Faculty of Commerce

An exploration into the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African University.

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Abstract

Universities are perceived as non-judgmental because of their tolerant environments and emphasis on producing well-rounded students. Despite transformative initiatives to create an inclusive culture, transgender and gender diverse students may still feel that they are treated unfairly due to stigmatisation or poorly implemented diversity policies. Studies have focused mainly on the gender binary practice of transgender individuals assimilating to cisnormativity. Yet, relatively little work has considered the implications of campus life where transgender students may experience discrimination because of gender-exclusive policies and practices (residence halls, bathrooms, public inclusion, training, and support). This study sought to address this gap. Data from a thematic analysis of qualitative semi-structured interviews were utilised to understand trans* students' perceptions and lived experiences at a South African university. Most of the participants revealed that a hostile climate for transgender students prevailed on campus and that the institution lacks resources and education on transgender issues. Findings reported three major themes: (1) Navigating the power of privilege and institutional systemic oppression; (2) Misalignment and invalidation of one's gender identity on campus; (3) The importance of understanding transgender health from a gender minority experience. Recommendations for creating greater inclusion for transgender students on university campuses are presented.

Keywords: transgender, higher education, diversity, inclusion, heteronormativity, cisgender

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"I'm no longer accepting the things I cannot change … I'm changing the things I cannot accept." – Angela Davis

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According to an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation within a South African university (2018) the term ‘trans*’ (with an asterisk) is found to be more inclusive as an umbrella term for both transgender and gender non-conforming identities. Non-conforming identities refer to gender identities such as agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, bigender, genderless, non-binary and transsexual, among the various other non-cisgender identities. Furthermore, as a means of utilising inclusive and diverse terminology, in this research report I substitute gender non-conforming identities with gender diverse identities[1].

Term	Definition
Cisnormativity	The belief system that preserves the idea that there are only two genders currently present in our society, namely male and female; that gender is determined/defined by an individual’s physical appearance; that individuals who are assigned female at birth will identify as “girls/women”; and that those assigned male at birth will identify as “boys/men”.
Cisgender	This refers to individuals that adhere to the two-sex binary practice that aligns with normative/societal expectations. Individuals identify with their assigned gender at birth.
Transgender/binary trans	This refers to individuals whose gender identities are incongruent to their assigned gender at birth: trans “men” who were born with female bodies and socially consider themselves as “male”, and trans “women” who were born with male bodies and socially consider themselves as “female”.
Gender identity	This may refer to how individuals experience their gender for themselves. Individuals may or may not identify within the two-sex binary of “male or female”.
Gender expression	This refers to how individuals express their identified gender through their behaviour, their mannerisms and at times their outward appearance.
Sex	When referring to one’s sex, this is the classification of biological characteristics when born, having the specific reproductive organs associated with a specific sex.
Sex description	This refers to the recorded gender of the individual per the Births and Deaths Registration Act in South Africa.
Sexual orientation	This refers to an individual’s attraction to others. Attraction to others may take the form of being allured romantically, physically, emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually.
LGBTIQA+	This refers to an abbreviation used to describe groups of different sexualities and gender identity. The term includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and agender identities.

[1] This paper follows the format prescribed by the Department of Organisational Psychology at the University of Cape Town.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Context

At the intersection of privilege lies an institution that is shaped by both power and powerlessness. These power relations are both visible and invisible. Drenched in classism, tribalism and colourism, spaces such as universities are incorrectly defined by the term transformation (Ferber, 2012; Fisher, 2001). Even though tertiary education seeks to empower individuals through the transference of knowledge, institutions may still convey a sense of powerlessness and the need for students to assimilate towards other students that form part of dominant social culture (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn & Pettitt, 2006; Blumenfeld & Jaekel, 2012; Coston & Kimmel, 2012).

Consequently, attempts to bridge divides of inequality remain unsuccessful as spaces such as universities may still imitate the harsh reality of segregation between students that come from well-off to low-income households in South Africa. In 2015, during the Fees Must Fall (#FMF) campaign, students across the country witnessed the statue removal of John Cecil Rhodes (Kgatle, 2018) from the University of Cape Town. The much-needed removal of the statue embodied a plea by students for structural and social change, not only within the institution but also in our country as a democratic South Africa (Kgatle, 2018). Ironically, what was meant to be a moment of progress, a student-led movement of inclusivity and Ubuntu led to yet another platform outlining privileges of heteronormativity (het) and cisgender (cis) society. Student protests were expected to provide a platform to represent post-apartheid ideals, transformation and perceived humanity of modern-day South Africa. The reality, however, highlighted protests as reflecting an on-going conflict that exists in the form of power, privileged identities and silenced voices among marginalised students within the institution. On 9 March 2016, almost one year after the #FMF student protests, members of a student organisation that aims to create awareness of the discourses that surround black queer trans people in post-apartheid South Africa, voiced their unique struggles and marginalisation faced as trans* students.

The student organisation, well known for their 2016 outcry during a Fees Must Fall art exhibition, highlighted the much-needed recognition of the need to understand the concept of diversity and, most importantly, the effective implementation of diversity and inclusive practices within organisations (Sobuwa, 2021).

Moreover, Soudien (2010) explains that tertiary education in post-apartheid South Africa has produced new conditions for the distribution of power, relationships of privilege and gender subordination. While there might be an increase in consciousness of issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, due in part to an increasing amount of literature and feminist theories (Bennet & Beja, 2005; Collins, 2019; Dolby, 2001; Morest & Bailey, 2006), much of the work

still excludes the experiences of trans* students and their involvement on campuses. Though the focus of this research may be gendered, the emphasis of participants' narratives serves to highlight how institutions reflect, structure and reinforce power dynamics among marginalised identities. To explore and understand gendered modes of interaction, as the researcher I captured participants' experiences within a seemingly transformed space.

Significance of the study

Substantial attention has been given to queer individuals and their experiences within cisnormative structures. The term 'queer' refers to a person's diverse sexual orientation and gender identities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans* (gender diverse identities) and intersex individuals (Epstein, 2000; Meiners & Quinn, 2012; Rasmussen, 2010; Renold, 2000; Ringrose, 2013).

To date, transgender research from an organisational psychology perspective is still developing. Likewise, research efforts towards trans* students in higher education are in their infancy, particularly within the South African context (Dugan et al., 2012; Pryor, 2015). Prior to framing trans* issues as a separate concern, trans* experiences were often seen in light of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) experiences (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018). Similarly, that which is often depicted as the trans* experience is commonly represented as the LGB experience, thus not much is known concerning how trans* students experience their campus culture and how triumphant university transformational efforts are without collectively summarising trans* issues as the LGB experience (Dispenza et al., 2012).

Previous studies have focused mainly on gender binary practices of trans* students adhering to cisnormative gender identities rather than uniquely dissolving obsolete gender practices (Bilodeau, 2005; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Rumens, 2014; Sharma & Guest, 2013; Stake & Hoffmann, 2001; Taylor 2005, 2006). A strong foundation in transgender research is vital to improve an understanding of individuals and encourage an increase of awareness for diversity-related practices on campuses (Gurin et al., 2002). In view of the insufficient literature, there is currently a need for research on transgender and gender diverse identities in higher education (Goldberg, 2018; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018).

Towards gender diversity and inclusion. Despite transformative policies in a country such as South Africa, trans* and marginalised groups are often subjected to experiences of severe human rights violations, discrimination and stigmatisation which affect their mental health and well-being (McAdams-Mahmoud et al., 2014). It is important to understand mental health and social support offered to trans* students at higher learning institutions such as universities. Moreover, supportive structures should be tailored to accommodate students from diverse gender, ethnic and cultural groups. Drawing on literature from general stress theory (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993), I have used minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995, 2003) to understand the mental and

physical health of trans* students.

Higher learning institutions such as universities are perceived as non-judgmental because of their tolerant environments and emphasis on producing well-rounded students (Kahu, 2013; Smith & Segbers, 2018). Yet, relatively little work has considered the implications of campus life where transgender students may experience discrimination because of gender-exclusive policies and practices (residence halls, bathrooms, public inclusion, training and support) (Ross-Gordon, 2011; Rumens, 2014; Sharma & Guest, 2013). This study sought to address this gap. Despite concerted efforts to transform institutions and to create an inclusive culture, trans* students may still feel as though they are being treated unfairly due to stigmatisation or poorly implemented diversity policies. Diversity in terms of queer and trans* individuals remain a marginalised strand of diversity management and is under-researched (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Thus, this study sought to understand the experiences of trans* students in relation to their awareness of existing power structures and privileged identities (policy, faculty and classroom) and their overall physical, emotional, and academic well-being (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Located within the wider objective of diversity issues the study serves to highlight experiences of sexual and gender minorities in organisations (Dispenza et al., 2012). Understanding and researching experiences of trans* individuals require organisations and individuals to move away from thinking in an etic and static manner. While the term 'organisation' implies a cisgendered system of hierarchically arranged processes and rational procedures, the term 'trans*' resists such boundaries and suggests unceasing disruptiveness (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). As a result, the two terms seem to conflict with one another as an organisation exerts structure/rigidity and the term 'trans*' implies fluidity and change. As suggested, organisations, groups and individuals should be fluid in such a manner that it includes and creates space that is inclusive of transgender and gender diverse identities.

Research aim and overview

The present study does not form part of any existing research projects. It sought to explore trans* students' experience at a South African university. Accordingly, to guide this study, the following research questions were asked: (1) How do trans* students experience the university environment? (2) How do the experiences of trans* students shape their academic, social and professional lives?

Located within the context of legislation, policies and practices, the exploration of these experiences sought to address diversity and inclusion within South African organisations.

