. I'm in this trans activism class we were trying to do a project around the trans identity. My classmates took the course to learn about trans identity, which is great, but in picking a project they wanted to do something around education. But that's geared toward cis people. Besides the fact that I don't trust my class to educate them – it took me three years to really start to unpack these things, it's been two months for them – there are ways directly help trans people. Our school is sucky when it comes to gender inclusive bathrooms. That's one of the projects I felt like my class could be working toward. We struggled with that, but now we've taken over that project. The project originally started through our trans student org, and then our LGBT center had been working on it, but they were checking every bathroom on campus, even gendered ones. Why? Just check the ones that matter to trans people first. No one was

really working on it, so I went to our student government for my department and asked for help with the project. We tried to give it back to the LGBT center, but they kept shifting it from person to person, and it never had a foothold. I said we would just take care of it if no one else will. And that's what we've been doing. Our trans group has six consistent members. We keep talking about this and other activism projects, but we're all tired. We don't have energy or time to follow through on these. I did at the time, I guess, so when people have questions, I'm the one they talk to. I'm the liaison between all these entities.

I feel like I conceptualize the world a lot differently than a lot of other people. I do activism because I care about people and their feelings. I see myself hurting other people, and I don't like doing that. Part of it is I see how the greater system hurts people and I see myself as one piece of this greater system. While I individually try to role model good language, I understand that it's all functioned out of this giant system.

I mostly do activism by trying to live my life in ways that role model and emulate what I want other people to do. Like with language specifically, but also being conscious of my body space. If I am in the room with an assumed woman, I'm going to try to not block the doorway because that could create an unsafe situation for the person. I am generally bigger and there are power dynamics in that. It's more everyday stuff like that, but I also am very intentional about other projects. The bathroom project is one.

Last year, there was a big movement for tuition equality for undocumented students. They had a big rally and I went to one of their protests. We protested the regents' meeting by putting red tape over our mouths, and then sitting on the floor in the meeting room and staring at them. That was cool! Being on residential staff for the

dorms, we have to take a class about social justice and dialogues, so I use that to have conversations with the residents about language and why it matters. Also, I facilitated a ton of workshops for our Group Dialogues program. At least six last semester! The way it works is they have single-subject courses on race and ethnicity and SES. They are all peer facilitated. And then there's a training course you take to become a facilitator. I facilitated a 15-week course on race and ethnicity.

My social justice learning came specifically from this retreat called Cultivating Social Justice at Every Turn. It's a three-day retreat. I've been every semester of my college career. When I got to college, I'd always hang with RAs in my dorm. They would always talk about social justice. Finally, I asked, "What is this thing you keep talking about?" I went and was like, "What do you know? Sexism and racism still happen today!" And I perpetuate both in many ways. My ignorance hurts a lot of people. The first retreat was legitimately my first social justice thing. I learned about everything! The first day was about communication. The second day was about common language and identities, and experiences people have. And the third day was that now that we learned about it, what are we going to do? At the retreat, we would act out scenes and different forms of oppression. People would enter the scene as if they were in it already, and either call people out or physically move people. Or walk through and interrupt it to address what was going on. That's why I got so language focused. Cultivating Social Justice set me up for that.

What I've learned through all this activism and training is that part of resisting the system is naming the system. The system works by people not talking about it, being conscious of it. Part of my resistance is not letting people getting away with their

problematic language. I'll talk to them about it. Not, "You shouldn't use that word!" Instead, I'll say, "Hey, did you know the word handicap comes from people having their cap in their hands and begging in the streets?" It's usually in language where being agender is noticeable. I get he/him/his pronouns all the time. Or when assumed men will say, "Hey man!" or "What's up man?" Or people on the phone will say, "Thank you, sir." If I get, "Hey man!" I probably won't correct the person. If I get he pronouns, it depends on the space. If it's the first time we've met, I almost never will correct them, but will in a social justice space. Even then I stopped correcting people. It takes too much time for me; it takes too much energy. It's not a huge thing, it's very subtle. And it's usually not relevant to the rest of what we're talking about. I'll take it and move on. Our time could be spent better somewhere else.

Granted, my gender identity is kind of a mess. My biggest struggle of my gender identity is that there is this gender that people see me as, and the gender that I don't feel. I say I don't feel specifically because I really don't feel a gender. I don't feel like I'm a man or woman. I don't understand how people feel like that. Biological stuff: I understand how people might feel better with hormones or surgery or any other transitional things, but I don't really understand how people identify gender wise. I feel like I am agender. But people impose man, masculine on me; I look like a cis man. I do have privileges because people read me this way. And when my male bodiedness intersects with my whiteness in my activism work, I get listened to better and more than other people. Part of my gender identity is grappling with that: do I take ownership of it and use it in good and productive ways? I want to acknowledge that I get read as a man and get a lot of privileges associated with that. Although, I think I'm hesitant to say I'm

agender. Part of my hesitancy is that I link it to the same way white people say they don't have a race. I don't want to say I'm not a part of this gender system because I am – I am very functional within it. I hate it; it's terrible. But I still have to participate as a member of society. People don't let me not have a gender identity. When I think about it more, I question my trans experience.

I'm always concerned that when I'm talking about my gender, people are going to say, "You are coming from a very privileged place in this, and you do all these things." So my trans experience feels very different than other people. Mine feels more about choice than a lot of other people that I know. I don't know. My biggest concern is that I don't know if maybe I should just identify as cisgender, if I'm taking on this gender to add another oppressed identity. Even with that, I'm not affected in the same way because I am White. And because I am read as a man and because I have class privilege. I am really worried that I am entering this community when I shouldn't be. That's been a tricky thing. But then I think, I really hate our gender system. I just want to say screw it! A way for me to reject the system is by identifying as trans. Anything outside of the system.

I have feminine qualities: my hair is very long, I care about people, and I'm very kind and gentle. Another one is that I've always connected better with women, I think because I trust them more. We can talk about feelings. In college, I trust women to get social justice more than I trust men, especially White, cisgender, class-privileged men. Where's the line between me being a woman and me being a man? My friend said it is whatever you want. Okay, maybe I have both qualities. I'm not an ideal woman and I'm not an ideal man so maybe I'm somewhere in the middle. Okay, yay! I identified as

gender nonconforming for about a week. Then I went to a 80s party dressed in zebra-print leggings, a skirt, and a neon band and put my hair in a side ponytail.

I walk into the room to show my friends what I look like. “You totally look like a woman!”

“You’re genderqueer!”

“Yay!”

So I went to this party and throughout the night people would tell me would see me from behind and then come around to the front to talk to me. “Whoa! I thought you were a woman.”

And I’d say, “I’m genderqueer!” But internally I feel agender. Sometimes I still identify as genderqueer because I’m queering gender, or what it means to be a man or woman. My favorite moments are when people will do a double take in the bathroom. They make me feel this weird pride of screwing with people.

I’ve heard people conceptualize gender as a dimmer switch. I think of it more dimensionally. I think of gender as the earth. People could be anywhere on the surface of the Earth. I think of myself as the moon because the moon came from the Earth – I think... so I’m told – and the moon still has influence on the Earth in terms of tides, but I can’t ever escape the Earth. Just like I can never escape our gender system. The earth still has gravity over me. I live within the system of gender that we have constructed.

Part of my agender identity is political in that I understand how our gender system works, to an extent, and I think it’s ridiculous. Not having a gender is subtle resistance to the system. Had I not been involved in social justice and understood that, then I wouldn’t have questioned gender so much. Being in activist spaces shaped that part of me.

Change happens when I start talking about my identity to people. They are interested in understanding it, and it helps them question what they've learned about the gender binary, how they experience gender. Also, it helps too that I don't present any differently than I would if I was cis man. I wear the same clothing I wore growing up. I think there's something to be said that I still influence the system by perpetuating it in some ways, although I'm not intentionally doing it. That's not just my clothing, but also my mannerisms and socialization, how I approach situations, which still could be considered cis man. I'm not totally absolved of the system.

For me, one of the challenges becomes navigating when I should or shouldn't use my privilege. One time, I was facilitating these workshops in the program. I was with a non-binary trans person and two others who I assume identify as cis women. Throughout this dialogue, we kept having to regroup to figure it out. While we are figuring out what to do, they would all turn and look at me as if to say, "Do you think we should do this?" *Y'all don't need to look at me! I'm not the authority on this!*

Sometimes I don't even talk about my own identities. In the dorms, they renovated the dining hall and put in two single stall bathrooms... and gendered them of course. I go to my residence hall manager and say, "Hey can you call housing design and change these signs because no one who identifies outside the binary can use the bathroom?" I didn't say, "I am a student who doesn't identify within the gender binary and can't use the bathroom." So then the manager called, and housing design said they were going to do it, but then vetoed it. I don't always reveal how I identify during my activism. In that case, it's because I haven't developed a relationship with my dining hall manager in that I feel safe sharing things, that I'll get validated and supported.

The other day, somebody used crippled as in ‘crippling depression.’ I said, "Hey, maybe you should just pick a different word because it's horribly derogatory word for people with disabilities?!" That one, I didn't say, "I do or do not have disabilities and this affects me in that way." It's just named it. I try to talk to people to get them to understand why it's important.

I'm tired from being an activist and from being trans. It's about the fact that I have to educate people in every space I enter. Even in my classes, I have to constantly educate people around trans issues and non-trans issues because people say problematic things, and no one else is going to talk about or address them so I have to do it. I try to pick my battles, but still it's hard. Also, I'm tired because I'm trying to care for the people I really care about and can't plan for emergencies. The other night my significant other who is a survivor just had this huge emotional thing going on – I don't want to call it a breakdown, but that's how I would describe it. I cared for them. It's stuff like that. Even that is a form of activism: caring for people who are survivors, triggered around issues that have affected their identities. I'm hesitant to call that activism because I don't want it to come across as I'm doing it to be an activist. But it's about self-care. Audre Lorde has a quote about self-preservation being a political act. I think about that around all marginalized identities.

I can't really disengage either, even if I'm not the oppressed identity. I'm just so conscious of everything that's happening. For example, if someone makes a sexist joke, when I'm really tired, I check it off in my head as, “Another thing that people do that is terrible.” It doesn't make me any less tired than as a cis-identified woman, although I can't imagine the hurt, frustration, and anger that I feel from that is the same as it would

be for a cis woman. I've heard disengagement framed as checking out: I've had conversations about what it means to check out, how do you not check out, especially with White people around race. What I'm thinking about is I'm not sure if me choosing not to go to something because I'm really tired is still disengaging. This is related to choosing my battles: is choosing my battle over not correcting people on using my name instead of the he pronoun every 30 seconds disengaging or self-care, or is it both?

But I keep pushing on. A few weeks ago, I got triggered to no end, and then hit hardcore depression, and then just went down for two weeks. I'm not using depression colloquially – it was hardcore serious depression. I've had mental health challenges in the past, and these periods of depression once or twice. In crisis situations like this one, I basically push down all my emotions. The question I got to was, "What the point?" I'm going to continue my work and then I'm going to die. Same with everyone else. Whatever. The way I dealt with it, because no one is going to give me that answer, is I stopped thinking about it and caught up in doing real-world things. Activism. For me, that's part of what keeps me going. Doing activism and just thinking about why I care about people – that's why I want to do things. That distracts me from my real feelings and thoughts about life and afterlife. It's so important to me because it has an impact on other people's lives, and I care about people.

Arden

"Damn."

"What?"

"We used to be on the same page – we were queer, we were nonconformists, we felt marginalized in the community – and now you're like we can't bro out until I'm on T? That's kinda shitty."

"Then why did you ask me about what it's like, what the effects of T are, how I made the decision?"

"I was just curious." It was more that curiosity. Maybe if he made this jump, that's the direction I'm going too? But we fizzled out; that was the last time we talked. I didn't want to have to take testosterone just to become better friends. And the worse part? He called me an ally. *Just an ally*. I'm pretty sure that many people know what it's like to trans, like pre-T. They're still trans.

For me, I've always known that I've identified in some sort of queer form. Like a lesbian didn't fit. Transgender didn't fit. So I decided on genderqueer. If I need a gender label, there it is.