Dissertation outline

Chapter one introduces the context of the study. In this introductory chapter, the challenges outlined above are explained to position the research study around the lived experiences of trans* students at a South African university. By providing an overview of the transformational context of the university, I frame issues of gender and sexuality within diversity efforts of the organisation. It is for this reason that an overview of the entire dissertation is given. In Chapter Two, I review the existing literature and legislation pertaining to transgender individuals. In Chapter Three, the methods, ethical and reflexive considerations carried out in the study are outlined. In Chapter Four, I present and discuss the findings in the form of thematic analysis and demonstrate how participants' lived experiences relate to current and previous research. In conclusion, Chapter Five considers certain limitations and offers a summary of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the existing literature and the potential infringement of certain rights highlighted in the Bill of Rights. After outlining issues pertaining to legislation in South Africa, I highlight consequences experienced by trans* individuals. I then discuss the complexities concerning the ineffective implementation of the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act 49 and call attention to the hardships faced by trans* persons who choose to legalise their chosen gender identity. Thereafter, the review is arranged to conceptualise trans* student experiences and to highlight the importance of trans* inclusivity.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, s 9: (1):

> **Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. (2) Equality includes the full and equal protection of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken. (3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, and … sexual orientation …**

South African legislation

Internationally, the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (1996) was the first of its kind. Section 9 explicitly prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (Hoad et al., 2005). The Constitution is the supreme law and any form of conduct inconsistent with the provision is invalid; thus, any obligations imposed by section 9 must be fulfilled (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, s 2). The Bill of Rights is the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in the country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom (Republic of South Africa's Constitution Act's No. 108 of 1996). While equality is seen as one of the most important and valued rights enshrined in the Constitution, it is also one of the most complex rights in the Bill of Rights (Smith & Robinson, 2008). Subject to interpretation, the term 'equality' may at times be difficult to comprehend as the scope and manner in which the term is utilised may vary (Smith & Robinson 2008). For trans* individuals and marginalised identities to be protected, it is not enough to just have an equality provision. Mere recognition and lack of proper policy implementation in relation to different identities, groups and individuals should be viewed as a form of inequality. According to the South African Human Rights Commission, the right to equality remains one of the most violated rights in South Africa (Anguita, 2012).

Critical to the political terrain, apartheid policies stressed racial segregation and oppressed diverse sexual identities in South Africa (Bennett & Reddy, 2009). To fully utilise the equality clause for its intended purposes, organisations should be required to transform and address deep

structures that fail to recognise the priorities of diverse sexual and gender identities. Therefore, it is expected that in order for the equality clause to be fully realised organisations should be able to review two important aspects, namely the recognition of marginalised identities and the restructure of organisations.

While restructuring organisations involves amending policies, income, power and resources to include diverse identities, the recognition of those marginalised involves upwardly revaluing invisible identities and the cultural products of maligned groups (Bennett & Reddy, 2009). Even though most South African organisations have anti-discrimination policies, identities that include sexual orientation and gender are mostly absent from these policies (Francis, 2016). It is for this reason that identities such as sexuality and gender should be considered as policy components towards diversity efforts to create inclusive environments within organisations.

Although South Africa's Constitution is comprehensive and progressive in terms of acknowledging sexual orientation, gender, disability, and racial differences, the execution and adequate application of transformation efforts in South African organisations continue to fail the less powerful, less educated and less privileged society (Anguita, 2012). As a result, when addressing equality as a form of effort towards diversity, one cannot ignore unpacking the power relations embedded in organisations. Sexual and gender minority identities are sensed, expressed and interpreted within specific socio-political conditions (Benenson, et al., 2009). A neutral stance to addressing marginalised issues reinforces the status quo as it does not consider power relations that exist in cis/het organisations. Heterosexual masculine identities are a basic feature of organisations that infiltrate institutions as a formal hierarchy of society (Benenson, et al., 2009). It is the invisible norm by which the behaviour and actions of individuals from designated groups are stigmatised. This institutionalised masculinity reproduces inequality when it induces subordinate expressions from gender diverse identities and marginalised groups (Benenson, et al., 2009, Fleming, 2007).

The following section highlights the importance of understanding gender terminology and delves into some of the challenges experienced by transgender persons when attempting to legalise their chosen gender identity and identity documentation.

Sex, gender and gender identity

Distinctions between sex, gender and gender identity form part of examining the challenges faced by trans* groups. The term 'sex', which refers to an individual's biological characteristics at birth, associates one's reproductive organs with a specific sex (Davis, 2009), subsequently gender represents the behavioural, cultural, psychological or social traits associated with one's sex, rather than one's biological characteristics. Lastly, gender identity is the chosen identity of an individual which refers to their psychological sense of gender, which may or may not be associated with their

physical appearance or designated sex at birth (Davis, 2009). Transgender, which is often regarded as an umbrella term, is used to refer to an individual whose gender identity or gender expression is incongruent to the sex assigned to them at birth (Austin, 2016; Connell, 2010; Davis, 2009; Hargie et al., 2017; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). In order for institutions to promote fluidity, the term 'transgender' should be acknowledged as a construct that encompasses a multidimensional range of gender identities. By rejecting binary views on gender this allows trans* identities to be viewed along a continuum that redefines gender roles, behaviours and expectations (Austin, 2016; Hargie et al., 2017; Kelleher, 2009; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). There is also a process of transitioning that is associated with the term 'transgender'. Transitioning relies on changing gender roles and expectations to reflect an individual's chosen gender identity (Velez & Moradi, 2016). Consequently, not all trans* persons choose to transition by means of surgical intervention and may prefer to remain the same physically despite their gender expression (Austin, 2016).

Social identity theory

Social identity theory suggests that a person has many identities, and each identity is uniquely attached to their social role within society (i.e., their roles and group membership) (Stryker, 1980). Social identities originate from general social categories that include gender. The expectation that individuals attach to each social role within different social groups and categories will determine the behaviour of their social role (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Theories premised on social identity (Tajfel, 1981) and social categorisation (Turner, 1982) show that cisgender people categorically place others in social divides that create rigid attitudes towards gender. Trans individuals have a self-image or identity that is not traditionally associated with their biological maleness or femaleness (Davis, 2009). Challenges surrounding gender for trans* persons are based on distinguishable features that are incompatible to the two-sex binary. Transgender or gender diverse identities disrupt the social assumption that sex, gender identity and gender expression correspond with one another (Connell, 2010).

Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act 49 of 2003

Although diversity practice by organisations is encouraged, South Africa as a democratic state is yet to follow suit. Highlighting the macro dilemma in the legal field to create a more inclusive society, the alteration of the Sex Description and Sex Status Act 49 of 2003 lacks structural and material support and therefore remains ineffective in its implementation.

Section 2(1) provides that:

> **Any person whose sexual characteristics have been altered by *surgical* or *medical treatment* or *by evolvement through natural development* resulting in gender reassignment, or any person who is *intersexed* may apply to the Director-General of the National Department of Home Affairs for the alteration of the sex description on his or**

her birth register.

According to the above provision, there are four circumstances in which the Act identifies individuals as eligible for an alteration of their sex description on their birth register: The first involves individuals who had their physical sexual characteristics altered through surgical intervention. The second includes individuals who receive or received hormone replacing treatment. The third relates to individuals whose sexual characteristics changed through 'natural development' (which has been quite a controversial discussion and an unclear section of the provision). Lastly, individuals who are intersex are found to be eligible for an alteration of the sex description on their birth register. Interestingly, the pronouns used in the Act itself perpetuate cisnormative views of gender. Although efforts have been put forward by the Act to practice inclusivity, two broad issues emerge from the inconsistent implementation of Act 49, namely the unjust delayed and improper processing of applications, and the unfair dismissal of rejections (Mudarikwa et al., 2017).

Act 49 applicants are often subjected to a waiting period of between one and seven years for the processing of their applications. In addition to the drawn-out documentation process, applicants are often unable or discouraged to submit simultaneous applications for both a sex description and forename alteration. Once applicants have succeeded in securing their amended sex description, challenges may arise with the issuance of a new identity document reflecting an amended sex description. Unfortunately, individuals' identity documents will be declared void unless they can provide evidence to substantiate that their sex description has been altered to their preferred gender identity. Additionally, several problematic justifications for the delay in processing Act 49 applications may surface. These may include an applicant's inability to provide evidence of their gender reassignment surgery, and thus fail to meet the requirements of the Act. According to the Legal Resources Centre, a Home Affairs office refused to accept an Act 49 application because the applicant failed to provide proof of their gender reassignment surgery (Mudarikwa et al., 2017). The progressive nature of the Act's provision is undermined by its improper implementation and practice.

Quality of life. The consequence of being denied the choice to modify one's gender perpetuates and promotes the practice of marginalisation and implicates transgenders' quality of life (QoL). De Vries et al. (2017) explain that QoL comes about when an individual's perceptions of their life's condition and satisfaction has an influence on their objective and subjective well-being. The complex and broad concept of QoL encompasses a variety of physical and psychosocial domains (Ainsworth & Spiegel, 2010; Newfield et al., 2006). While several factors have been shown to affect the QoL of trans* persons (such as transitional status of gender, levels of social support and perceived discrimination), trans* persons' quality of life may further be influenced by

their inability to utilise medical services, apply to jobs with their educational qualifications, vote, or perform any other activity that requires some form of identity evidence because of the mismatch between their sex and gender(Mudarikwa et al., 2017).

A meta-examination found that trans* persons experience poor QoL in all areas of their life explored in comparison to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts (Amuthan, & Selvalakshmi, 2020). Following a survey evaluating the QoL of trans* persons who had received hormonal treatment and affirming treatment of their preferred gender, it was reported that 80% of participants experienced an increase and improvement in self-esteem after hormonal intercessions (Amuthan, & Selvalakshmi, 2020). Subsequently, the mismatch of trans* people's gender identity and life's conditions could potentially affect their life satisfaction. Because of poor QoL, trans* persons may be severely affected mentally, physically and in their social life (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

Right to human dignity. Based on the right to be treated in a dignified and humane manner, trans* individuals should be given the right to be identified by their preferred gender. In *S v Makwanyane,* the Constitutional Court stated that "recognising a right to dignity is an acknowledgement of the intrinsic worth of human beings; human beings are entitled to be treated as worthy of respect and concern" (S v Makwanyne & Another, Constitutional Court, 1995, p. 79). Resources such as an identity document indicating one's preferred gender identity is an undermined and undervalued privilege in the cisnormative community and remains one of the many struggles faced by trans* groups. Promoting the right to dignity should at least encompass that an identity document reflects one's preferred gender and should encourage, membership in society as a trans* person. Furthermore, invalid identity documents may incur unwanted and unintentional fraudulent behaviour (Mudarikwa et al., 2017). Provisions for dignity, equality and access to everyday life activities as contained in the South African Constitution should equally be applied to all citizens regardless of gender (Republic of South Africa's Constitution Act's No. 108 of 1996).

In the United States a study by Rank et al, (2010) found that college campuses offer very little resources and support to trans* students, which to lead a certain level of unwillingness of these students to disclose their gender identities because of the nature of these institutions.
According to Grant et al. (2011), transgender people encounter widespread job discrimination in the USA. The survey respondents revealed that transgender persons were unemployed at twice the rate of the general population (Grant et al., 2011). In South Africa, discrimination involves a particular form of illegitimate differentiation based on grounds such as sex, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, culture, language, and birth. Legal formulations include different forms of discrimination, such as direct and indirect discrimination (Smith & Robinson 2008). In its mildest form, direct discrimination occurs when a person is disadvantaged or treated differently

because of their race, gender, or sexual orientation (Smith & Robinson, 2008). Indirect discrimination occurs when policies are applied that appear to be neutral but may have an adverse effect on a certain disadvantaged group of people (Collins, 2015; Smith, 2008). While anti-discrimination policies may exist in an institution, these policies may not necessarily address the issues faced by transgender or gender diverse identities; therefore, current policies may in effect promote indirect discrimination (Collins et al., 2015; Smith & Robinson, 2008).

University identity documentation is in the form of a student card. A student card can be seen as the student version of a person's identification document. With the adoption of an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation at a South African university, guidelines have been set to inform and educate staff and students to make use of preferred names and pronouns. One of the outcomes of the policy was the need for a more inclusive approach to titles (Miss, Ms, Mrs, Mx, Mr, or leave it blank). The university has made the provision for both prospective and current students to select their preferred title, or to select no title at all. Students who wish to make the necessary changes to their title may do so through an internal self-service university system. However, the reality of trans* student graduates is somewhat different. Although students may express their preferred gender by selecting their preferred title on their student card, this choice is often not present in their lives after university. More so, even if their educational qualifications reflect their preferred name or title, however, without their identity document reflecting their preferred gender identity this may render their qualification evidence as void when performing required employment verification checks.

Right to choose a trade, occupation, or profession. Section twenty-two of the Constitution states that every citizen has the right to choose their trade, occupation or profession freely. The practice of a trade, occupation or profession may be regulated by law. However, the failure to provide applicants with their amended identity documents efficiently and within a reasonable time limits trans* students from being able to pursue any employment that requires their altered identity document, therefore indirectly coercing individuals to disclose their gender identity. This might lead to feelings of vulnerability and being discriminated against. Despite the progressive efforts by legislation to rectify the legal framework, much of the drafting is based on an assimilated understanding of heteronormative and cisgender society (Mudarikwa et al., 2017). Thus, for the regulatory framework to be successful in its implementation and practice, an understanding and awareness of the lived experiences of trans* students are needed in our institutions and society (Republic of South Africa's Constitution Act's No. 108 of 1996).

Academic and campus culture

Universities are currently characterised by both academic and campus culture. According to Shen and Tian (2012), the academic culture mostly consists of academic outlooks, ethics,

scholastic enhancement, and expanding one's mental capacity to create and develop a sense of self-awareness within academia. Consequently, campus culture is cultivated by both internal and external evaluations of academic groups such as lecturers and the social, cultural and economic needs of the student (Shen & Tian, 2012).

Universities are interesting yet complex organisations in higher learning, tertiary education. While the physical foundation of universities primarily depends on infrastructure, policies, special-purpose equipment, research sites, libraries, healthcare services and food canteens in support of the student experience, the functionality, however, is embedded in a system of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2014). Neoliberal universities operate below underdeveloped assumptions that value is determined by quantifiable behaviour such as productivity in the form of academic performance. Productivity and academic performance at tertiary level is mostly measured by new outputs of knowledge and the monetary value generated through this commodification (Giroux, 2014).

As higher learning institutions have become more driven by profit and productivity, the enrolment of students has become less about their personal advancement and preparedness as individuals in society and is focused on achieving organisational objectives successes (Burke & McManus, 2011). Neoliberalism may arguably affect the lives of trans* students as it does not allow for fluidity necessary to accommodate students of different identities and gender expression (Kimmel & Llewellyn, 2012). Premised on the notion of neoliberalism to achieve organisational objectives such as profits and productivity, higher education institutions may not be equipped to provide and act within the best interests of students, and thus remain ignorant to the lack of structural and social support needed to assist students from gender diverse backgrounds to succeed academically (Kimmel & Llewellyn, 2012).

Therefore, universities should not just be about the production of knowledge and information; it should rather be a platform created for unlocking students' potential and lasting social/societal influence. This could lead to an irreplaceable inner strength for change and promotion of inclusivity (Shen & Tian, 2012). More importantly, institutions can cultivate a student's disposition, improve their lifestyle and have a beneficial influence on their well-being (Shen & Tian, 2012). However, without understanding the experiences of trans* students, universities may typically reflect societal genderism in practice, despite efforts to implement diversity in practice and policies (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Even if a student card reflects a student's preferred name or title, trans* students may still feel the need to express their gender identities in accordance with cis/het campus culture in terms of dress and appearance. This may be especially difficult for students who do not choose to transition through surgery and hormone replacements to reflect gender. Cisnormativity and cisgenderism are overpowering domains in higher education and affect microsystems such as physical structures, policies, curricula and

classroom practices. Students who are constantly faced with gender oppressive divides may develop chronic stress from their gender minority status and choose to conceal their identity in such restrictive alienating structures (Goldberg et al, 2019).

Campus climate and culture. Student experiences extend beyond academic achievement and accomplishment. A campus is a multifaceted combination which includes but is not limited to a variety of influences such as social positioning, support, belonging, finances, organisational behaviour and transformational initiative (Kahu, 2013). Students' positive experience of campus culture could substantially contribute to the achievement of university transformational initiatives and steer social imperatives to the forefront of social change. Misalignments in diversity practices can subvert the university's transformational goals, which could lead to a reduction in perceived student support. While diversity concerns do not remain on campus only, promoting change should traverse political territory and eliminate contentious disbelief concerning appropriate gender social practice within organisations. For universities to encourage social consciousness on campuses, the advancement of change must be savvy, discrete, strategic, as well as radical and visionary (Davis & Harrison, 2013).

Furthermore, university campus climate should be able to collaborate effectively with trans* students to create an environment that is responsive to the needs of marginalised individuals and be proactive to diversity and inclusivity efforts, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ability, ethnicity, culture, or religion. Although the domain of higher education should arguably create change, it should not fall on the shoulders of trans* students to drive this enterprise but rather hold cis/het groups accountable for maintaining normativity and strict social expectation. More so, university employees who are constantly dealing with high-end student-facing interactions and environments such as residence life, student wellness centres and sport or society memberships should be sensitised to the experiences of marginalised groups when engaging activities such as class introductions, leadership training and orientation. An in-depth cognisance of the educational effects of diversity and inclusion will better equip institutions to adapt to prospective transformation changes and should improve the learning experience of students. Researchers Gurin et al. (2002) and Laird (2005) posit that individual-level experiences with diversity influence are more likely to result in positive student educational outcomes. Premised on psychological concepts, student experiences with diversity, in particular communicating with a diverse group of peers and curricular exposure to inclusive content, promote a healthy development sense of self and challenge intellectual student engagement (Erikson, 1956; Gurin et al., 2002; Laird, 2005; Piaget, 1985). These authors further suggest that experiences with diversity are crucial influences on student learning expansion, which includes a development of complex cognitive structures and encourages open-mindedness on matters of transformation (Gurin et al., 2002; Laird, 2005).

Individual level. Notwithstanding, South Africa's legislation, policies are often insufficient in managing expected transformational objectives towards trans* inclusivity in organisations: structural barriers in the form of cis/het language use (pronouns) and facilities (bathrooms) still perpetuate exclusion (Menzies & Baron, 2014). Achieving such organisational culture change requires South African universities to implement effective practice among all their constituents and revisit their organisational design (Menzies & Baron, 2014; Mountford, 2014). This emphasises the notion that diversity initiatives and sustainment are not limited to individual-level choices and circumstances only (Rasmussen, 2010). Rather, the promotion, protection, and support of optimal inclusive practices reflect a collective institutional responsibility (Reay et al., 2010). With the staggering increase in the number of students identifying as trans* within the institution, diversity and inclusion should be driven to the forefront of organisational social imperatives, where students' subjectivities are commonly formed.

Organisational level. Subsequently, institutions of higher learning from an organisational level should mitigate student experiences to increase effective commitment and institutional loyalty that might aid alumni sponsorship for research into marginalisation and anti-discrimination policies. Effective implementation of diverse and inclusive initiatives should be viewed as an investment towards social responsibility as the potential benefits may improve students' mental well-being and contribute to an environment that is conducive to learning and that fosters economic development for students from underprivileged backgrounds. Therefore, given these challenges, understanding marginalisation from a trans* point of view may effectively pave the way for transformation in South African organisations. Research into trans* experiences at a South African University should be able to assist the institution in establishing appropriate efforts and accurately meeting trans* students' needs in higher education.