I've been trying to define for myself how genderqueer works in the trans umbrella, and then the asterisk came out. You know: trans with an asterisk after it. Every few years, I would look up trans passing tips to find out, "Am I trans? How does this feel? Could I actually do this?" So probably one of those searches I probably saw it. For a long time I didn't think anything of it. I'm like, "That's weird." But then I saw LGBT organizations that started picking it up, and thought, "I guess it's not like some typo or just *we're trying to be fancy*." When I looked into it again, it said the asterisk includes "3rd gender, genderqueer, nonconforming gender, bi-gender, and two-spirit." So, I think genderqueer is part of the trans* umbrella. But there's a lot of backlash, you

know, from within the trans* community. People like my friend who seem to be holding the umbrella. *Gender nonconforming? You're somewhere else. You're just allies.*

I feel like trans-identified folks are also gender nonconforming; we are all gender avengers, challenging the gender status quo. And that's how we all come together underneath this umbrella. In the LGB community too. My genderqueerness has made me want to be more visible and really represent my identity. I went to Minnesota pride where there was a trans* march, and I found a group of GQ individuals who had their own shirts and signs. I joined them. We shouted, "We're still here! We're included in this umbrella!" But what we were saying by being there was, "We exist in your movement."

That's seriously the biggest challenge I face in being genderqueer and being involved in activist work: being seen as an ally. By trans* people. I think it happens with other people too. Probably because I look inherently feminine, female. I can't really get away from that. I just take it, I guess, until it comes up more. I've started like telling people to use they/them/theirs pronouns. Closer people... people who would get it. LGBT people and allies hopefully catch on. It's always been "just an ally" until I speak up. Most people are quick to correct themselves, and I think it really broadens their mind that in trans activism there's a lot of different identities that are there wanting to be represented. Really, there's a whole aspect of my activism that's to convince trans* people on testosterone that, "No, actually gender nonconforming is a thing too and we're all in the same boat." I do my best. I think it's a lot harder than convincing people who don't know anything. It's much easier to start from a blank slate. But I'm still happy to work for rights for trans* people on T. I know that doesn't make sense. But it's because

not everyone is an asshole! I'm not going to give up. It's just certain individuals, but since the community is so close, it can seem like that's the whole community's feelings. I can get over that and realize it's just these individuals. I've even been called transphobic by trans* people!

I definitely didn't know until I was in the LGBT culture and community where I was going. I think genderqueerness is a layover; it's a good place to start versus jumping in and taking T, having surgery. I feel like I am in the right spot now, although, like I said, I feel too feminine. I definitely thought about going on T, but I always know that that's not something that I want to do for long term. And I don't think I ever want to give up my genderqueer identity. It's kinda a fine line, or a huge gray space, actually. Switching my name and my pronouns – that was my transition.

When gender-variant people get to choose their own name, it's very exciting. It's like picking your own personality. There's a lot that goes into choosing your name. Growing up, my parents have always shortened my name to a nickname. It caught on, so that's when I started thinking: I can pull this off; I can be known by a whole different name. So, because I didn't want to be associated with a gender label, I changed my name to signify that I'm genderqueer. I think the first person I told was my roommate. She kept saying, "Does that mean you're trans?" I'm like, "Just call me Arden; I just want to be Arden." And that's it. I am who I am.

I plan on changing my name legally. That's when people are going to take me and my genderqueer identity seriously. For now, with instructors at school, I mostly just use my first initial of my legal name. That's okay because it's just a letter: it's still within the gender non-conforming paradigm.

My mom is very against me changing my name, in feministy way, especially because she sees it as such a male name. I haven't told them about me being genderqueer. They're just kinda coming to terms with the fact that I'm dating someone of the same sex. I knew it was a topic to stay away from: I've had trans* friends over the years, and once my mom said, "Don't hang around those people. They've got too many problems." *Those people.*

It's confusing though. My mom has always been super obsessed with gender – what it's supposed to look like and who's supposed to perform it. Society's emphasis on being masculine or feminine is very much embedded in her. But at the same, she always bought me boy clothes. She'd say, "Well, they fit you. If you want it. Okay."

The other day, I was over at their house and she asked whether I wanted to be a man. I've always told her no. But she pushed on asking, "So then why do you want to change your name?" I think my understanding of her is that she accepts that people can transition and that anyone can be whoever they want to be, but that doesn't apply to me apparently.

It's funny: My mom always told me that life isn't fair. She said activism was a way of evening it out. Her desire to make change was definitely part of my upbringing. I remember being very young and going to the state capitol with her. She always explained about how my sister, who has autism, needs more help in school. She said it was important that students with disabilities get help, but that it costs money, so you have to convince a lot of people that it's worth it, that this is a need. But I was just never really interested in doing much activism things when I was younger. Back then everything had to be instant results. I may have been a little cynical and didn't think it was really

changing anything. I can't really backtrack and know for sure, but I think she made me realize how important it is to be involved with activism. It's my gender identity that influences my activism now. I most likely would not be an activist otherwise. Back then I was like why would I bother? At least now I know progress is possible, even if it does take a very long time.

Change affects me directly. Like I can get discriminated at my job for gender identity still. I don't think that it's directly happened to me, and I would hope not. But it could in the future. I feel it more within my own community. The queer community. And definitely with trans* being gender nonconforming. "You're not trans* enough." That sucks.

If someone asked me the different ways that I identify, I'd go right to gender identity. Sort of on the forefront of my mind right now. I mean I'm White; I'm privileged too. But I've never felt that way. At least I can admit it. Frankly, it's like I don't have many struggles around gender identity either, but I don't really care what people think of me at the same time. I know there are students who struggle with their identity and I try and reach out a hand to them and help them. Like I tell people, "Pronouns are a sacred: you use it and I say it." Especially like younger trans* individuals, when they're having a hard time using their pronouns for the first time. It's kinda intimidating... like, "Who's actually going to take me seriously?" I always tell them, "Use it. If anyone ever uses the wrong one, just stop what you're saying and you correct them. Every time."

That's what activism is to me: doing something for a cause, being involved in whatever way possible in order to better people's lives. As a whole, I'm really supportive of everyone's rights and achieving a better life for them. I've just been involved with a lot

of LGBT-affiliated organizations that I would do activisty things with – like not just on campus, but the broader community too. Right now, I feel more passive as an activist. I do things like help connect others with resources, informing people when they say things wrong in day-to-day conversation. Like I jammed out this paper on activist art last night – it’s really awesome to critically think about how artists do that. I talked about the Act Up! AIDS Silence = Death as re-appropriating images to grab the public's knowledge and have them critically think about government. It was very interesting to look at it from an art perspective because I've definitely learned about it as an activist. It's really effective to use art in creating change.

Something else: my girlfriend has a cousin who is a freshman student here. My girlfriend was saying that her cousin was going through something and didn't know who to talk to and was thinking that they were genderqueer. We talked. I gave them books, Web sites to visit, and introduced them to some of my friends. I said, “Here's genderqueer stuff. Look at it. Does it feel like you?” And it didn't. I know the local trans* resources which are a good place to start. But genderqueer and trans* are not very separated right now. There's definitely different foci on lesbians and gay men, and trans* people – that's been separated out – but with genderqueer, it hasn't been separated from trans* identities to have its own resources. And now my girlfriend's cousin has come out as trans*. I feel like I had a part to play in that. Maybe. A little. Definitely.

I didn't really have any problems in terms of going to college, but I know people who came out whose parents won't support them financially. It kind of puts a damper on your future. So I looked up scholarships to see if those might be a solution. Scholarships are definitely offered. I think it's neat that students who might not have the means to go

to college can get scholarships just for being LGBT-identified. So now that I have that information, if I know someone is struggling because their parents kicked them out and won't pay for their things anymore I tell people, I tell them.

I once had this surplus of money and I found it like super thrilling to find trans-identified people with their Go Fund Me pages, just dropping \$100 for them.

Anonymously. Everyone thinks I'm crazy because they're like, "Why don't you keep that money?" Well, because someone needs it. Like they absolutely need this surgery. Their life is miserable without it. I just want to help. Because what, am I going to buy another pair of shoes?

But I like doing things more physically; I like doing walks, being more present and visual. So even though I'm in the closet with my family, in an activist space, no way! I really don't think it's worth it. With activism you're fighting for rights, equality, and a better life. So why would I go into the closet? That way, when you're visible, you're saying, "Yes, this does matter, even if it doesn't affect me." I've done a lot of work with a statewide group. Hitting the streets, going door to door. I did a Books Not Bombs rally too. It was a protest where you walk out of your classroom to say you don't support war, and to send that money to education instead. A lot of my friends were doing it and I wanted to see what it was like. I was kinda scared. I'd rather not skip school; that's also important to me.

I tried to form a student organization called Queers and Allies Together, or QAT. I thought there was a need. Actually, I would have benefited from it! I got my three officers and thought, "Okay, we can do this!" I got a lot of emails from people wanting information and asking when the first meeting was. I had a huge list of names – it was

really awesome! We had our first meeting... and no one showed up. Not one person. So maybe there wasn't a need after all. It's kinda sad: a bunch of student organizations that used to exist don't anymore. Like we used to have one for trans* students. One for queer people of color. This is a commuter school too, so it's really hard to get people to stay on campus. Most students finish class and then they're gone. I thought it'd be good to include allies in QAT. I'm an ally. (Not *just an ally*.) Definitely for trans* people, even though I'm included under trans*. I guess I'm still learning, so I'd say I'm an ally because I don't know all of it, if that makes sense. It's hard. Allies should always be learning and growing. Because you care about these people so much and you want to do everything, but inherently you don't have the same issues they do. It's really hard to be passive.

In the future, I hope to be more involved than I am now. I'm really into working in a small town, like a library or historical society, so that will get me on some town boards. I think that's really cool. A lot of people ask me why a small town versus going all the way, like bigger things. I think it's because I don't really see myself as a leader type. And I think I'd have more of an impact in a smaller setting.

I wish there was something else for me to say. I don't really seem impressive right now. I don't know. I just feel like I should have done more in my college career, in more activisty ways. But I don't have time to be as involved on the ground, like every day. It's pretty much a time constraints. The activism has been overall positive – even if there's negativity within it – and I want to keep going, but being a student kills it. I don't really feel like an “Activist.” I just don't do enough. I think that title is for people who are doing so much more than me.

Sal

I think one thing you'll find in my story is an ambivalent paradox of "both and at the same time." I feel like it's this and it's that, or it's this and now it's not that. Being trans is a perspective that I'll always have that is different and useful. It informs my work in the academy, but it's not the center of my activism, which is multifaceted.

Identifying as trans snuck up on me. It wasn't on my mind since I was a child; I wasn't born in the wrong body. That is not my narrative. I did have a short stopover between genders on my way to being trans. I saw that as being more subversive and giving more political visibility, but my deeper desire was to start looking like and being identified as male. My life has gotten a whole lot easier since I transitioned. If you're not necessarily implicated in a struggle – the struggle – it's easy to start to become complicit or complacent. Both.

Part of my activism is using my privilege to challenge White people, in particular, but non-queer White people, secondarily, in their assumptions. Being White is a category to which I belong that I feel gives me a certain set of privileges that I think are really important to consider in relation to my activism in general, but also in being trans. And now being male also is also a particularly difficult category in activist circles. Automatically, my authority and my ethos are not questioned because of my light skin. Another category that is important for me to consider is my position in the academy. Being almost done with my PhD, I think it I'm perceived by some as having more credibility, but it also compounds my whiteness and masculinity. Those three together can be especially intimidating in circles where there are people with all kinds of identifications and experiences.

One of the projects that I worked on was a group of musicians – some trained, some untrained – who got together with the goal of using music to bridge some of the racial and economic segregation in different communities. It was a way for us to work collaboratively, inspire others to have fun, and disrupt public space. There are a lot of street bands like this around the country, mostly with White, queer hipsters. I didn't want to just do that. I wanted our group to truly be an anti-oppression musical organization that's primary focus is anti-racist activism.

But then a woman in the group said to me, "You're really not getting it. The way that you run this group is really alienated a lot of people. You're an academic who thinks they understand what it's like to be an anti-racist, anti-oppression activist, but you don't! You're a white dude... and it shows." I was most interested in how the queer was fun for me because it's comfortable. As soon as I imagined doing really difficult and intersectional community-based organizing with people of color, I froze up. *This isn't fun anymore.* So I bowed out, decided to focus on my dissertation, and the group fell apart.

I have to be very conscious of the space I take up especially if I'm doing work in solidarity with communities of color – trans communities of color in particular. So it's something that I have to continually do work around and make sure that I'm taking a back seat and letting people of color be the leaders of the activist endeavor we're working on together. What frustrates me efforts as an activist are difficult conversations between White trans/queer people and communities of color who are and aren't trans/queer. You really hit roadblocks when we try to talk across race and queer.