Minority stress theory

Meyer's (1995, 2003) concept of minority stress refers to a theoretical model that explains stressors anchored in an individual's social position (i.e., sexual orientation status). When experienced negatively, minority stress can lead to health-related conditions such as mental disorders, reckless behaviour and loss of personal well-being. The minority stress model proposes that because of microaggressions such as stigma, prejudice and discrimination, queer and trans* individuals who retain a sexual and gender minority status are more likely to experience stress that causes mental and physical disorders (Meyer, 2003). The model proposes that cultural beliefs produce distal and proximal stressors that explain health deterioration in minority groups (Bostwick et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2016; Frost et al., 2015; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). According to the model, most distal stressors refer to situational and environmental occurrences that relate to an individual's membership to a stigmatised group (Meyer,

2003). As an additional form of stress, the expectation and awareness of stigma may accompany an individual's motivation to hide their stigmatised identity. Similarly, most proximal stressors include self-stigma and internalised negative attitudes about one's self and one's identity within a stigmatised group (Phinney, 1996; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Historically, minority stress theory focused solely on sexual minority identities, as Meyer (1995) originally developed the theory in the context of diverse sexual orientation. Subsequent studies have shown how minority stressors influence the health and psychological properties of sexual minority identities (Bockting et al., 2013; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Testa et al., 2015). Stigmatised groups such as the queer and trans* communities are often subjected to excessive degrees of stress based on experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

Consequently, in response to the experience of stress, queer and trans* persons may also develop coping mechanisms and build resilience to help them survive and even succeed in the face of adversity (Kwon, 2013; Meyer, 2015). Resilience can be defined as the psychological, mental and emotional ability to survive and thrive in situations when faced with adversity. It is the personal development of constructing and creating mental processes and behaviours to cope with highly stressful occurrences and to protect oneself from the negative effects of stressors (McLemore, 2018).

Health concerns of trans* youth. Research conducted on trans* youth has outlined harmful influences such as long and short-term health shortcomings of adhering to cisnormative educational settings. (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018). Adolescents' mental health in particular may suffer due in part to their awareness of difficulties when transitioning into their lives as tertiary students. Mental health, like many other aspects of health, can be influenced by a range of stressors, including the concealment of one's gender and/or sexual minority status. Internationally, depression and suicide were revealed as the leading causes of death among 15- and 29-year-old adolescents and young adults (WHO, 2018). A study on suicidality among transgender and gender diverse individuals detailed high rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, with 45% to 77% of participants reporting on either one of the influences (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007: Scanlon et al., 2010, Nuttbrock et al., 2010; Testa et al., 2012).

While research may not reflect a representative sample of trans* persons, these rates are alarmingly high in comparison to the 20% general population worldwide that suffer from mental issues (Tebbe & Moradi, 2016; Testa et al., 2017; WHO, 2018). Despite increasing public knowledge and presence concerning trans* people in contemporary entertainment and media settings, the world of work and organisations are yet to follow suit and pay attention to the needs of marginalised identities (Collins et al., 2015; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). Unlike South Africa that maintains a progressive regulatory framework, countries such as the United Kingdom and the

United States seldom incorporate or integrate inclusive terminology for trans* groups into diversity policies or statements (Beauregard et al., 2018). Annual reports from a review of the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 firms demonstrate that 80% of top global organisations do not have specific non-discrimination policies for transgender employees (Bentley, 2015; Beauregard et al., 2018; Collins et al., 2015; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016).

Even though explicit anti-discrimination policies may exist, these policies may not be effectively addressing the variety of issues related to gender identity (Davis, 2009). Studies in South Africa tend to focus on equality in the form of gender as a two-sex binary of either “male or female”, rather than unpacking the idea of gender variations in organisations (Colgan & Rumens, 2014; Hyde & Delamater, 2008; Jewkes & Morrel, 2010). Gender diversity in relation to trans* individuals is less researched in comparison to sexual diversity in the LGB community, thus a study focusing on trans* persons and their experiences is needed (Colgan & Rumens, 2014). Although discussions on sexual and gender diversity in higher education are taking place, the complexity associated with sexual and gender diversity is sometimes difficult to manage (Colgan & Rumens, 2014). Even if, many organisations and institutions become more conscious surrounding diverse and inclusive practices, many do not fully understand the differences between gender identity and sexual orientation, especially when implementing policy (Collins et al., 2015).

Academic staff and tutors at a South African university are encouraged to teach content that, where reasonably possible, includes literature that reflects sexual diversity. In accordance with an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation, the provision aims to provide a holistic reflection of an assumed progressive society. However, in 2012 it was found that the MBChB curriculum at a South African university did not provide a comprehensive approach to LGBT health-related topics (Müller, 2013). The Health Sciences Faculty MBChB Curriculum Revision Task Team agreed to investigate possibilities for teaching LGBT-related content.

As universities pave the way for students to become future health professionals, the inclusion of topics within the teaching curriculum that reveal how social exclusion and stigma affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and intersex people’s health, is very important. It challenges dominant, and often prejudicial, attitudes and assumptions about the health issues of LGBTI individuals (Müller, 2013). Policies with regard to diversity initiatives pertaining to sexuality and gender identity should focus on how to effectively address institutional issues and challenges associated with various facets of sexuality and gender (Kormanik, 2009).

Concluding notes

This section provided an overview of the complex structure within which higher education institutions function and influence the experiences of trans* students. The review of literature and theories assist with understanding the challenges that trans* persons encounter, including policy,

practices, and lack of social support. As highlighted, transgender research from an organisational psychology perspective is still developing. Moreover, research on trans* students in higher education is limited within the South African context. A critical concern from Meyer's (1995, 2003) minority stress theory is that because of microaggressions such as stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, trans* individuals are more likely to conceal their gender identity which may lead to harmful influences on their health and thus, may affect trans* youth mental health and well-being when adhering to gender binary practices. This has implications for the kinds of support society and universities in higher education can provide to trans* students. Therefore, this study aims to enhance our understanding of trans* students experiences within the context of higher educational settings and ensure that appropriate insights and knowledge is formed to increase awareness and support for trans* issues.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the research design and methodology utilised to conduct the study. The theoretical framework and reflexivity to position the project are explained first, followed by an account of the sample and recruitment approach of the study. A discussion on the data collection and analysis procedure follows. Lastly, I focus on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six effective steps to a thematic analysis, and themes that emerged from the data. The importance of rigorous research is highlighted, and ethical considerations are set out.

Theoretical Framework

Research design

The research was situated within the interpretivist paradigm to examine how lived experiences are created and how meaning is constructed (Lewis, 2015). An exploratory phenomenological qualitative approach was utilised to understand the subjective experiences of trans* students (Banister et al., 2011). This approach was most appropriate as it allowed trans* students to voice their perceptions and experiences within the institution (Dollarhide et al., 2016). I was thus able to capture the in-depth, subjective, lived experiences of the participants while interpreting their perceptions of gender diversity practice within the institution (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

Supplementary qualitative research methods such as grounded theory and field research could have been utilised. In contrast to phenomenological research, these methods focus mainly on gaining access to one objective experience or rely solely on observation to study a phenomenon (Coolhart et al., 2018). Therefore, I used a phenomenological approach to specifically explore the diversity and variability of human experience in all its complexity from the personal accounts of participants. This approach mainly aims to understand how the world is experienced by those who are experiencing the phenomena of interest (Banister et al., 2011). Thus, to understand the experiences and perspectives of trans* students within the institution an experiential research study was conducted.

Reflexivity

I reflect on my identity as a coloured cisgender female interested in trans* matters. I am mindful that participants were not entirely comfortable with discussing their personal experiences of being a trans* student. Although I, conducted the study within the higher education setting with students with whom I share a privileged space of learning, I am aware of the power imbalances that exist between us. Gender as a social construct places individuals either in the male or female

binary position, depending on how well their gender assimilates to cisnormativity. I am embedded in the two-way binary as my gender has never been brought into question. Even though the participants and I share a common space of privilege, our differences were highlighted in the presumption of gender and participants' chosen pronouns. The lived experiences of the participants represent an experience that differs from my own, being both a student and a marginalised, coloured, female. The term coloured is constructed from a time when slavery and apartheid South Africa defined my racial group by a number of physical characteristics and enforced negative perceptions of self when compared to Caucasian individuals (Adhikari, 2005). In South Africa, the concept of 'coloured' represents an individual of mixed race-related heritage and is associated to an identity of a marginalised group (Adhikari, 2005; Stumbitz & Jaga, 2020). To protect White privilege minorities, racial segregation was used during apartheid to keep apart the education system and enforce social hierarchy whereby skin colour and class were detriments to social order (Hartshorne, 1992). Although both the participants and I come from historically unfavourable racial discrimination under the apartheid system, the participants' gender identities remain oppressed in present-day South Africa. This may have enhanced my capacity to understand the experience of marginalisation. However, I acknowledge my privileged position as their experiences of marginalisation continue to be silenced. Furthermore, my difference was marked through my sexual orientation as this might have positioned me within the conventional heterosexual framework of ignorance and insensitivity to trans* experiences. This proved to be challenging while gaining access to the queer and trans* community and establishing rapport with trans* students.

Sampling method

Janson et al. (2015) define sampling as the process of selecting a portion of the population to obtain the data to analyse and interpret the research study. The sample for this study consisted of six trans* students at a South African university. A snowball sampling method was used to select participants who possessed identities sensitive in nature. The snowball sampling method is used when characteristics possessed by participants are rare and difficult to find (Emerson, 2015). Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was used. This involved the recruitment of the first participant who then provided further referrals to other participants who were interested in the study. Participants, in turn, recommended additional trans* individuals. The process continued until the full sample was realised (Emerson, 2015).

For purposes of the current study and to promote inclusivity, I felt it important to describe participants based on their account of gender (i.e., female instead of transwoman). Even though the sample consisted of four transwomen, two of the participants identified as female. The sample further consisted of one transman and one gender diverse student. All

participants identified as South African. When asked about their race, four participants identified as Black, one identified as Mixed race and one identified as Caucasian. Participants were also from different faculties, namely Commerce, Humanities and Health Sciences. The ages of participants ranged from 20 to 24 years old. Five of the participants were undergraduates and one was a postgraduate student. For purposes of remaining neutral and diverse, I refrain from using gendered name pseudonyms in the study and refer to participants as One, Two, Three, Four, Five and Six (Figure 1). When asked about their pronouns before the interviews, Participant Six, used the pronouns ‘their’ and ‘them’. The other participants chose either ‘she/her’ or ‘his/him’.

Figure1

Demographics of participants

Participants	Gender	Year of study	Faculty	Race	Nationality	Age
One	Transwoman	Fourth year MBChB	Health Sciences	Mixed	South African	23 years old
Two	Female	Third year BCom	Commerce	Black	South African	23 years old
Three	Transwoman	Fourth year PGDA	Commerce	Black	South African	24 years old
Four	Transman	Third year BSocSci	Humanities	Black	South African	20 years old
Five	Female	Second year BCom	Commerce	Caucasian	South African	20 years old
Six	Gender diverse	Third year BBusSC	Commerce	Black	South African	21 years old

Note: Gender based on participants’ chosen gender identity

Ethical considerations

I obtained approval from both the Commerce Ethics Committee and the Director of Student Affairs at a South African university (Appendix A; Appendix B). Permission was also granted by the Department of Student Affairs at a South African University, to allow me, as the researcher, to contact a campus-based society that appreciates queer and gender diversity among students to distribute a recruitment letter to all interested trans* students (Appendix C). Recordings and transcribed data were dealt with confidentially and safely stored on a secured password protected computer. Due to the sensitivity of the study and to protect the identity of participants, as a researcher no mention of participant names were recorded during the interview. The inclusion criteria were transgender, and gender diverse individuals registered as students at a South African university. Students who are currently experiencing the transition of both medical and non-medical procedures participated. Due to the nature and sensitivity of the study I informed participants of the services offered at the university’s wellness centre. I then approached the Principal Psychologist at the student wellness centre to ensure that counselling sessions were available for participants in the

event that it was required and requested after interviews took place.

Data collection

Once participants were identified, emails were sent to each participant with the necessary consent forms to confirm the interviews (Appendix D). Interviews took place from July to September 2019. To maintain the confidentiality of participants a private room in a department at the university where the researcher was registered was utilised with the permission of participants.

Individual in person, one-on-one interviews were conducted to collect the data. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to exit the study at any point. Before the commencement of each interview, participants were asked a few demographic questions. These questions related to their gender, year of study, faculty, race, nationality, and age. An interview schedule was used to list the interview questions that I asked the participants (Appendix E). I then proceeded to ask about their experiences as trans* students within the institution.

Semi-structured interviews were utilised. Semi-structured interviews seek answers from participants that can be easily explored if they are relevant to the research topic (Dollarhide et al., 2016). This allowed me to probe and ask further questions relating to participants' answers, without strictly following the interview schedule. The interview schedule included the following questions:

- Currently, what is your year of study, and have you previously studied at any other university?
- How would you describe your experiences as a student?
- How have you adapted to the life of being a student and how do you ensure that you retain a balanced life?
- How do you view your university's commitment to creating an inclusive culture?
- How have you been made aware of existing diversity policies within the university? And in particular, have you been made aware of an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation?
- What is your view on these policies and how they have been implemented?
- Can you think of examples of times when you have felt comfortable with your gender expression at your university?
- Are you open to sharing these experiences?
- Can you think of examples of times when you have felt uncomfortable with your gender expression at your university?

- Are you open to sharing these experiences?
- How have you coped with these challenges?
- How has being trans* played a role in your relationships with fellow students, lecturers, and administrative staff?
- What are your hopes as you continue moving forward in your student journey?

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to inform the line of questioning and to ensure that I asked questions that would lead to an understanding of the trans* experience at a South African university. The duration of each interview ranged from forty-five to sixty minutes.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method that identifies, analyses and report's themes within the data. In thematic analysis, data is analysed rather than summarised (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method interprets the multi-dimensional aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The analysis was achieved by searching for themes and patterns in the data that are relevant to the research topic (Appendix F).

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), two levels of themes exist. Themes can be either semantic or latent. In the present study semantic themes were explored. Semantic themes can be defined as data that is "within the explicit or surface meanings of the data, which the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

The purpose of thematic analysis was to identify themes through an inductive approach which is a data-driven analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This was achieved by searching for themes and patterns in the transcribed data. Themes were identified at a semantic level and analysed at an explicit level, as I was not looking for any deeper meaning beyond the data obtained from the participants.

Six effective steps for conducting a thorough and rigorous thematic analysis were followed, as described below. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest the following six steps: familiarising the researcher with data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes and finally producing the report.

Familiarising the researcher with the data. The first step to an effective thematic analysis is to familiarise the researcher with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the data in the current study was transcribed, I was able to engage with the information. Transcription is the close observation of data through repeated careful listening and transforming of data into a written form for more of an in-depth study (Braun & Clarke, 2014). A process of immersion commenced, which

refers to "repeated reading of the data, reading the data interactively, searching for themes, patterns, similarities and any other data related or unrelated to the research topic" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In order to fully immerse myself in the data, I read through the entire data set twice before I embarked with coding.

Generating initial codes. The second step to an effective thematic analysis began when I generated a list of codes that were of interest to me in the data set. This step is known as the production of initial codes. During this process, codes can be seen as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). Codes were generated by coding extracts of the data. Coding the data set included a process of highlighting, making notes, comments and organising the data for each participant.

Searching for themes. The third step to an effective thematic analysis began once all the data extracts were coded and collated. This step involved sorting "different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant data extracts within identified themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Codes were then sorted and combined to form overarching themes which were placed in the form of tables and mind-maps. This step in the process allowed me to visually understand the relationship between the different codes that formed potential themes.

Reviewing themes. The fourth step to an effective thematic analysis began when the identified themes were reviewed. During this step, the process of reviewing themes was divided into two levels. The first level consisted of matching the data extracts to each theme and determining whether there were similarities in the themes. If themes were incoherent with the data extracts, the second level was applied. This implies that themes were either reworked or refined to match the data extracts.

Defining and naming themes. The fifth step to an effective thematic analysis began once themes had been identified and refined according to the data extracts. During this step, each theme was closely analysed, to determine what aspect of the data each theme captured. Each theme was then defined and described to determine whether it appealed to the research question. Finally, once themes were identified, defined and described, all the data was then transformed into the results section of this study.

Ensuring rigorous research

To ensure the rigorous quality of the data, I applied the criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and assessed the trustworthiness of the data through credibility, transferability and dependability. These criteria were utilised to confirm that thematic analysis had been conducted in a precise, consistent and honest manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The criteria are briefly discussed below.

Credibility. To determine whether findings accurately represented participants' experiences various strategies can be used, however credible checks that were most appropriate for the study included: Firstly, the use of suitable research methods for the phenomenon being explored. Secondly, a semi-structured interview format was used to facilitate participants to speak openly and freely. All participants were ascertained and informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they were free to stop participation at any point during the interview. Participants were also informed that all findings would be anonymised and no use of pseudonyms would be utilised. Scrutiny of the project by a supervisor and editor were welcomed, including the marking of this dissertation by external examiners. This process created an opportunity to ensure that any researcher bias, assumptions or errors were challenged. Excerpts from the participants were used throughout the results chapter, this portrayed the lived experiences of students that have been explored and assists readers with determining the extent to which findings align with reality.

Dependability. To achieve dependability, I examine whether the research methods were appropriate and could be replicated within a similar sample in similar contexts (Creswell, 2013). The research methodology used within this study has been reported throughout the dissertation. This allows examiners to evaluate the extent to which ethical research practices have been followed and develop an apprehension for the effectiveness of the methods. Researcher reflexivity may also provide readers with a thorough understanding of transparency of methods and analysis.

Transferability. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies do not aim to generalise the findings of the results to other contexts; however, findings of such studies may be transferable to similar situations or groups if results are relevant and expressive to those in similar situations (Nowell et al., 2017). To achieve transferability, I ensured that the inclusion criteria allowed for the recruitment of participants, whose experiences reflected issues of gender being explored. Data collection steps were explained and described as thoroughly as possible. Participants' own words were used to guide and support findings, research similar to current studies were included to witness a golden thread among themes emerged from the data.

Concluding notes

This chapter outlined the methods utilised in the research project. The study was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm and a phenomenological qualitative research approach. Snowball sampling was used to recruit six participants, aged between twenty and twenty-four years old. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to allow participants to express their experiences at a South African university. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. During the research process attention was drawn to challenges of quality and relevant ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore trans* students' experiences at a South African university. Once individual face-to-face interviews were transcribed and analysed, three main themes emerged from the data: (1) Navigating the power of privilege and institutional systemic oppression; (2) Misalignment and invalidation of one's gender identity on campus; and (3) The importance of understanding transgender health from a gender minority experience.

In the sections below, the discussion of each theme commences with a brief description which is followed by direct quotations from the analysed data.