I find that I have the most leverage when I don't come out. Besides, the farther

away from that transition point I get, the harder it is to openly identify as trans. Part of it is because my body's changed so much. Sometimes I'm not sure where to route my activist desires as it intersects with being trans. Does trans exist? Aren't people just coming up with these more fluid identities by the day? Do people see me as queer enough to welcome me into a community? I'm old. I don't know where to go. So instead I just check out. I can do that. Because of the beard, because of the confidence, because of my age, because I'm almost Dr. Sal: these are all markers that I pass as male – I hate the word pass – but where I feel recognized in a way that doesn't make me feel crazy about myself.

There's definitely a sense in many activist communities of how awesome you are is concomitant with how much you kill yourself. Others say to me, "Well, I'm in the struggle all the time because I care, and you're just prioritizing other things." That is absolutely true. I want to focus on having a career, a family, and money. I have competing desires. On one hand, there's the queer community that I love and grew up with. I really need them in my life. But then there's this internal fantasy I have that I'm not really trans. I have these desires that are circumscribed by normative expectations of maturity and adulthood. It's not about internalized transphobia, although there is a sense of sadness, mourning, or loss, and I have to constantly figure out ways to make myself feel better about the fact that I'm unable to participate in the normative rites of passage in the same way my cisgender friends are.

Coming out really shatters my fantasy, but at the same time, the less I come out, the harder it is for me to explain why all of my friends are butch lesbians or queer. And within the queer community, it's important I come out as trans as a way of letting people

know that I'm part of the community and not just some guy who showed up. One time I did come out to a student, a woman of color. She had never understood why it is that I seemed to be cognizant of her struggles, so when I told her I was trans, it made a lot more sense to her. I found myself being really sad: I wish I could say that I was a cisgender White guy, because that would mean there's someone out there who understood this marginal position.

Along the lines of gender identity, sexuality, and class are underrepresented groups that are treated as a whole unequally. When I can, I lobby for better political, social, and economic conditions for those folks. In those cases, I can be the direct beneficiary of my efforts. But I see things are connected. I get involved with communities that I'm not a member of also. I see myself as a direct beneficiary in those cases too because living in a society of people who can participate more fully is an emotional benefit to me.

I was contacted by a radio show called Gaia Planet to talk about gender because, they said, I have an interesting perspective. I know two of the three women who run the show. We got all set up, went on air, and the host I don't know said, "Well, tell us about you experienced gender as a kid." So I started talking about it and unpacking what trans means. I saw her face shift. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, wait, wait..." she interrupted. I guess she didn't know I was trans – and I didn't know that she didn't know. I thought that the others would have filled her in. There's a little Web cam that monitors the show so you can watch the program online, and she grabbed it and pointed at me. "I just want you to see this guy. He's transgender! I mean with a full beard and everything." It was super 101 things not to do to a trans person; it was horrible. I decided to just go with it, and

went back into my story. Months later, they asked me back. I agreed, but only on the condition we establish some parameters about how they treat trans guests. They got really defensive, and I haven't heard back from them. This was a situation I wouldn't call activism, but was a circumstance where people wanted to know my perspective because I'm trans. I believe in responding to those calls to educate the public about trans identities.

I will always be an activist; it's just really a way of life. I see a strong connection between my activism in the real world and my activism in the academy. My future as an academic is my activism. What I do in the classroom is always to help students think critically and systemically about different kinds of social problems that don't have easy answers. And then I take a lot of these conversations that are about trans and queer people, and put them my research into how teaching practices alienate trans, queer, people of color, and other students on the margins.

I've had colleagues say that me being trans is not central to my dissertation. Well, that's interesting. It's only because I'm trans that I was able to see the lacunae in the work out there. It's my transness that has allowed me to ask different kinds of questions. And it does; it affects everything. It's one that's been shaped by 26 years of living as a woman, right?

I get the subtle feeling that my department is unconsciously transphobic. There are subtle clues; it's a filmy feeling I get. This is a deeper reminder that even though I pass, my colleagues know my perspective and my history and my research. I feel like that has informed people's decisions not to mentor me, not to take on my projects, not to give me funding.

Now that I'm looking at getting tenure-track positions, I'm wondering whether I really want to be in the spotlight for being trans. If I'm in a faculty position at a university, and students find out I'm trans and come to me for help, I will – it will always be something that I do – but I might be more prone to take up those fights after I get tenure.

During my time on campus, there were two projects that really stand out. First, I taught an introductory queer studies course where I really emphasized a community service component. There was a cohort of students in the class that for their final project, co-created with me, a transgender policy group for the campus. I think it was the first of its kind in the state. I helped my students write a mission statement and bylaws, and helped them figure out what kind of positions we needed to help the organization run. We got in touch with several key players across campus – a professor, a staff person and a LGBT committee – who helped the students set a bunch of goals based on data from a gender inclusivity report. The group got up and running. The students were super excited about it; it was a great piece for their resumes. I'm really proud that I was able to integrate into my classwork a kind of merging of theory and praxis in an effort to improve people's lives on the campus. And now that I'm getting ready to apply for faculty positions, I see this as an example of a pedagogical teaching success.

The other project is related to my campus trying to get off the ground a Living-Learning Community for students who identify as queer, LGBT, or as allies. The group working on it contacted me to create the curriculum for the class component. So I developed a course called “The Queer, Multicultural City” that focused on forming an intersectional understanding of power, privilege, difference, and inequity within and

between communities. They're going to pilot the queer multicultural class in 2014, but I won't be here to teach it, which is too bad.

Jack

I'm always moving. I'm a 45-year-old Korean adoptee. See I have to say it that way – “Korean adoptee” – because if I just say “Korean-American,” and without the “adoptee” part, people get annoyed. For me to claim my identity as Korean, I have to speak the language. I'm not Korean enough because I can't speak the language. But people get hinky when I claim to be an American because I'm not White and I don't look like Americans, which is funny because I've lived in the states since I was two-and-a-half. My father was in the military and traveled a lot. They spent a year in Okinawa after they adopted me, and I've been in the U.S. since.

My adoptive parents were from the Midwest. Not the most loving home. Mom threw him out when I turned sixteen. Not for beating her or being an abusive drunk, but because he was cheating on her. She said that's the straw that broke the camel's back. *Out you go!* I never really knew my parents. I just really knew this very violent man and this woman who just took it. I left home when I was seventeen, which is right after I got my high school diploma. The day that I knew I would be leaving she went to smack me and I grabbed her hand and I said, “Stop hitting me.” Those are the special moments that I remember.

Now I'm here, back in the Midwest. California is my home state. I've lived in Washington, Florida, Virginia, Georgia... and that's it. And here. See, moving? Don't get the wrong idea: I didn't move a lot because of my dad being in the military. Ha ha, no. It was me finding love in all the wrong places, which got more interesting with the

onset of the Internet. That's how I met my wife. I followed her as she took a post doc, and then again for her current position. Gotta go where the job is, right?

Being these different identities – my Korean American identity, my adoptive identity – you go through things in life. You either get a thick skin, or it makes you crazy and you can't take it anymore. Add on my trans identity and it gets really complicated!

In my late 20s, when I figured out I was trans, I didn't have the support or mental capacity to take everything on that was going to come with coming out. I don't know if I would have done it if I hadn't met my wife. She gave me the strength and security I needed. Three years ago, I went to MBLGTACC. It was being at the conference, meeting people, going to panels, and seeing other trans people where I decided, "Hey, this is for me." It was a really great experience.

When I first moved to this city, I sought a physician who looked like me. I was tired of being treated as if I wasn't made of flesh and blood, and somehow looked as if I wanted my physician to make a commentary on who I am. So I found one. She's Korean, not adopted. But after I started taking testosterone – which I got from a different doctor – she got very uncomfortable just providing general care. From what I can gather from the pics in her office, I think she was raised traditionally Korean, and I suspect she feels awkward with trans guy in her office.

So, yeah: another move. Taking testosterone at 43. That's kinda old. Transition for me was all the physical stuff because I'm still the same person. It's not like now I act all manly! It was really the congruence of identifying as a masculine person and having my body show that as well. So now there's no confusion: "Oh yeah, it's short, fat, Asian dude!" My confidence has increased as my transition has trucked along. There are still

places that I can go and get stared at. It used to be "Oh, is that a boy or a girl?" Now it's "What is this Asian man doing in this really white place?"

I think now that I've thought about it, the blatant racism is less visible to me because of the people I've chosen to associate with, and as I've become an adult, I gotten more power. When you're younger, you don't have much power so people say and do shit to you – like "Hey slant eyes!" or "Chink!" – that maybe they wouldn't dream of doing to an adult. I don't know. To explain it is difficult. Look, all these things are a part of me and affect me in some way, but maybe it's good that this part of my identity doesn't affect me consciously all the time. It's awful to be asked, "What are you?" or "Where are you from? No, where are you really from?" I was abandoned on the streets of Seoul; that's where I'm from.

Just being Asian in the U.S., you don't fit in from the get-go. Period. It's an eternal search for who I am and how I fit. I mean, who are my role models? Jackie Chan? Jet Li? Daniel Dae Kim? No, all I see are these tall, hairy White guys. I'm none of those things. It's been almost two years and I have yet to rock a Fu Manchu. There are some tall Koreans, but that's not going to be me. I think my activism might bring something out in me that helps me grow – not taller, unfortunately. But help me become who I am.

When most people think of activist, they think of picket signs, yelling at people, hitting the pavement. They don't realize that just by being open, you're being an activist for your identity. Activism is walking the walk. Or walking the talk. If you feel strongly about something, you should portray that in your life. If you have an opportunity to have an educational moment to someone who is genuinely curious and supportive, go for it!

I think my activism started when my first girlfriend and I were walking down the halls of her high school holding hands and nothing happened. I found out there were other people with feelings like this, and that snowballs. The more you put your feelers out, the more you stay alive and nothing bad happens, you just keep feeling your way over time. Now that I'm getting older, I start to think a lot about ability. I'm in school for information technology so I do my best to make sure technology is accessible to as many people as possible: search engine optimization, doing things for people with hearing problems, making sure images are tagged so screen readers can pick them up.

I think the act of helping others is something I enjoy. My benefit is how it makes me feel, knowing that I can help others. But I also entered IT field so I could merge my social justice with my tech skills. I really see myself approaching activism from this way rather than through direct education. For example, I've had a lot of horrible hospital experiences recently. I had to go for a pelvic ultrasound. That was super fun. Even though I'm the one with the wristband, the technician hands my wife the gown. I'm like, "Hello?!" He just looked at me and said, "This is the women's hospital." My wife talked to the person who handles patient care. They had an exchange. I don't know where it's going, but I don't really feel like at this point that I want to do any more teaching. Be the guinea pig, show and tell.

Maybe I can approach them later about healthcare informatics? I'm getting a certificate in that. That's the thing where you design the form fields in the software they use at hospitals and doctors' offices. I think it's really important to get a spot in medical software where it can be indicated that someone is trans. I don't care if you've been in this field forty years and I'm the first one you've met. I have a body. There's flesh and

blood here, and it's your job to take care of it, not to make a commentary on who I am as a person.

I did my general ed stuff at a two-year college in the 'burbs. It was a really great place to get a really solid foundation before coming to "big boy school" or whatever you want to call it. I was on the campus for three years. I had to go part time in order to work. Needed money for my Star Wars game. And my coffee. But seriously, it's frustrating here at this university because I'd already established relationships with the campus, faculty, and staff at the two-year college where I went before. I knew some of the instructors because they were my wife's colleagues. We'd go out, have drinks. I don't have that here. At all.

I had every intention when I came to this university to be a presence at the LGBT center here. *Get all up in that*, so to speak. But school's been a detriment to my activism. I feel like it's in a lull right now. I'm putting in for a campus-wide LGBT committee next semester. And a staff person asked me to be involved in a group that does stuff with gender. She is in conversation with people about getting preferred name fields in the whole university system. Working with that is right up my alley. If there was an opportunity to get on that boat and make that happen, I want to be part of it. Once we figure out that database process, I'm going to transfer that to hospitals so we can get that gender identity field in the software.

In case you didn't gather, I identify as a geek. I see the overlap of that identity, my being trans, and my activism. In my classes in information studies, those guys are jerks, especially towards women. Oh, their entitlement: Don't get me started on that! If they say something, I'm like, "Bro, you should not say that!" If I have to *bro up* in order

to get through to you, sure! It's risky to come out and stand up to them, but I do anyway. It's important we be visible. Until trans people become a household name, we have a lot of fighting and pushback to do.

Stuff like that is a no-brainer; I've always been an advocate for women. When I was a woman, it was obviously close to home. I still feel it now identifying as male. I think this is influenced by my own situation with my mother and abusive father. The reason a lot of people don't break out of abusive situations or husbands is they don't think there's a way. They are so locked up and that's all they have. If I can help people not experience what I've experienced, then I want to help with that. It sucks. It sucks to be abused, the underdog, feel trapped.

Right now I'm trying to figure out how my activism and my career are going to work together. I would like them to, but not sure it's going to work out because of the time commitment both will take. If the career wins, then I can use those resources to do activism in other ways. Giving money to organizations. Or I would try to use my powers for good. Help with an organization's Web site or their data processing. Something. Anything. Somewhere I found the opposite of the despair I used to feel. I want everyone to have the opportunity to experience that as well, to be happy. It might not get better fast, it might never get completely better, but here's what you can do to ease the pain along the way, to forge a path for yourself. Because it's tough.

Steve

Because I don't know enough about different kinds of oppression, I don't confidently call myself an Activist activist. I don't know what it is to be an activist I guess. I don't go to events or protests or anything. I just have an ideology and I tried to

spread it as I can. I'm hesitant to call myself an activist because I don't feel comfortable actively calling out people all the time. Nobody wants to talk to you if you're always calling them out on things. It's an awkward tension. But the more I learn about things that should not be normalized, the more uncomfortable I get with how these things have become normal. I'm trying to get better at saying that I have issue with what you're saying, not with who you are because I feel like that it always sounds personal when you call people out on their privilege. I try my best to be an activist, but it's hard, for example, to be male-bodied and saying, "You're being misogynistic!"

What I do participate in around activism started with my own identity when I first came to college. At the time, I identified as a gay male. My best friend started getting into social justice. He brought me to a place where I no longer feel like calling people out is enough. Yes, it'll cause ripples and the ripples will cause waves, but those waves: what are they going to do? We are shaking things up, but that isn't enough for me. I feel like we, as a community, almost have grown complacent with this, "We're just going to raise awareness and that's it." Yes, there's marriage equality, but nothing else. The gay tropes on TV are not enough. I used to be very complacent with the system.

Then the Trayvon Martin thing happened. I posted a status on Facebook, "Please don't shoot me. You'll get away with it if you're White." One of my friends messaged me to say I was being racist and she took offense at my status. I explained that it was impossible to be racist toward White people. I couldn't figure out how my friend could possibly think this way. It got really heated; a lot of harsh words were thrown around. I learned so much having to argue for this. It was so important to me for whatever reason.

But I felt so awkward and alienated after that too because it was a friend questioning something at the core of me. If they don't support that, then how could I ever come out as genderqueer? After that, I started to follow a few pages on Facebook. I like Facebook as a medium for activism because the more Likes and comments that a posting gets, the more feeds it gets into. One of them is Spectra Speaks. She's a Black woman who talks about the intersection of queerness and Black womanhood. She was the one who opened the door to my own race stuff. I followed another page: the very indignant, African American queer activism page called Son of Baldwin. After awhile, I started to search for more on Brown, queer people, and that's when I found Dark Matter, which is another page on Facebook. *The Bluest Eye* was another thing that I'd seen during this time that was one of the more formative things for me.

I'm in a place where I've been questioning whether I can even identify within the trans umbrella. I'm non-binary conforming, and I'm also uncomfortable with masculinity. I don't have a comfortable grasp of what it means to be male – cis males don't even seem like sentient beings sometimes – and I don't understand heterosexual relationships a lot of the times. I'm always afraid of identifying as trans because I don't feel like I follow the traditional trans narrative that culture has imposed on me: *if you don't like your parts, then you're trans*.

I also am not sure whether this is cis guilt that I'm feeling. As I study more and more about intersectional identity, I feel ashamed of my male body and all the privilege I receive from it. I just feel like I'm not trans enough to be trans, but I don't feel male enough either. Because we are so used to binaries, I'm not physically perceivable as trans. If other people don't acknowledge me as trans, can I still be trans? If I'm perceived

as a gay male, is that what I am? Only I can really identify my identity, and it's one that I'm proud of, even though I'm uncertain. I just get tired of advocating for myself.

So my activism for my gender is somewhat limited because I'm scared of it, but because I'm an activist for my race and sexual queerness, it just lumps in with all of that. It's not like only one kind of oppression exists or that these things happen one at a time! I like starting with racial oppression because it's the most common, overarching, and then I can draw parallels to other kinds of oppression.

Nowadays I have a queer community, and although we don't have the same identity, being queer is enough. I like that. I like non-binary conforming as a specific term, but I like just identifying queer because it's a nice to have a definition that doesn't really mean anything. I'm a gamer too, and within that community, it's always a competition. Because I identify as androsexual, they assume that I'm more flamboyant, more ladylike, not as competitive, and then not as skilled at whatever game. I think about whether identifying as trans is just another tactic to me to repress my femininity because I'm ashamed of it. But I don't feel like I'm lady enough to be a lady, nor do I feel man enough to be a man. I feel like it's so confining to be stuck in other of those.

Advocating for myself is always hard because there aren't many people who are like me. Currently, in my English class, my teacher writes on the board "his or her" in singular form. I self-identified on the first day as genderqueer, said I used they, them and their as pronouns. But in the cases where she writes "his or her" on the board, I'm not visible. I sent an email about it with an article about how *they* singular can be a thing in the English language. The teacher said that most of it was reductive, except for the part that discussed how it's important to somebody's identity. So now she writes "he, she, or

they” on the board, but then, in brackets, she writes “sic.” It’s not *sic* because that’s who I am!

I’m talking about this class because I feel like it’s a large part of identity lately because we have these talks – they are so fascinated by what I am. I get to be the authority on queerness. It’s frustrating, but I also take it as an opportunity to at least open people’s minds a little bit. With queer stuff, I have a love/hate relationship in regards to talking about it. I like talking about it when I’m in an academic setting because queering different subjects is really fascinating to me. With people who are completely unfamiliar with queer stuff, sometimes it’s I don’t want to have to explain everything.

It’s just like when I was in high school. I was the authority on being brown or being Middle Eastern or Southeast Asian because apparently all of that is me even though I’m only Indian, only Punjabi. Far from it! We have a name for what I am: whitewashed. I can’t speak our language; I don’t go to cultural events. I take issue with the values of my Punjabi culture, and also my White culture, frankly, but because I’m mostly exposed to White America, I’m usually White. I’m part of the Sikh temple community, but I’m far from active. It’s because I’m not out in that community at all. Part of it is my parents are ashamed of the way I dress. When I do go, I make myself look very Indian. One of my cousins has been living with us. He’s 17, straight out of India. His coming to my house was very threatening for me because he’s the male that my parents would have wanted me to be. I can’t be genderqueer and Indian. When my dad found *Gender Outlaw* in my backpack, I said, “I’m not trans; I’m not female.” He thinks I’m just some emo alternative.

On campus, I'm part of this group that explores the intersection of religion and being queer. We'd talked about bringing in a member of the Temple community to talk to our group. I'd said, "No way! You choose which culture you're going to be a part of and that's it!" The Sikh religion is all about service and being the best person that you can be on an individual level. My beliefs align with that in that respect. What frustrates me though is that while is preached throughout the religion, the culture of the people is to be classist, sexist. Being queer and Brown is not a balance, but a choice. I'm either socialized with and around White people, where I can be queer, or I'm silenced by people who are brown or Sikh or Punjabi/American culture.

Eventually, I want to bring it all together through a blog about causes that I care about. Representing the community is important, and my writing could be a huge opportunity to learn and make the world of social justice a little bit more accessible to people of different levels of understanding. I see that as having value. I find it frustrating that within the community of activists there are individuals who make the world of social justice very inaccessible to people who don't know things already. We are all still learning. If you really want to make a difference, why would you make it so exclusive? That doesn't make any sense! Exclusion is an oppressive tactic too. Shaming someone for not having access to information is everything that the oppressor has been doing to us.

Being a more established activist is something I'm working towards. I need to read more things; I need to learn more things; I need to talk to more people who know more than me. That's why my activism only goes as far as learning more for myself now, and hoping to influence the system when I get inside the system as an educator. I plan on

doing activism through education because schools – although influenced by culture – define culture. When I see that when things are screwed up, I want to destroy them, and then rebuild them in new ways.

Luka

There is a lot going on between the pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups on campus. And unfortunately there's a power issue because the Jewish organizations are meeting with high-level administration. But they won't sit with the Palestine kids because the university doesn't agree with what they are saying. So I work with one of the Jewish student orgs. But I'm a stealth Palestinian supporter. It's really weird.

The way I see it, a lot of queer people and people of color have an investment in the pro-Palestinian group because they see the pro-Israel group as a colonial power. Other populations of people have experienced colonialism in the same way, so people feel connection with the colonialism that's being experienced by Palestinian people. I personally don't think I can claim to have a similar experience to Palestinian people even though I'm queer. My reason for caring about the Palestinians has to do with allyhood more than with parallel experience. Raised Jewish, I'm expected to be Zionist, so I'm actually going against an identity that I hold in support of the pro-Palestinian group.

I go from the pro-Palestinian people to pro Israel and ask, "Did you ever think of this perspective?" They know I'm not super pro Israel, but they don't know I'm pro Palestine. I try to help the pro Palestine people know what's going on because the pro Israel people have a lot more political power here. I can tell them what's going on politically, what the pro-Israel perspective is, and try to reframe it. Other times, I will intentionally talk to pro Israel people because they won't listen to people they know are

pro Palestine. They just won't. I can present it in a way that seems not so biased.

Neither side knows I'm involved in the other. I can't be out about it because I would no longer have access. If it ever got to a point where no one was listening to each other, then we need people like me who could translate.

Then there's what I do in my spare time: I'm in a group that goes around to educate others on specific topics. My first year of college, I was in the LGBT group and the domestic violence awareness group. I visited the environmental one occasionally, but I didn't really get involved in it just because at that time, I had to think about my own identities. It's when I joined the DV group that I realized that I'm actually a survivor. Also, I was part of an activist organization called Peer Justice. I'm involved in a mentorship program too where I have a mentee that I meet with every other week. And then everyday life: one time I had to sit down with a group of friends and talk about how tranny is a problematic word. "That word is a porn term," or, "That term is actually used as an insult word, and is not one people use to self-identify." So I'll draw out spectrums for gender and sex to give them a very simplified way to think about the two. I'm often doing that sort of stuff for friends who don't get it.

It's exhausting because on top of that, I'm trans, which takes up time and energy, and definitely has an impact on my stress. Misgendering is probably the worst. In my classes, I have to explain my pronouns every single time. *We've been in this class for the whole semester. How hard is it for you to use they, them, and theirs? These are not made up words. These are words that you already know, but you just refuse to use them when I ask.* I feel like someone intentionally disrespecting my pronouns is a microaggression. It depends on many times it happens a day, but it that scratch can turn into a big open

wound. It's really hard for me to keep focusing so much energy on telling others what to call me.

I either have to spend my time healing, or being active in educating others so crap doesn't keep happening. That's the balance I'm trying to find. Right now, I go and go and go with activism and educating and patience until I have none left, and then I need to be alone for three days and just not talk to anyone. It's not healthy, but I don't know how else to do it. I feel so obligated. There's no one else doing it, so I have to.

The thing is you do see slow change. I see slow change. That motivates me to keep pushing myself hard. I also want to make sure that I can devote time to people I care about who are outside of the trans community because it's important to build solidarity. I'll go and help a group of people even though it doesn't affect my life super directly. For me, it's a sense of imagined community. As part of the community, since I have these skills, time, or ability to do something I care about emotionally, or am, "Oh, that was me three years ago," then I'm obligated. Not obligated, but it's my responsibility – it's all of our responsibility – to care. I get really angry with people in our community who use their passing privilege in order to not participate in activism. We help you with all your binary needs, so why aren't you helping us with our non-binary needs? Trans people need people who are not trans to help sometimes too because we're a small group. If we rely on the same ten people in Transgress – which is our trans-focused student group – to change every bathroom on campus, there is no way in hell it's happening. I'm trying to do that too while maintaining my relationship, while maintaining my schoolwork, while maintaining my family relationships... I'm doing all the normal human things plus my activism plus your activism plus my emotional

problems.