Theme One: Navigating the power of privilege and institutional systemic oppression

In theme one, I examined participants' experiences of navigating the power of privilege and their views on systemic oppression at a South African university. As individuals, each of us belongs to several social and cultural statuses. In addition to other statuses, trans* students must navigate the different dimensions of gender and sexuality in a cisgender and heteronormative organisational space. From an intersectional perspective, each participant is defined by their different identities in relation to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and economic status in society. Moreover, to their gender identity, trans* students have other subordinate identities. Different identities are specifically appraised by their rank and value in society and thus result in privileged group statuses. The power of privileged group statuses are characterised by being male, White, heterosexual, able- bodied or a member of the middle to upper socioeconomic class (Button, 2001). This is in contrast to oppressed groups of marginalised statuses which include being female, a person of colour, queer, disabled, and/or being part of a lower socioeconomic class (Mousa et al., 2020).

Participants in the study faced opposition in the form of privileged group culture, either before, during, or after transformation initiatives. Participants' experiences were not only subject to their trans* identity; and they felt that various other dominating identities in relation to race, sexuality, and economic status were frequent within the institution. Various conditions highlighting their experiences within the institution emerged. Participants reinforced the sense that organisational campus culture is privileged, heteronormative, cisgender and unaccommodating to disadvantaged students this was formed by general perceptions of organisational culture, residence formation and Fees Must Fall protests. When describing her experience as a trans* student at a South African university, Participant Two demonstrated the interplay of her different identities:

> Because even coming to varsity I had to get funding and like it's hard to make ends meet sometimes. As a student it was really hard because I come from a

> disadvantaged background and I found a lot of things were so different compared to how I lived back home, and I had to adjust. I come from a township. I don't want to say we don't have a house; we have a like that place we stay in, but then it's built out of iron. Is it zinc or iron? Yeah, something like that. As a trans person, I feel like. I don't want to say I'm not accepted, but at the same time I feel like I'm an outlier [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

Reflecting on her student journey, Participant Two was knowledgeable and aware of her different identity statuses. She referred to her socioeconomic status and then mentioned her experiences as a trans* student. However, with each identity she is reminded of how "hard" it is to be a student from a disadvantaged background and trans*. Highlighting her circumstances, she stated that much of her upbringing was in an informal settlement where she had limited exposure to resources. Although tertiary education is ranked as a privilege, Participant Two talked about her hardships, and about achieving accessibility to tertiary education. Even with her status as a student, she still found it difficult "to make ends meet". As a trans* student she still felt like an outsider and that her gender identity was neither accepted nor rejected. Participant Three, quoted below, also experienced similar forms of group status oppression:

> So, it's been interesting in sort of the people, my colleagues [Postgraduate Residence House Committee Members] not having sort of experience like with trans people, I guess, or worked with trans people. But they've been like making an effort. Like they use my correct pronouns and all of that. But I still feel like, yeah, like residences and like the spaces are quite heteronormative. Yeah, so I try not to like, it's not that I try, but I really don't associate a lot with like the spaces because they're quite like heteronormative, yeah [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

Like Participant Two, Participant Three also voiced her frustration as an oppressed group status identity. In this narrative, Participant Three mapped out her interpretation of how residences within the institution are likely to be characterised by heteronormativity and how she disassociated herself from those kinds of spaces. Even though a postgraduate student, during her undergraduate years she had perceived the university to be exclusive towards queer bodies, even with attempts to gender her correctly. She reiterated that even with her peers acknowledging her gender, she still felt that much of the space was heterosexual, thus illustrating the organisational culture as a male hegemonic space. The struggle between oppressed and privileged statuses was articulated and manifested in several ways, "[b]ecause generally like the res itself is very hyper masculine and so it was, oh my, it was literally, it was like boys' camp" (Participant Six). The influence of having multiple statuses and identities seemed to be similar experiences for participants. Case et al. (2012) argue that White, Christian, heterosexual males are increasingly advantaged from several privileges denoted upon them as a dominant group and members of a hierarchical social order. These privileged identities are branded as the 'mythical norm' against which all other identities

are differentiated in society. Their identities are deeply embedded in cultural norms, perceived gender and gender expectations. This type of privilege is influenced by cisnormative behaviours that approve gender-appropriate ways of others in social settings. While the conceptual understanding of gender as a binary offers thought-provoking debates rather than the elimination of gender oppression, the experiences of trans* students provide useful insights into gender normalisation (Case et al., 2012). Comments by Participants illustrate this notion:

> But it was the first time where it was like not normalised, but acceptable. Yes, like, so I think first year and also it was because it was during the whole Fees Must Fall movement and all of that, so, I think having that political movement going on made gender identity like also like part of the like political like stuff that was happening at the time [Participant Six, Black, gender diverse, commerce student].

> I can't remember what year it was but during like Fees Must Fall, there were also like conversations about like how the spaces that like male residences are quite masculine and like hyper masculine. Sometimes toxic towards queer bodies that live in those spaces [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

> Then protests [Fees Must Fall movement] happened during the year, which was like a lot. And I think that's also when I came to terms with my sexuality and my like gender, just my identity as a whole [Participant Four, Black, transman, humanities student].

Participants equated conversations and formation around gender identity and sexuality as a response to institutional culture during the Fees Must Fall movement. They explained that gender identities and expressions were "not normalised, but acceptable". In this context participants highlighted that an expression of gender identity is not seen as normal. Here, the participants mention the political struggles that the institution faced and how students emphasised their unacceptable cisgender and heterosexual normalised practices and conventions. In this study, gender is regarded as a crucial identity dimension of institutions and power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). While understanding gender may have gradually moved on since the Fees Must Fall protests, from an individual and organisational level analysis the different expression of identities is increasingly conceptualised as social structures. In this particular context, gender is seen to be institutional, as gender identity is immersed in both constraining and shaping organisational interaction between students (Kenny, 2007; Paantjens, 2005). The issue with ongoing normative institutional processes is that the power of privileges is likely to be underplayed. In the United States a National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) (Grant el., 2011) surveyed 6450 trans participants. The survey showed that transgender persons attending universities, technical and professional schools and higher education institutions reported high rates of doubtful treatment by students, lecturers, and staff, including harassment and bullying towards transgender individuals (Grant et., 2011). The NTDS also

reported participants experiencing numerous other challenges such as lack of student financial aid. Transwomen and students of colour were more likely to emphasise these challenges. In a study by Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017), it was found that 19% of trans students mentioned issues concerning financial aid for their tertiary education in comparison to the 12% overall student population. The data showed that transgender students came from families with lower parental annual incomes (Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017).

Participant One concurred with her fellow trans* peers and reiterated that spaces in university are not “genderqueer”, as outlined below:

> Because the way I also see it is that at the end of the day most people at this university are not genderqueer, are not of a sexuality that is not heterosexual. So, there’s no, most people just don’t see that there’s a need to do all this [be inclusive]. Like why don’t you just stay there? [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

Respondents alluded to oppressed racial and gendered groups congregated at the institution. This division becomes most articulate in residences and is mostly experienced among trans* students. The issue with cisnormative and heterosexual peers is that they highlight differences of trans groups and place reminders on trans* students both consciously and unconsciously that they are marginalised (O’hagan, 2017). Significantly, participants emphasised that the institution is unfamiliar or ignorant to the experiences of ‘genderqueer’ students. Trans* students expressed their frustration and dismay at cisgender and heterosexual organisational culture. Complex in many ways, residences deal with counter-cultural groupings that form part of institutions. This becomes a very dangerous platform which manifests itself sharply around privileged groups making it very clear to everybody that only White male heterosexual identities may exist (Goldberg, 2018). Participant One explained her personal account of dominant group interaction and assimilation:

> Because even people who aren’t White males, some of them still pander to the same kind of behaviour and values and attitudes. So, it’s just like what’s the point of not being a White male? You might as well be a White male at this point. Do you know what I mean? [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

Crenshaw (1991), who examined and navigated intersecting identities of discrimination based on gender, sex, ethnicity and sexuality, found that power inequities played a major role in social issues (Slee, 2015). Various researchers have found that when comparing racialised and marginalised identities to those of cis/het individual privilege, power imbalances of discrimination may occur, resulting in labelling the oppressed group as disordered identities (Cole, 2009; Garcia & Ortiz, 2013; Harris & Patton, 2019; Liasidou, 2016). Institutional power hierarchies generally construct racial or gender stereotypes.

As seen from above extracts, trans* students and marginalised identities may experience disproportionate rates of verbal, physical and sexual harassment (Rankin et al., 2010). It has also been reported that gender diverse students account for higher rates of victimisation and marginalisation than students from the LGB community (Beemyn & Rankin 2011; Rankin et al., 2010). According to Wolff et al. (2017), marginalisation has adverse consequences, such as social isolation, insufficient support services and perceptions of invisibility. This demonstrates the kind of interaction and normative role in heteronormative/cisgender institutions. To elaborate on her perception of the institution, Participant One commented as follows:

> So, I think [this university] tries to transform and tries to be progressive. I'm using air quotes because that's just the right thing to do but at the same time, I think it's sometimes a half-baked effort because of vested interests in other endeavours and kind of privileges that people want to hold onto [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

Arguing against the progressiveness intended by the institution, Participant One compared the organisation's vigorous determination to that of a "half-baked effort". She added that their unsuccessful attempt at transformation is largely fueled by interests of other parties that govern the university. Participants were of the view that it is privileges and power that the institution holds onto, and if they were to be progressive there are certain privileges that should be revisited, starting with the Executive Management structure. According to Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critical consciousnesses is a learning process that provides individuals with valuable insight to examine their realities while actively creating their own self-knowledge (Diemer et al., 2016). In essence, the main goal of this process is the transformation of individuals that results in action against oppressive structures in society. When marginalised students confront hegemony and challenge oppression within institutions of higher learning, Executive Management may either react defensively or with disdain. Upon critical reflection of educational spaces, institutions need both students and management to combat oppression practices. As social actors of progressive knowledge, it is imperative that both parties are coherent in their understanding of what compromises diverse and inclusive environments.