I didn't really think a lot about any of this when I first came to college, including the impact of being White or being from an upper-class background. I thought I was middle class or lower because my understanding of wealth was people who literally have so much money they own a private jet and a mansion and a tour bus. I came to school identifying as a bisexual, cis woman. I was from a pretty conservative place and I didn't really know what trans identity was. All I knew was the binary; I didn't understand the concept of gender fluid.

After I was in college a bit, I realized my perception of reality was a little skewed. What helped fix that was my being part of a living-learning community called Activate!, which is about activism in the community, and learning how to organize to promote social change. In what we call Facilitate to Activate, we run dialogues within campus groups that are often times meant to help its members resolve internal conflict by moving toward a solution rooted in social justice. I did one last week on socioeconomic status. Two of us got paired up – I came in as the agent-identified facilitator and my co-facilitator was target – and we went through activities and probing questions to try to get people to come to their own conclusion about their SES. “You have a job and make minimum wage: Do you buy birthday gifts for your friend? Do you buy health insurance? Do you buy these groceries?” It makes them think about everyday decisions that wealthy people just don't have to think about. The point of this dialogue was to have the audience become more aware of their SES and how it affects our activism and our community.

Eventually, in an effort to make some new friends, I ended up at a Jewish queer group on campus. I'm not religious, but I was raised Jewish, and so I feel attachment to

tradition, even though it's not a salient identity for me. Someone I met there – who is the person I'm seeing now – and I would hang out and talk about really deep things. One day we were talking about gender. We were sharing our own experiences with gender, and I was describing how about how when I was younger, I would dress up and pretend I was a boy. I just threw out all the ways I'd experimented, and how I'd always had this obsession with androgyny because I felt like my partners policed my gender a lot. We talked about gender fluidity, and after some research, I thought I must be non-binary trans! I freaked out at first. Why am I freaking out? My behavior isn't changing at all; I'm just changing the label on what I'm calling the behavior.

Since I was little, I thought it was sexuality, but it's gender. It's gender. It was learning to distinguish between the two. I was conflating my gender with my sexuality, which is what a lot of people do. I was always trying to balance my gender with the person I was with, feeling I needed to express myself differently. I felt like if I was with a feminine lesbian that I needed to be masculine; if I'm was with a frat dude, then I had to be Barbie. After a while, I realized I wasn't playing out genders because I didn't think I couldn't have women unless I was a man. I was playing out gender because I wanted to be different gender. It was like having a word that made all the difference. The activist community gave me that vocabulary, and the identity gave me a community. If you have a way to describe it to yourself, then you have a way to describe it to people. And having a community behind me made me feel more confident in explaining it to others.

So my trans identity is pretty new. I identify as gender fluid. I also identify as non-binary trans. People often conflate them even though they're distinct. Gender fluid for me means my gender changes all the time; non-binary means I could be looking like

Barbie tomorrow, then a man next week, but androgynous most of the time. Most of the time I feel very centered, although I tend to lean feminine. I think a lot of my survivor identity influences my femininity, and I'm comfortable doing feminine because that's how I grew up.

That's an interesting identity piece of my activism. Figuring out I was a survivor made me more... actually, pulled me out of being active for a while. Because I needed the time to take care of myself once I figured it out. I wish that activism made me more out about my survivorness, but it actually makes me more hidden because people think I'm fragile or can't handle things. I go to dialogues and do binary gender dialogues, and abuse comes up all the time and if people knew, they might not think I could do it.

My being a survivor also comes up because of pressure from my community of trans and queer people to be polyamorous. There is a conflation being queer and being radical means being polyamorous. I literally cannot adopt polyamory because of my experience as a survivor. But when I don't share with people why, they just think I'm being close-minded, and that's a whole another interesting aspect of radical communities. It's just interesting not being radical enough. When I say I'm not out in certain places, people ask, "Why are you not unapologetically genderqueer?" It's because I don't want to lose my parents. I feel like that's a place where I'm not queer enough. Within the general radical and queer community you have to be "enough."

My identities do strongly play into which activism I choose to do and not to do. I try to do a balance of self and community, and then ones that are not my community, I choose who I want to ally with. Because of that, I am mostly involved in personal identity politics more than I am in poverty and homelessness and stuff like that. It's not

that I don't care about those things it's just you have to pick and choose to devote your time. I do care a lot about the struggles of students of color, specifically Arab students, Black students, Latino/Latina students because people I care about are experiencing hurt and are having inequitable experiences here.

It's impossible to say that my activism doesn't affect how I identify as trans. And it's the other way around too. I'm sure of the fact that because I had to fight to pee in a certain place and feel comfortable makes me more secure in the fact that I'm trans. I feel like I'm holding onto my trans identity tighter because I have to fight for it. I don't know if it's the activism or the community that comes with activism, but us working together reaffirms my value as trans. It makes sense doesn't it? There is no way to separate any of my identities: My race influences the way that I am trans. My being a survivor intersects with how I am trans. My existence as someone who experiences PTSD affects how I walk around and experience being trans. My gender before I identified as trans effects how I am as a trans person. Religious upbringing affects how I see myself as trans. There is no way for one to exist separately of the other. Same with my activist identity: I've been inspired by a movement to identify in a certain way, and I've joined movements because I identified in that way. And I've also had them happened concurrently, where the activism and identity go hand in hand. There are ways to compartmentalize in different spaces where one becomes more salient than another, but I never in a space where any become invisible. They are all important; they all influence one another.

My transgender identity motivates me to become involved in certain movements or causes. It comes in multiple forms. It clearly motivates me to become active in causes that affect my life directly and other people who are also in the trans spectrum. That

includes the bathroom initiative. Transgress, our undergrad student group, is working with the university and the student government to try to get one gender-inclusive, ability-accessible restroom in every single building on campus. I'm clearly involved in that because I need to pee. I'm also on the campus committee that's working on gender-inclusive housing. We're working on the programming for that housing option. Clearly that matters for me because I'm trans. I want other trans students to feel comfortable living here because as a trans student living in the dorms, I didn't get to explore my identity fully because I felt restricted in my environment. That stuff I choose because of my experience. Because I know what it feels like to not have a bathroom that safe. And I know it feels like to be misgendered. I can talk about the experience and the need to educate. My personal perspective as trans can help guide the programming.

I'm involved in activism around race too because there isn't often trans representation in those communities. I think it's important for trans people of color to have somebody who can be an ally to them. I see common struggle – not that bathrooms are going to be an issue for people of color in the same way – but discrimination within the university happens against people of color and trans students. We both have a common issue here. People who are of low SES have a common issue here. I become involved in those movements to build solidarity with each other. Within general queer activism, I show up to represent the trans voices because it's usually always lesbians and gay men. There are very few open survivors who are also trans, so I go in as the trans survivor.

In all these spaces, it can be tokenizing, but it's also important. When I have the energy, I'll be that person. Same with education: I don't mind it. I'm very patient 90% of

the time. But if I'm misgendered more than once, then I'm out. People in the trans community are expected to be patient. If I've corrected you six times already today and it's not changing your behavior, it's really frustrating and exhausting, and I just kind of shut down so I just won't participate.

But it is worth standing up to people who I have a direct stake in them understanding or a direct stake in someone I care about. For example, I had a group project member who actively misgendered me every time we met. The group member will say, "Luka is trans," but will then use the wrong pronouns. That's a person I think that's worth standing up to because we are working toward a common goal. Internet activism is a place where it gets fuzzy about who is worth standing up to. I try to stand up to everybody and if it goes badly I just drop out if it's not worth it to keep going. Finally, what's great is that I'm always out when I'm doing activism, even if it's related to, for example, race. Even if I know there is transphobia, because I know it is an activist setting, it's a space where I know I can call people out as transphobic or even just jerks. Even when I'm working as an ally, if somebody is misgendering me, I'll say, "Hey, I'm trans and my pronouns are they/them/theirs," and then continue to do the work I'm there to do.

Themes

Places of commonality or difference, as well as broader themes, can be seen when looking at the participants' narratives as a whole. In some instances, participants' trans and activist identities are explicitly connected, such as in an activism project of inventorying the gender-inclusive restrooms on campus, the creation of a transgender policy group, or educating others on third-person pronouns beyond "he" and "she." In

other narratives, the connection between the two is more nuanced. Such is the case in Jae's account of the intersection between zir drag performances and activism:

Drag is an expression of gender, an expression of how you see your inner self.

Activism is an expression of how you see or want the world to be. So they are both different expressions of yourself, in a way – what you want yourself, or the world, to be.

Not surprisingly, interviews with participants that focused on their activism invariably included stories of their trans identities; talking about their gender identities led to conversations about activism. The two are inextricably linked. Woven throughout these stories were descriptions of the roles other identities – race, ethnicity or religion, social class, age, perceived gender, specific sub-identity within the broader trans spectrum, and more – play at the intersection of gender and activist identity. It is all these identities – and resultant experiences – that intersect to create a new condition that defines these participants' time in college.

The effects of activism on their transgender identities varied by participant. Being involved in social justice work motivated Ash to question gender in the first place, while seeing people of varied gender expressions in activist spaces encouraged Jae to be open about zir transgender identity. Sal's involvement in activism necessitates that he come out as trans in order to establish his right to be there, rather than being “just some guy who showed up.” Immersion in a community of activists helps to reaffirm the Luka's trans identity and empowers them to hold onto the identity more tightly.

The two participants, Jack and Sal, who have gone through physical transition with the use of hormones (also the two oldest participants), recognized that transition

brought with it more confidence. These participants generally have more control over when to reveal their trans identity – they have “passing privilege” – because their gender presentation intersects to obscure their trans identity. This is in contrast to the participants who struggle daily with being misgendered or with “double takes,” the latter mentioned by both Jae and Ash. For the participants who have not chosen hormonal transition, their years in college are awash with questions and experimentation around gender, including changing their names and third-person pronouns, as well as trying out different forms of gender expression. Steve, Jae, and Ash, all designated male at birth, sometimes question whether they can claim a trans identity knowing they don’t follow the traditional narrative of “being born in the wrong body.”

The participants told stories that described the overlap of their transgender and activist identities, and the roles other social identities play at that intersection. Arden’s social class privilege made them not think twice about providing financial resources to peers struggling with their trans or queer identities. Ash’s history of mental health issues intersected with activism when Ash entered a severe state of depression triggered by challenges of being trans. “I asked myself, ‘What is the point?’ But because no one was going to give me the answer, I just buried it. Distracted myself with real-world things like activism.” The intersection of his activism, trans identity, and life as a scholar is what allows Sal to ask the questions he does in his research, for him a form of activism, noting his “twenty-six years living as a woman.” In attempts to self-advocate for quality health care, Jack finds it is both his trans status and identity as an adoptee that interferes with his ability to receive medical care from his more traditional, Korean physician. Steve knows their binary non-conforming gender identity and engagement in trans-

related activism cannot intersect with Punjabi culture, so they do everything possible to ensure the three don't come together in the same setting. Jae says, "I don't want to get shot" knowing that the intersection of zir gender expression and race poses a threat to personal safety when engaging in activism in more politically conservative areas of the state. Finally, Luka's trans identity motivates them to support activism with the pro-Palestinian group on campus, but the intersection with their Jewish upbringing requires that support to be "stealth" so as not to alienate peers in the pro-Israel movement.

Participants engaged in a variety of forms of activism, both formally through student and non-profit organizations, and in everyday life. Ash and Luka are involved in a number of campus organizations, Jack has plans to get involved in a university committee, and Arden tried to start their own student group. Participants did not limit their activism to campus. For example, Jae had lined up summer internships at local non-profit organizations, and Sal participated in a radio show educating people around gender. Most participants brought up everyday activism in terms of correcting and educating people's use of gendered language, a practice facilitated by the intersection of their trans and activist identities. In class, for example, Steve would self-advocate around use of the third-person pronouns they/their/them; Luka would intervene when friends used outdated or derogatory terms that referred to gender identity. Everyday activism intersects with their trans identity when Arden works to connect people with financial, medical, political, or social resources. Ash saw the work of caring for other activists as an form of social justice, citing the Audre Lorde quote of self-preservation being a political act.