Interestingly, Participant Five did not share the same sentiments as her fellow students. Unlike the other respondents, her experience of the university was quite positive and may be a portrayal of transformation efforts by the institution:

> I haven't really felt any sort of prejudice or like hatred towards me being trans [as a student at the university]. I've been told I pass well [similar appearance to women], which is kind of like a, yeah, I mean, it's great. It makes me feel great [Participant Five, Caucasian, female, commerce student].

Participant Five spoke about her experiences as a first-year student in 2018: since her

arrival she had not experienced any feelings of victimisation or any form of discrimination. Even though Participant Five had not felt any forms of social prejudice, she highlighted the fact she had been told by peers that she "passes well". This may confirm the idea that although she may be trans* much of her physical appearance does not reflect any distinctive features that may consider her different or othered relative to cisgender girls/women. Park (1921) and Burgess (1964) argue that social interaction with dominant group members ensues in rapid assimilation. Primary to classical assimilation theory (Warner & Srole, 1945), the more an individual is exposed to heteronormative/cisgender practices and behaviour, the more they will choose to accept certain behaviours. This understanding is key in the interplay and influence of privileged groups. The incorporation of this position highlights the role of institutional structure and oppression (Sue & Telles, 2007). The idea of passing well is not only the belief of the participant but is also formed by institutional constraints of interaction with dominant groups. Following up on how she would describe her experiences at the university, I asked whether she stayed in residence. She responded:

> I got my own place from the beginning, so, yeah. So that helped. I was going to go to a res but I didn't really want to be [in res], because they have gender like … they have resses [residences] with both genders in them, but it's still separated by floors, so you're still defined as one gender within those resses. And like that's uncomfortable. So, yeah, I just chose to go get my own place instead [Participant Five, Caucasian, female, commerce student].

Participants felt that as long as the institution depends on cisgender and heteronormative culture, the extent to which real transformation can take place is debatable (Bennet & Beja, 2005).

An important finding in this study is the difficult organisational culture that trans* students face in higher education, and specifically the challenges faced as an oppressed status group (Kahu, 2013; Smith & Segbers, 2018). These students did not demonstrate the identities of cisgender and heterosexual students and were thus marginalised because of their trans* identities (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). In this study trans* students, who were less likely to assimilate to normalised perceptions of social roles and identities, were more vulnerable to prejudices and discrimination (cf. McAdams-Mahmoud et al., 2014). The difficulty of navigating privilege was in some way amplified by participants' race and economic class. Four of the six participants mentioned that the Fees Must Fall protests influenced their university experience. Despite expectations of organisational culture to be accommodative and progressive, many trans* students experienced conflicts during their student journey. Such experiences influence the identity of trans* students, as they determine the kinds of identities and subjectivities allowed in higher education (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016).

Theme Two: Misalignment and invalidation of one's gender identity on campus

In this section I discuss the formation of gender identity constraint to traditional views of

gender. Cisgender expectations determine that gender identity should be congruent to social gender norms and confined to the sex assigned at birth. Trans* students deviate from this gender norm and are constantly confronted by their delineation of gender expectations. Despite efforts to implement an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation, the lack of adequate proper implementation and practice by the organisation and its members undermines the policy. This leads to feelings of misalignment and invalidation of trans* students' preferred gender identities. Participants indicated that even though they may have chosen to transition into their gender identities, many of these experiences have been invalidated by organisational physical structures and individual-group behaviours. Binary arrangements restrict identity formation and unlike cisgender identities, trans* and gender diverse identities do not align their sense of self with either male or female gender roles. Many of the participants in this study experienced negative attitudes and behaviours from others as they refused to acknowledge trans* identities. How an individual chooses to transition should depend on their understanding of gender without confining themselves to gender expectations and gender structures (Nicolazzo, 2016).

Before formally deciding to transition as trans*, participants either took measures to understand and ease into the process of transitioning or gave accounts of exploring gender identity earlier.

> So, I actually sat down and then did some research about like being trans and I actually realised I identified with that and then that's when I actually realised that I am trans. And then from then onwards sort of started slowly, you know, moving towards presenting more feminine. [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

> In 2017 I was still figuring out what's going on and then I started dressing more feminine and stuff. Not that I wasn't dressing feminine like in my youth years, like when I was very, very young I was doing that, wearing my sister's clothes and stuff like that. But then growing up, I started like conforming to the norm [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

Participants Three and Two described their transitioning processes. Both participants experimented with "women's wear" and "started dressing more feminine". Participant Two also mentioned that it was not her first time encountering female clothing and that earlier in her "youth years", she had experimented with dressing in a feminine way. However, she was unable to continue as she started conforming to the gender norms of her previous gender. Most participants reported that they formally began their transition in the years between 2016 and 2017. Some of the participants discussed gender reassignment surgery but felt that it was not a priority as this requires funds. The process of transitioning for trans* individuals is both visible and invisible. Even if individuals do not choose to proceed with hormone therapy and undergo sex reassignment surgery, there may still be classifiable changes. The invisible process of transitioning, which is often unnoticeable, is the individual's self-identifying and internal acceptance of gender. Each of the

participants in this study felt differently about deciding how to represent themselves and their gender identity. While some trans* individuals may adopt feminine or masculine attributes by way of attire, many students may also redefine gender identity by diversely aligning their sense of self somewhere along the gender spectrum. Trans* students who are part of a gender minority may choose to define themselves within or between the binary arrangement of gender (Smith & Segbers, 2018). Traditional binary arrangements are enforced and confirmed through human behaviour. Social identity theory (Tajfel,1981; Turner 1982) asserts that everyone possesses both an identity and membership in society that is socially constructed by gender roles (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Cisgender individuals are more likely to categorise persons as either ingroup or outgroup members of society and only interact with individuals that are homogenous to their own social group. In line with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), a participant commented:

> Generally, my experience this year, where I'm kind of more passing as a woman so people automatically gender me as such [Participant One, Mixed-race, transwoman, medical student].

According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982) from a transgender perspective based on people's perceptions on the meaning of their social role, specific gender behaviour is attached to a specific sex. To determine whether people act in accordance with their identity, behaviour is assessed through social categorisation of people's acceptance of that identity (Serpe & Stryker, 1987; Thoits, 1992). Trans* identities experience more pressure from cisgender individuals to act in a certain manner. In relation to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), transwomen who transition do not align to gender cisnormativity but rather align their behaviour to the internalised social role of being a woman. Recognition can never be achieved from others unless trans* individuals pass as a cisgender woman (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identity verification by mere adjustment of behaviour to their social role would never be enough, unless they pass well. Therefore, it is the responsibility of cisgender/heterosexual society to alter their preconceived views of gender identity. Trans* students publicly challenge the rigid presumption of gender when they choose to self-identify and express their gender identity in spite of societal norms.

Highlighting the dramatic and uncomfortable reactions of others and the difficulties faced when transitioning, Participant Six added:

> I'm more free-spirited than anything. I just like being myself and expressing myself the way that I feel like expressing myself. So, I really do struggle with having to explain why I'm doing this [gender diverse identity] else you are not valid. It's like, oh, why are you wearing a wig? Oh, do you want to be a girl? I'm like, it's just a wig [Participant Six, Black, gender diverse, commerce student].

The quote above provides insight into how gender diverse persons' transitioning is

perceived by organisational members. Participant Six mentions the struggle of explaining their gender expression as a gender diverse identity. Irrespective of their sex, gender diverse identities may choose to identify as both male and female and do not confine themselves to any gender (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). The lack of support for identity formation by the organisation and fellow students is an example of the way individuals are socialised and conditioned to ostracise trans* students who deviate from the dominant gender norm. Most of the participants described that they found it difficult to express gender identity while questioned about their gender. Trans* students who do not hold binary gender identities and whose physical representation is not stereotypically 'male' or 'female' may experience levels of discomfort and stress in trying to assert themselves (Catalano, 2015; Pryor, 2015). In the United Kingdom, a case study conducted on the transitioning of a male-to-female transgender individual examined the participant's experience of unfavourable attitudes by her co-workers (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). The data collected through participant observation and individual interviews with her surrounding colleagues suggested that she was regarded as ill-fitted and an embarrassment to the organisation which led to a reduction in contact by her peers (Barclay & Scott, 2006). Additionally, the transgender individual was not allowed to utilise the women's lavatory, an issue that is not uncommonly experienced by transgendered persons. Despite queer theory's attempts (1996) to address concerns and to transform views on gender and sexual identities, much of the theory is still based on traditional social assumptions that perpetuate gender-role stereotyping and create gender boxes rather than destabilising gender categories (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Even though queer theory (Jagose & Genschel,1996) seeks to undertake masculine females and feminine males, it still builds on the supposition of the male versus female gender distinction. Traditional gender identity forms a crucial foundation and defining component of queer theory. As a critique to queer theory, transgender theory (Roen, 2001) moves beyond just an either or understanding of gender identity, and yet still challenges the binary arrangements of gender. Transgenderism as a term derived from transgender theory, transgresses linear conceptions of gender (Roen, 2001). More importantly, the concept of transgenderism does not expect individuals to transition physically or internally and promotes flexibility without categorisation of gender. However, this postmodernist theory does not account for the sense of self or the influence of social structures on the flexibility and multiplexity of gender expression (Heyes & Goldberg, 2016). To illustrate how the physical environment contributes to the misalignment and invalidation of participants' gender identities, when asked whether they were aware of existing diversity policies within the university and in particular, the Inclusivity Policy for Sexual Orientation, one participant responded:

> I mean, this policy includes things about allowing, like people being allowed to use the bathrooms that they want, encouraging gender-neutral bathrooms to become a thing across campuses. I don't know of any gender-neutral bathrooms on the health

> side's campus or in Groote Schuur Hospital. That's just me. So, it's things like that [Participant one, Mixed-race, transwoman, medical student].