Replete in all the narratives was the notion of not participating in activism for selfish reasons, but to better the conditions for other people. All felt called to help others

even if they did not directly benefit from the work being done. For White participants Sal, Luka, and Ash, this meant working with campus- and community-based groups fighting racism. Sal said his work for other groups was valuable to him “because living in a society of people who can participate more fully is an emotional benefit.” Luka sees the importance of building solidarity between seemingly disparate groups, recognizing common or parallel struggles that may not be evident at first glance.

A few participants noted specific experiences that led them to begin a life of activism. For Ash, engagement in activism started by going to a conference and being asked to think about different forms of oppression. It was Luka’s involvement in a living-learning community on campus that helped to spark activist work. Arden tells the story of growing up doing activism with their mom. No matter how it started, participants talked about how their trans identity – sometimes in conjunction with other social identities or life experiences – is what motivates them to continue to be involved with activism. As a member of a community marginalized for gender identity, participants have personal investment in the work it takes to achieve equity. In addition, having visibility as a trans person had value for participants. For example, Jae uses zir gender presentation as an advantage to stimulate discussion during social justice work: “Being visibly transgressive is a conversation starter a lot of times; the whole shock factor really gets people's attention.” Arden identifying as genderqueer was motivation to take to the streets during a Minnesota pride march in support of inclusion of their identity under the transgender umbrella.

Although the overlap of trans and activist identities is a positive motivator, other intersecting identities contradict identification in the trans spectrum and/or disrupt

engagement in social justice work. With some participants, specific identities clash with other identities they hold. Jae finds it challenging to participate in BDSM yet identify as a feminist; the microaggressions from within the queer community make it difficult to participate as a person of color in LGBT activism. Steve talks about how identifying as genderqueer and being Sikh or Indian is not a balance, but a choice; Steve feels awkward being a male-bodied person calling out misogyny. Ash is hesitant to identify as not having a gender because of it being akin to the problematic scenario where White people claim not to have a race. Sal said activists consider one's dedication to social justice to be measured by how much time and energy goes into the work. He feels strongly about participating in activist endeavors, but at the same time wants to balance that with other desires such as developing his career, making money, and growing his family. Arden believes in being an out and proud activist working for transgender rights, but knows this visibility may compromise the ability to keep their gender identity hidden from their family. Luka is expected to be pro Israel because of how they grew up, but on campus, secretly works for both "sides" of the conflict. In addition, as a survivor of domestic violence, Luka worries others will find them too fragile to participate in activism on certain topics, so keeps their identity as a survivor hidden. Nearly every participant told the story of how identifying as transgender was itself a form of activism. Arden said of trans-identified people and gender nonconformists, "We are all gender avengers, challenging the gender status quo." Jack is assured by the fact that just by being open about his trans identity, he is being an activist through his everyday living.

Participants cited a number of challenges around engaging in activism, especially that focused on transgender topics. As a student, there were a number of priorities to

balance. Sometimes participants emphasized their activism letting their academics falter, while other times they disengaged from activism altogether in order to focus on school. Finding that balance was needed in order to manage their stress. Ash was frustrated by the fact that no one outside the trans community would help with trans-specific projects, leaving the burden in the hands of the six consistent members of the trans student group. Several participants spoke of the inordinate amount of energy it takes to address inappropriate uses of gendered language. Slow change is frustrating to Arden, while Jae and Steve are stressed when they encounter vehement opponents to trans equity. Finally, when the social justice work revolves around trans identity, three of the participants mentioned the challenges of being considered as the representative of all trans people. Luka found those experiences “tokening,” and participants found it problematic to be the “authority” (Steve) or “guinea pig” (Jack) when it came to addressing trans topics.

When race intersected with trans and activist identities, other challenges for these participants arose. Jae, Jack, and Steve, all the participants of color, found microaggressions and prejudicial treatment worse in queer and trans activist circles, which led Jae to ask, “How can you spit on someone when you're being spit on?” White participants Sal and Ash also felt race to be a challenging aspect to trans activism. For Sal, having three privileged identities – White, masculine, and educated – meant having to advocate for his right to be involved, especially in activism geared toward racial or gender equity. Ash was annoyed with being assumed to be the authority because of being White. In the presence of women or trans people, Ash felt regarded as having cisgender *and* male privilege, despite not identifying within either category.

The challenges of engaging in social justice led participants to integrate activism into their academic work, as well as formulate plans for more concentrated efforts in the future. Arden, majoring in Art History, wrote a class paper on the intersection of art and activism; Ash took a course where the content is explicitly focused on the intersection of transgender identity and activism. As a graduate student, Sal had multiple opportunities to merge activism and trans identity into his scholarship, both in terms of his teaching, as well as forming the lens through which he conducted research. He is thinking how this might play out in his future as a college professor. Jack is considering now, and as part of a future career, the role technology might play in advancing the rights of people who are trans. Steve has plans to bring all their identities together by writing about them once the time restrictions of being a student are lifted. As a teacher, Steve plans to dismantle broken educational systems from the inside, and then “rebuild them in new ways.”

Summary

The narratives in this chapter are first-person descriptions of the intersections of trans, activist, and other identities of the participants. The common threads running through them give insight into the meaning the intersection of transgender and activist identities holds for these participants. Theoretical interpretations, connections to the literature, conclusions, implications for higher education practice, and recommendations for future research will be discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how transgender college students described the intersections of their gender, activist, and other social identities in the urban university context. Data from participant interviews were analyzed and formed into first-person narratives. The narratives reveal the ways students' activist identities were affected by their trans identities, how their trans identities were shaped by their activism, and the role other identities played at those intersections. The gender and other identities – both privileged and marginalized – of participants motivate their engagement in activism and shape the types of activism in which they are involved.

Identity Development

The development of their transgender and activist identities was described by participants as starting soon after entering college. The process was marked by learning about gender identity and social justice work through going to conferences, getting involved in campus organizations, and socializing with others. Participants' description of their transgender identity development has parallels with existing literature. In the studies by Gagné et al. (1997) and Bockting and Coleman (2007), trans identity development included stages of self-identification as trans and coming out to others. The former was achieved by meeting others and learning the language around trans identity (Gagné et al., 1997), experiences described by some of this study's participants. Parallel to participants in this research, the literature reveals how coming out (to self and others) promotes increased participation in activism (Bockting & Coleman, 2007) and commitment to social change (Bilodeau, 2005). Involvement in campus activities led to positive gains in participants' personal development, findings that align with those by

Kuh et al. (1991). For participants who engage in formal activist endeavors, their activist identity development follows the models presented in the literature (e.g., Harper & Quaye, 2007; Komives et al., 2005; Makkawi, 2004; Urrieta, 2007). Participants in the study are committed to all marginalized communities, have moved (or are planning to move) into leadership positions, and recognize the importance of the intersection of their identities to their activist work.

Although participants in this study were still undergoing development of their identities, they described future activist endeavors as being lifelong practices. Part of the delay in participating in more robust ways has to do with being a student – not having the time, energy, or resources to be fully engaged. However, participants looked forward to building activism into their future careers or ensuring other ways of bringing all their identities together in the future.

Intersectional Complexity

Evident in the data is the complexity that exists at the intersection of participants' identities, making it difficult to isolate the interaction between their transgender and activist identities at the exclusion of other social identities. Participants responded to questions about their transgender identity while referencing their activism; questions about activist identity were linked to experiences of being trans. The theoretical framework of intersectionality suggests that these identities are linked, and resulting experiences – both positive and negative – happen simultaneously (Combahee, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991).

When various axes of identities come together, a new identity is formed (Parent & Moradi, 2013), which creates a set of circumstances different from those produced by

each identity separately. In some contexts, an identity may take on salience, while moving to a place of less importance in a different set of circumstances. Identities may intersect or run parallel to each other; they may be invisible, imperceptible (as in the case of passing), or purposely hidden from others.

The complexity of the interactions between these participants' identities is seen when looking at how salience shifts in different contexts. Jack's race took on more salience after transition when he was unable to measure his masculinity the way his White trans male friends do: by how much body hair they have or how tall they are. Arden's trans identity is "on the forefront of [their] mind right now," while their racial identity is suggested as being irrelevant ("I mean I'm White; I'm privileged too. But I've never felt that way."). The salience of race, either due to marginalization as a person of color or awareness of the privileges Whiteness holds, to other participants in this study is reflected in their social justice work, while Arden's focus remains on LGB or trans activism.

Transgender, activist, and other identities can intersect or run parallel to each other. For example, Sal's racial identity and educational attainment intersect with his gender in a way that makes it challenging for him to be taken seriously as an activist. Passing as cisgender, others see him as a White, male academic steeped in privilege, rather than as someone who has first-hand knowledge of marginalization. On the other hand, Steve's identities at home (as Punjabi, Sikh, etc.) are not integrated with their identity as a trans activist. A "non-binary conforming" gender means participating in activism around trans identity and language. A cultural background as Sikh means attending temple and "being the best person you can be." The identities do not overlap to

make Steve a “non-binary conforming Sikh activist,” but run parallel to each other, never intersecting.

The concept of “intersectional invisibility” (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), where individuals’ identities do not align with the prototypes of their respective group members, seemed to hold true for participants whose gender identity did not conform to the binary or participants of color. All the participants’ gender identities fell outside of the prototypical, which are either (cisgender) man or (cisgender) woman. But marginalized within a marginalized group (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) because they do not conform to the expectations of a prototypical trans person, namely someone who undergoes a physical transition to become the “other” gender, are individuals who identify as binary non-conforming, agender, genderqueer, etc. Intersectional invisibility occurred with participants like Jae as well who does not adhere to the prototype of “trans activist,” which is White, nor “multiracial,” which is cisgender.

Another form of invisibility holds true for Jack and Sal in that their trans identity is imperceptible. Passing makes navigating gender-segregated campus spaces, programs, etc. easier in some regards, but these participants find difficulty in convincing others their need for “women-specific” medical care or explaining why they never registered for Selective Service (required to receive federal financial aid) like every other male on campus. In both cases, not aligning with identity prototypes and passing as another identity, invisibility means exclusion from groups that are formed along a single axis of identity and the need to fight extra hard for recognition both within and outside their identity communities.

Activism at the Intersection

The activism of the participants reflects their intersectional identities in that their work is not focused on a single identity (Combahee, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991). Participants engage in activism where change is a direct benefit to them, but also cross identity boundaries to work with other oppressed groups. As seen with individuals developing an internalized (multiculturalist) identity, described in Cross and Vandiver's Expanded Nigrescence theory (2001), participants in this study see a common struggle and begin to engage in activism outside of their own gender, racial, ethnic, ability, or religious identity categories. Ash's work around surveying the inclusive restrooms on campus is not only focused on the needs of transgender individuals, but also people with disabilities. The purpose of Sal's marching band was to bring a diverse group of people – all who experience oppression differently – together to promote social justice through music. Luka works as a translator between opposing student groups, influenced by their Jewish upbringing to be involved in pro-Israel movements, and motivated by their trans identity to work with the pro-Palestinian group. Participants recognize the importance of building coalitions between trans-specific and other student organizations, and ensuring trans representation in student groups not organized around gender identity. The literature (e.g., Astin, 1993a; Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) clearly supports the notion of building solidarity across identity-based groups as interactions with diverse peers have positive impacts on the educational outcomes, retention, personal development, and overall satisfaction of college students.

Identifying as transgender is one factor that motivated the participants in this study to engage in social change through activism. Marginalized college students have a

history of organizing around identity in efforts to achieve social change (Boren, 2001; Rhoads, 1998; Vallela, 1988). Motivated partly by their trans identity, participants in this study got involved in both everyday and more formal types of activism. The literature (e.g., Revilla, 2004; Rhoads & Martinez, 1998) notes the positive benefits of student engagement in activism as including bringing about needed change, personal empowerment, student development, and a way to combat attrition. The positive effects of involvement in campus activities also noted in the literature (e.g., Astin, 1993b; Flowers, 2004; Tinto, 1993) indicate student activists would be more likely to persist on campus and have improved academic outcomes. The importance of activism to participants in this study is clear: getting involved means satisfying motivation borne from their own identities and contributing to making positive differences in their own and other people's lives.

Participants also told stories of challenges that match those found in the literature: transgender students experience discrimination, harassment, and hostile climates (Brown et al., 2004; Dugan et al., 2012; McKinney, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010) on college campuses, which can lead to negative psychological effects (Bilodeau, 2009; Effrig et al., 2011). The participants in this study, especially those between the extremes of man and woman, have difficulties navigating facilities and services segregated by gender, and find the binary system of gender imposed by the university (Bilodeau, 2009) problematic. However, when other identities intersected with trans and activist, the challenges seem to extend beyond institutional-level discrimination (medical insurance/care excluding trans health, absence of preferred name option, etc.) and blatant harassment. Participants who look to campus LGBT centers for support around trans-specific projects or resources are

met with staff and students who do not seem to understand how sex, gender, and sexuality come together in individuals who identify as gender non-conforming. Participants cite within-group harassment where transgender people who are going through a physical transition think of binary non-conforming, genderqueer, or androgynous individuals as “not really trans.” Participants of color expressed a fear for their personal safety while engaging in activism knowing the intersection of their race and transgressive gender expression meant higher risks. Every day, participants face insults from instructors and peers who argue that their gender identity or pronouns are illegitimate, and for participants of color, these are on top of the racial microaggressions they face from both within and outside their LGB, trans, and queer communities.

Participants in this study repeatedly brought up the stress of working as an activist, which match the negative effects of student engagement in activism noted in the literature (Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Vaccaro, 2011). However, for these participants, being transgender compounds the consequences identified in the literature, and having one or more additional marginalized identities exacerbates these effects further. Participants talked about increased demands on their time and energy, and having to balance their activism with their academics, all without a concomitant increase in self-care or outside support. Identifying as trans and working as an activist means they are often called upon to speak as the authority on topics of transgender identities and experiences, making them out to be “the token trans person” or “the guinea pig.” Exclusion from broader movements leads these participants to have to take on the entirety of activist projects on their own. Working on trans-specific projects with no one else to assist is stressful and overwhelming. Participants see larger campus units’ lack of headway on trans-specific

projects as signals to take on the projects in order to make any forward progress. Similar to what is found in the literature (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Pearce, 2012), participants between or outside the gender binary, like those who identify as genderqueer, agender, androgynous, non-conforming, or gender fluid, talked about “backlash” from their LGB and gender-binary peers when doing campus activism. They did not speak to the isolation transgender students in Bilodeau’s (2009) study described, but did to the simple exhaustion of having to explain their preferred name and pronouns daily to peers and instructors. Most study participants also spoke of the way race intersects with their trans and activist identities, although there were differences in how participants of color and Whites described the influence of race on the juncture. Participants of color described negative experiences where their race intersected with the gender and/or activist identity (Grant et al., 2011; Meyer, 2009; NCAVP, 2014). They expressed surprise and frustration that racism and prejudice would follow them into trans and activist spaces. Participants who see their Whiteness as a salient identity recognize racial privilege often serves as a deterrent to being respected within activist spaces.

One difficulty these participants face is that of constantly having to regulate the visibility of their identities while engaging in activism, a phenomenon studied within other stigmatized identity categories, such people with disabilities (Scotch, 1998) or LGB individuals (Taylor & Raeburn, 1995). Participants in this research, however, also see the value in being out in activist spaces. Being out gives some implicit permission to be involved by demonstrating to others their understanding of struggle and marginalization. Other participants think it important to represent transgender identity in non-trans-specific groups. Literature on trans individuals indicates that with visibility comes

harassment, which in turn causes those individuals to conceal their transgender identity (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Rankin, 2003). Several of these participants are not out to family members, so although they are out activists, they take care in making sure family and activism never intersects. Several participants mentioned the implications being an out, trans-identified student, and worry about the potential effects on their future careers.

Not Being Enough

Looking at the data through a theoretical lens of intersectionality, a common theme emerged: the idea of not being *enough*. Participants felt this either in their transgender and/or activist identity, or in one or more of their intersecting identities – not trans enough, lady enough, Korean enough, activist enough, radical enough, Brown enough, educated enough. Sometimes this pressure came from external sources – *You don't take hormones: you're not trans enough* – and sometimes it came from within: *I don't confidently call myself an Activist activist because I don't know enough about different kinds of oppression*.

Being perceived as in between two identities, such as not falling at either end of the gender binary – not man enough, not woman enough – is usually what prompted external forces to question the participants belonging in specific categories. However, with the two participants from the sample that acknowledged using hormones and/or having undergone surgery, not being enough was about being perceived as cisgender. For example, they were seen as not queer enough or radical enough to participate in activism, or had to fight for the right to receive trans-related services.

Participants had different explanations for the internal dialogues about not being enough. The element of time was often a factor in either that participants' gender or

activist identities were relatively new (i.e. undergoing identity development) or they were on hold until the future (e.g., *I'm not X enough right now, but will be after I graduate*). With regard to transgender identity, some participants questioned whether adopting a non-normative gender identity was a way of combatting their shame over their intersecting identity of male-bodiedness, or adding an oppressed identity onto a long list of privileged ones.

Implications

The participants' narratives reveal a number of implications student affairs professionals in higher education could consider in order to best support transgender college student activists. So little understanding of basics of working with transgender students – like the array of available third-person gender pronouns or the importance of being called by a name other than their legal one – puts the onus of education on the trans students themselves. Participants in this study faced pressure or felt an obligation to educate their instructors, classmates, peers, and other campus community members on all things trans. This everyday education, on top of the activist work they are already engaged in (and studying, maintaining relationships, being involved in extracurricular activities, etc.), was described as exhausting. Universities can relieve students of this responsibility by instituting widespread education and professional development on trans students and the implications transgender identities have on practice. University personnel, on top of including trans identity in their repertoire of multicultural competence, must learn to work with students holistically, understanding the complexity of how identities intersect.

In addition, advanced undergraduate and graduate students need authentic opportunities to bring their identities and scholarship together in order to effect change. Participants' engagement in activism was borne from their identities, and despite being exhausted from continued engagement, they persisted because of its importance in their lives. Formal opportunities, such as serving on committees, teaching courses, developing curriculum, giving talks, etc. would allow these students to participate in important work, but in discrete endeavors that are not as taxing on their time and energy, and that have real value to their future careers. Concomitant with structured opportunities should be specific support to ensure students maintain a balance between their activist endeavors and everything else (academics, jobs, relationships, etc.), especially knowing the toll identifying as trans and being an everyday activist can have on their lives as students.

In addition, more intersectional work within and between campus organizations needs to take place in order to mirror how identities overlap within students. As evidenced by these participants, students hold many identities. A deliberate effort to bring organizations together would allow students to more freely participate in work that reflects their actual lives, rather than having to pick and choose which identity to give more salience. An Asian-American student organization, for example, might team up with a transgender student group in a joint activist effort. Not only could there be common concerns between organizations, but the shared work would serve the students who represent an intersection of these identities. Better yet would be the creation of an organization or student group that attends to the new condition created at the intersection of two or more identities.

Finally, student affairs professionals must take care in providing trans-specific resources for their college and university students. Resources for transgender-identified students might need to exist separately from those for LGB students. Furthermore, resources for transsexuals (e.g., FTM, MTF, etc.) should be disaggregated from those for students who do not identify within the gender binary (e.g., androgynous, genderqueer, etc.). Other trans-specific resources include professional development for campus administrators, faculty, and staff, and extracurricular education for students. Continuing to include information on trans identities and experiences as part of LGB education can easily lead to the conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation. Personnel working with trans students or educating the general campus population need to be well versed in the differences between gender and sexual identity, and furthermore between the subcategories under the trans umbrella.

Limitations and Future Research

In order to build a solid foundation on what we know about transgender college student activists, future research needs to be conducted. Welcome would be research into the lives of transgender students, as the field is relatively new. More research on the experiences of transgender college student activists would give us insight as to how their engagement in activism is changing with the rise of social media and the Internet.

In addition, based on the fact that the participants are university students, I believe the sample to be rather homogenous along the lines of social class. Of the participants who spoke about social class, only one mentioned growing up in a working class family while the rest cited relative class privilege. Conducting the same study outside the higher

education context – and drawing from a wider range of social classes – might lead to new understanding.

At the same time, future research of the intersection of trans and activist identities might include a less diverse sample than the one for this study. Having more data from a set of participants who all identify as people of color, graduate students, or religious minorities, as examples, or that self-identify under specific subcategories of trans (e.g., genderqueer), might provide more insight as to how individuals within specific identity categories experience the intersection where they come together.

Finally, it should be noted that participants in this study attend colleges and universities in urban areas of the Midwest, U.S.A. therefore findings might not reflect the experiences of other transgender college student activists. Future studies could include participants from other areas of the country or world, and also outside the urban context. Students who attend smaller, private, or non-urban colleges may describe the experiences around their identities and activism in vastly different ways, changing the implications and conclusions drawn from studies situated in such contexts.

Conclusion

This study explored how transgender college students described the intersection of their gender, activist, and other identities. The experiences of marginalization participants talked about during the course of the interviews align with experiences noted in the literature by other transgender college students (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Erbentraut, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Rankin, 2005). Some experience harassment in gender-specific spaces such as restrooms and dormitories; others discussed difficulty in navigating university systems around legal name and the

sex designated in their records. A general lack of knowledge about transgender identities and misunderstandings of appropriate language, including third-person pronouns, makes everyday life challenging for these participants.

Involvement in activism provided these participants a way to combat their marginalization by working toward positive change on their university campuses. An intersectional analysis of these participants' narratives reveals that the overlap between their transgender and activist identities is complicated. It is not just about being trans, nor just about being an activist; these two identities cannot be analyzed in isolation. Any description of the intersection is incomplete without taking into account participants' other social identities. There is evidence that part of the motivation for participating in activism came from being transgender-identified; and being an activist opened doors to participants seeing the breadth of gender identities. However, participants were also motivated by other factors, and where they directed their activist efforts depended on other personal or sociocultural identities, and how they enacted their social justice work was shaped by their academic pursuits and lives as students.

The university context served as a space where participants could explore their identities in relative safety, away from the scrutiny of parents, trying on different gender labels, expressions, and meeting others with similar identities. It is where they learned about the breadth of identities under the trans umbrella, and also about oppression, privilege, and social action. Participants' chosen programs of study influenced their activism in terms of choosing what causes to focus their activism on, or by giving them the skills to better engage in social justice work.

Evident in the stories of these participants is the notion that the intersections of transgender college students' gender and activist identities, especially when one considers the overlap of other sociocultural identities and experiences, are complex. But what is clear is that transgender college students' engagement in activism promotes positive change on campus, bettering the lives of themselves – and others – in the process.

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Appendix A
Email Questionnaire to Determine Eligibility

How old are you?

In what college or university are you enrolled? Are you an undergraduate or graduate student?

Do you self-identify as transgender? Please describe briefly.

Do you identify as an activist? Please describe briefly.

This study is about the intersection of identity. Please tell me a little about other ways in which you identify (e.g. race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc.):

In order to participate in this research, you will need to give your consent by reading and signing the attached IRB-approved consent form. If you have any questions about the form, you can ask me, or any of the contacts listed in Section 10 of the form.

Do you have any questions about the consent form or the research study itself?

If you meet the eligibility requirements for this study and would be willing to give your consent to participate in this research, I will contact you to schedule an initial meeting/interview.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Les T. Johnson

Appendix B
Recruitment Advertisement

activist | trans*



Are you a trans college student?*

Do you consider yourself an activist?

Consider participating in my research study!

What is the study about?

The purpose of my dissertation research is to learn more about the intersection between transgender and activist identities of urban university students.

Who can participate?

Most important is your interest in participating! You must also meet all of the following criteria:

- 18 years of age or older
- College student (undergraduate or graduate)
- Identify as trans (genderqueer, transgender, MTF, FTM, transsexual, etc.)
- Engage in any sort of campus activism such as advocacy work, leadership, protests, educating of others, etc. (Note that the activist work **does not** have to be related to trans issues!)

What does “participation” mean?

Participating in this research will involve us talking with each other (interviews, reviewing previous responses, etc.) 3 times (for an hour or less each time), and, if possible, attending public activism events with you. For your time and efforts, at the end of the study, I will make a \$25 donation to a non-profit or campus-based organization of your choice.

Who is doing this research?

My name is Les Johnson, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Urban Education at UW-Milwaukee. This research is for my dissertation.

What are the next steps?

Contact me via email at: johns893@uwm.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!

This study was approved by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee IRB on October 2, 2013, IRB Protocol Number 14.081.

Appendix C
Individual Interview Protocol

INITIAL MEETING/INTERVIEW ONE

Who are you and what is your background?

What university do you attend?

What is your student status (undergrad/grad)?

How long have you been a student?

What is your major/field of study?

What has been your academic career path?

How old are you?

What other categories of identity do you think are important for me to know about (i.e. ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, ability, religion, etc.)?

What pronouns would you like me to use when referring to you in my writing?

What pseudonym would you like me to use for this study?

What is the story of your transgender/gender identity?

How would you describe your transgender/gender identity?

How do you identify under the ‘trans’ umbrella?

What has been your process in identifying as transgender?

Did you *transition*?

Are you *out*?

What was it like growing up?

What is your relationship with family and friends?

INTERVIEW TWO

What is the story of your activist identity?

How would you describe your experiences with campus activism?

What types of activism (causes or movements) are you involved in?

In what ways do you participate?

How did you first get involved in activism in general?

What motivates you to stay involved in campus activism?

How does activism affect your life here or outside the university?

How did you decide to be involved in these particular movements?

How did you decided to be involved in these particular ways?

INTERVIEW THREE

What is the story of the intersections between your transgender and activist identities?

What role did your transgender identity play in motivating you to become involved in campus activism?

What role does your transgender identity have in decisions to remain engaged in campus activism?

What meaning does activism have in your life as a transgender-identified student?

What are some of the challenges you face as someone who is transgender-identified involved in campus activism? How do you respond to them?

What, if any, downsides are there to participating in campus activism as a transgender person?

How would you say you negotiate your level of outness or visibility when engaging in activist work?

How would you say your transgender identity affects your activist work?

How would you say your engagement in activism shapes your transgender identity?

What roles do your other identities (race, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) play at the intersection of your transgender and activist identities?

Appendix D
**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MILWAUKEE
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

THIS CONSENT FORM HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE IRB FOR A ONE-YEAR PERIOD

1. General Information

Study title: Exploring the Identities of Transgender Student Activists

Person in Charge of Study (Principal Investigator): Dr. Shannon Chavez-Korell is in charge of this study. She is a professor in the School of Education at UWM. Les Johnson is a co-researcher and is a doctoral candidate at UWM.

2. Study Description

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to.

Study description:

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the intersection between the transgender and activist identities of urban university students.

The study is being done to help us understand how these two identities – transgender identity and activist identity – are negotiated, which is an important consideration for student affairs professionals who work with transgender student activists.

The study will be conducted in the Midwest among college students, age 18 years or older. Six to eight students will be recruited to participate in the study. Your participation in the study will take approximately six hours total over the course of the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters.

3. Study Procedures

What will I be asked to do if I participate in the study?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in three interviews with Les Johnson. You can choose the location for these interviews. Each interview will last approximately one hour. The interviews will allow the researchers to understand the intersection of your transgender and activist identities.

With your permission, we will record your voice during the interview with a tape recorder. The recording will be done to make sure we accurately record your views. If you do not want your voice recorded, please let the researchers know and they will write down your responses on paper instead.

In addition, Les Johnson would like to attend public activists events or endeavors with you. These events will ideally take place both before and after the second interview. You can decide what events the researcher will attend.

4. Risks and Minimizing Risks

What risks will I face by participating in this study?

The potential risks for participating in this study are minimal – no greater than what you would experience in your everyday visits to campus. If you are asked a question you do not want to answer, you don't have to answer that question.

Psychological: It is likely that talking with the researchers will stir up some emotions, bring up difficult memories, or cause you to feel embarrassed about your experiences.

Of Special Concern: Being known by others as transgender on a college campus can lead to vulnerability in the social, physical, and legal realms. Examples include: discrimination in the work setting, prejudicial treatment by peers, difficulty navigating systems divided by gender (housing, healthcare, recreational sports, etc.), and biased treatment in the classroom.

All names of people, locations, organizations, etc. will be changed on all research materials to protect your confidentiality and minimize these risks. In addition, the researcher will provide a list of local, trans-supportive resources should you need help to address these concerns.

5. Benefits

Will I receive any benefit from my participation in this study?

A benefit you may receive by participating in this study is the opportunity to make your voice heard. It may be healing to talk about your experiences with a researcher who understands and respects your opinion. There are no other benefits to you other than to further research.

Are subjects paid or given anything for being in the study?

For your participation, we will donate \$25 to nonprofit organization or advocacy group of your choice, either in your name or anonymously (your choice) at the end of this study.

6. Study Costs

Will I be charged anything for participating in this study?

You will not be responsible for any of the costs from taking part in this research study.

7. Confidentiality

What happens to the information collected?

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. We may decide to present what we find to others, or publish our results in scholarly journals or at conferences, but all names, locations, and other identifying information will be changed for your protection.

Only the Dr. Shannon Chavez-Korell and Les Johnson will have access to the information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review your records.

Only your chosen pseudonym will be recorded. The information we collect will be stored on Les Johnson's personal, password-protected computer. We will erase the audiotapes after one year, but keep the transcripts indefinitely.

8. Alternatives

Are there alternatives to participating in the study?

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study.

9. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

What happens if I decide not to be in this study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

If you withdraw early from the study, the information collected to that point would remain part of the study. In the case of early withdrawal, the aforementioned \$25 donation will not be made.

10. Questions

Who do I contact for questions about this study?

For more information about the study or the study procedures or treatments, or to withdraw from the study, contact:

Shannon Chavez-Korell, Ph.D., N.C.C.
Associate Professor, Counseling Psychology
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Education
Department of Educational Psychology
2400 E Hartford Ave, Enderis Hall, Office 729
korell@uwm.edu

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?

The Institutional Review Board may ask your name, but all complaints are kept in confidence.

Institutional Review Board
Human Research Protection Program
Department of University Safety and Assurances
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
P.O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201
(414) 229-3173

11. Signatures

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered, and that you are 18 years of age or older.

Printed Name of Subject/ Legally Authorized Representative

Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

Date

Research Participant's Consent to Audio/Video/Photo Recording:

It is okay to audiotape me while I am in this study and use my audiotaped data in the research.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No

Research Participant's Consent to Having Researcher Attend Public Activist Events:

It is okay to attend public activist events or gatherings with me during this study, as long as I get to choose which events you will attend.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No

Principal Investigator (or Designee)

I have given this research subject information on the study that is accurate and sufficient for the subject to fully understand the nature, risks and benefits of the study.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Study Role

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

CURRICULUM VITAE

Les T. Johnson**EDUCATION**

University of Colorado-Boulder, 2005
 Master of Arts in Elementary Education + K-6 Teacher Licensure

SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, 1994
 Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Forest Biology

DISSERTATION TITLE

Transgender College Student Activists: The Intersections of Identities

EXPERIENCE

Educational Technology Guru, 2011-present
 School of Education, Academic Affairs: Teaching and Learning, UW-Milwaukee

Lecturer, Spring 2015
 School of Education, Department of Educational Policy, UW-Milwaukee

- Teach ED POL 375: Cultural Foundations of Education [U]

Lecturer, Spring 2013-2015
 College of Letters & Science, LGBT Studies Program, UW-Milwaukee

- Teach LGBT 200: Introduction to LGBT Studies [U]

Associate Lecturer, Summer 2009-2010
 School of Education, Department of Educational Policy, UW-Milwaukee

- Taught ED POL 535: Educating At-Risk Students [U/G]
- Taught ED POL 534: The Student at Risk (Causes) [U/G]

Graduate Project Assistant, 2009-2011
 Administrative Leadership, School of Education, UW-Milwaukee

Teacher, 2006-2008
 Horizons K-8 School, Boulder, Colorado

Substitute Teacher, 2005-2006
 Boulder Valley Schools, Boulder, Colorado

Mathematics Specialist, 2004
 Heatherwood Elementary School, Boulder, Colorado

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Refereed Journal Articles

Published

Reed, L., & **Johnson, L. T.** (2010). Serving LGBT students: Examining the spiritual, religious, and social justice implications for an African American school administrator. *Journal of Negro Education, 79*(3), 390-404.

Chavez-Korell, S., & **Johnson, L. T.** (2010). Informing counselor training and competent counseling services through transgender narratives and the transgender community. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 4*, 1-12.

Refereed Book Chapters

Under Revision

Johnson, L. T. Subtleties of difference. In E. Brockenbrough, J. Ingrey, W. Martino, & N. M. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Queer Studies and Education: Critical Concepts for the Twenty-First Century*.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Brust, J., Dickson, M., Miller, C. M., & **Johnson, L. T.** (2014, November). *Designing discussions for conversation (and assessment)*. Roundtable at Wisconsin Brightspace Regional User Forum, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Johnson, L. T., & Miller, C. M. (2013, November). *Choose your own adventure: Adaptive release of content*. Presentation at Wisconsin Desire2Learn Ignite Regional User Forum, Madison, Wisconsin.

Miller, C. M., & **Johnson, L. T.** (2013, November). *D2L flexibility: Allowing pedagogy to take a front seat*. Presentation at Wisconsin Desire2Learn Ignite Regional User Forum, Madison, Wisconsin.

Johnson, L. T. (2013, October). *Where transgender identity meets student activism: Narratives of negotiating engagement in campus change*. Paper presented at American Educational Studies Association Annual Conference, Baltimore, Maryland.

Johnson, L. T. (April, 2013). *Where transgender identity meets student activism*. Panelist at UW-Milwaukee Graduate Student Research Reception, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Johnson, L. T., & Miller, C. M. (April, 2013). *Radical reorganization: Creating an online course that's not "all text."* Presentation at Office of Professional and Instructional Development Spring Conference, Madison, Wisconsin.

Johnson, L. T. (2012, April). *Gender transgressors on campus: The educational experiences of transgender-identified university students.* Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Johnson, L. T. (2011, April). *LGBTQI interdisciplinary research perspectives.* Panelist at UW-Milwaukee Graduate School Research Reception, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Johnson, L. T. (2011, March). *Passing as an outsider: An interview between transgender men.* Film presented at UW-Milwaukee School of Education Research Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Johnson, L. T. (2010, October). *Interview as discourse: How access, context, and power intersect with identity.* Film presented at American Educational Studies Association Annual Conference, Denver, Colorado.

Johnson, L. T. (2010, March). *Transgender students' access to campus services.* Research presented at UW-Milwaukee School of Education Research Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

CERTIFICATIONS AND LICENSES

SMART Notebook Certified Trainer, 2014

Certificate in Online and Blended Teaching, 2010
Learning Technology Center, UW-Milwaukee

State of Colorado Provisional Teacher License, 2005-2010
Endorsement in Elementary Education

GRANTS

Wisconsin Technology Initiative – [Under Review] \$18,720
Project to install video codecs in a local K-8 school for remote observation of teacher candidates during their clinical experiences, 2014

UW-System Office of Professional & Instructional Development – [Funded] \$3,540
Research: The Relationships between Classroom Design, Pedagogy, and Student Learning Outcomes. Co-Principal Investigator: Hope Longwell-Grice, 2014

UWM Academic Staff Professional Development Award – [Funded] \$1,800
Professional development grant to provide five faculty/staff with SMART Notebook certification, 2014

Wisconsin Technology Initiative – [Funded] \$29,250
Project to implement videoconferencing recording in technology-enhanced classroom, 2014

Wisconsin Technology Initiative – [Funded] \$75,000
Project to design and build an Active Collaboration Room, a classroom with videoconferencing capabilities and interactive technology, 2013

AWARDS

Joanne Lazirko Award for Innovative Use of Learning Technologies, 2014
School of Education Graduate Student Travel Award, 2013
Graduate School Student Travel Award, 2012
Cecile M. Foley Scholarship, 2011
Robert Kuehneisen and Eiserlo Scholarship, 2011
Graduate School Student Travel Award, 2010
Chancellor's Graduate Student Award, 2009

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Educational Technology Committee – Co-Chair (Present), 2011-present
School of Education, UW-Milwaukee

LGBT Studies Advisory Committee – Member, 2012-present
College of Letters & Science, UW-Milwaukee

Urban Education Doctoral Committee – Student Representative, 2011-2013
School of Education, UW-Milwaukee

Chancellor's Advisory Committee for LGBT+ Advocacy – Member, 2009-2013
UW-Milwaukee

Literacy Services of Wisconsin – Volunteer Tutor, 2010-2011

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- American Educational Research Association
- American Educational Studies Association
- The International Society for Educational Biography