Only three of the six participants were made aware of the existing diversity policy. While Participant One was knowledgeable of the policy, her view was that there was a lack of organisational response to implementation and practice. From an organisational perspective, Pitcher et al. (2018) argue that an understanding of trans* students' experience in higher education requires the application of diversity practices. This enables organisations to comprehend the effects of marginalisation processes that produce inequalities within their structures. Even though the university's policy for sexual orientation may be the first of its kind on gender identity and sexual orientation in higher learning institutions, the efficacy of the policy remains questionable when seen through the experiences of trans* students. Giddens's (1979) theory of structuration supports the notion that holds that when organisations are centred on rules, resources, and policies, many of these efforts are restricted by the resources and mobility available to the individuals who inhabit organisations. If the structures remain the same, and policies are not enacted at that level, traditional routines become difficult to disrupt. Structural barriers, such as bathroom allocation, especially restrict trans* students. Participants found it difficult to utilise bathrooms:

> Like even in the teaching hospital for medical students there's like a male and a female bathroom that if you walk in, they look exactly the same, but they are, so, I just don't understand why it's gendered. And that's outside the student environment, I think efforts to implement it [policy] are lacklustre and half-hearted. [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].
>
> I think the most annoying place is I hate, I hate using the bathroom at the university's middle campus I don't know, I think the most in-your-face experience as a trans person would be like the bathroom situation. [Participant Four, Black, transman, humanities student].
>
> If you're not as women-presenting, then you always get like stares if you go to like the women's bathroom [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

Participant Two reiterated trans* students' experience with bathrooms as follows:

> So, I [MTF][2] normally like to do my eyebrows. Not eyebrows, what is it?

[2] For the purpose of the following theme, please note that transgender individuals may be referred to as Male-to-Female= [MTF] and Female-to-Male= [FTM]. These persons are identified as having non-binary=gender diverse identities. I acknowledge that the above abbreviations may be limiting and contradict thoughts on gender by placing individuals into either male or female categories. As noted, it is merely a guide to assist the reader to understand the issue related to gender categories.

> Eyelashes. I put my mascara on and put some lipstick on at campus and stuff like that. So, I was doing that in the bathroom and there were girls in the bathroom that started making [impolite] comments. I was just preparing to go out for the day and go to my lectures and stuff like that. I remember even this one time, *ag*, I really got hurt. Because there was this girl that was staring at me and then she left the bathroom and then I heard her speaking to her friends outside saying 'She's [MTF] not supposed to be in here.' And then when I walked out, her friends were like staring at me. It just frustrates me because bathrooms are just bathrooms, they don't need to be gendered. [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

As pointed out by participants, the conversation and issues related to restrooms were found frustrating and discomforting. Participants described feelings of vulnerability and unpleasant experiences when using the restroom. Participants were perceived as breaking traditional boundaries and were thus subjected to harassment and violence when using campus restrooms specifically gendered for men and women. Participant Two highlighted her extreme and uncomfortable social interaction difficulties. She constructed her experiences as hurtful and recognised the invalidation she received because she was easily identified as a MTF transgender student. Transwomen are more likely to be vulnerable to verbal and physical assault and face challenges of being questioned why they are in a particular restroom. In the United States a national survey for middle and high school gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual students reported on the negative treatment towards trans* people (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018). The national survey found that 60% of trans students were expected to use a bathroom aligned to their sex. Alarmingly, 65% of trans students experienced verbal harassment (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018). Bathroom safety is one of the biggest sources of anxiety for many trans* persons (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Given these threats, some trans* students choose to use restrooms that are safer or avoid using campus bathrooms altogether.

> So, I guess it's just like in those positions where like I have to compromise. Like I compromise myself in that I just go to any bathroom. And I think that's also just me eating at my privilege and knowing that I can actually get inside a women's bathroom and I pass to get inside a women's bathroom, and no one would actually like say anything [Participant Four, Black, transman, humanities student].

Participant Four (FTM) expressed his "compromise" under certain conditions, such as using the female restroom instead of the male bathroom and highlights his convenience and ability to manoeuvre the gender binary arrangement. Interestingly, the participant's convenience may be equated to male privilege and confidence by association to masculine identity. In contrast to the quotations above, Participant Four uses words such as "eating at my privilege" to describe his position as an outsider to the in-group membership of a male. Goldberg (2018) asserts that one of the many institutional features that distinguish trans* from cis/het students are sex-segregated bathrooms. Gender-exclusive bathrooms unintentionally expose the identity of trans* students whether or not they wish to be transparent. Gender-neutral restrooms are infrequent, rare and

seldom visible on campuses (Goldberg et al., 2019; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b). Despite transformation efforts by a South African university through policy, queer students are still expected to negotiate cis/het practices without structural support for their gender (Ellis et al., 2014; Rankin, 2003). Participant Four who was the only transman in this study added that:

> Men's bathrooms [should] get, I always say this, men's bathrooms should definitely think of getting [sanitary] bins in the stalls, because, yeah, because it's when I'm on my period. I just go to like the women's bathroom. [Participant Four, Black, transman, humanities student].

An understanding of gender construction shapes our understanding of how gender binaries promote a system of societal expectations. Trans* individuals are coerced into adhering to social categories of gender and those who do not conform to the binary are disciplined. Trans* individuals must constantly arrange their identities to two normative binary categories even when transitioning. Consequently, trans* persons are faced with several challenges relating to the way they choose to express and pass their gender. The findings revealed that institutional structural discrimination is a major concern for trans* students since participants had to negotiate their identities within structural and social constraints. The participants in this study faced safety risks when they chose to express their gender outside of gender norms, such as using their preferred restroom. Although policy has been implemented to address gender issues, the findings of this study demonstrate that the university should stress the adherence to the policy. Taranowski (2008) argues the necessity for providing trans* individuals with facilities that are accustomed to their needs. When trans* students reflect their gender through attire, they should not be forced to use bathrooms in contrast to their gender identity to avoid uncomfortable encounters.

Theme Three: The importance of understanding transgender health from a gender minority experience

In this section, I assess mental health in relation to gender minority experiences. Trans* students, are vulnerable to the psychological effects of both external social attitudes to gender diversity and internal emotional responses to misgendering. For some trans* students, having their lecturers and peers gender them correctly and using their preferred pronouns, reflects gender-affirmation behaviour. Failure to address trans* students by their preferred gender may lead to feelings of stigmatisation and discrimination. Relative to Meyer's (1995) minority stress model extended to transgender experiences, McLemore (2018) asserts that misgendering from a minority stress perspective is a minority stressor that leads to stigmatisation. Stigmatised groups such as the queer and trans* communities are often subjected to excessive degrees of stress as a result of experiences of prejudice and discrimination. Participants reported stigmatisation at either interpersonal or personal levels within the organisation. Trans* students face stigmatisation which include victimisation (interpersonal) and negative feelings towards one's identity because of being

misgendered (personal). These kinds of experiences and challenges inherently stigmatise the individual and create barriers of discrimination with which many trans* students are confronted (Hughto et al., 2015).

Though sexual and gender identity development are both strands of marginalisation, to avoid interpersonal interactions of transphobic treatment, trans* participants are less likely to disclose their trans* identities. Participants further allude to the narrative that when choosing to disclose their identities, their trans* identity is less likely to be understood:

> But when I say that I mean because right now people don't really know. I haven't really spoken about it, but when something comes up like, so, I think I would like to be able to be more comfortable, to be open, openly trans. I don't think [I'm] closeted trans, but I don't think I'm super open [Participant One, Mixed-race, transwoman, medical student].

> So, obviously when I first started here [at a South African university], I identified as gay and not as trans. They've heard of gay. It's for the most part normalised, whereas like being trans isn't. So, I think people are not familiar and are not used to like trans people. People accept gay people a lot more than like trans people. I think they respect gay people more than like trans people [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

Although both Participants One and Three were 'out', both expressed facing levels of discomfort when discussing coming out as trans*. Participants' general perception was that, unlike trans* identity, queer identity has become more 'normalised' and a familiar concept to groups on campus. As Respondent One noted, disclosing her trans* identity is a matter of being comfortable to be openly trans*. Participant Three stated that she identified as a male attracted to men and not as a transwoman. As she socially transitioned and identified as trans*, even though she identifies as a transwoman, she stated that people know and still identify her as a gay male. Participant Three highlighted that homosexuality is valued and is a respected identity, more so than trans* identity. Perceptions regarding homosexuality, more specifically interactions in the classroom, residences and on campus, may be more accepting as a phenomenon than trans* identities. This effectively places an institutional burden on students to either accept being identified as queer (gay) or face marginalisation from coming out as trans*. Marginalisation produced from both sexuality and gender perspectives often generates stigma as these subservient forms of identity deviate from heterosexual and cisgender expectations (McCormack & Anderson, 2010). Stigmatisation can be even more severe when gender identity is not defined along traditional lines of homogenous masculinity (Cheng, 2008). When campuses reinforce binary practices, they create very vulnerable and fragile spaces for transgender students. When transgender students choose to transition, they often face the discomfort of being gendered incorrectly and as a result they must either disclose their identities or run the risk of being misgendered. This kind of invisibility or concealment of information brings about a sense of feeling unwelcome and experiences of exclusion (Dickey & Singh, 2017). To avoid such

uncomfortable conversations, students may refuse or even ignore the possibility of addressing their trans* identity (Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001).

To reiterate social attitudes of perceived feelings towards sexuality, Participant Two commented:

> I haven't necessarily come out as trans, but when I came out as gay at the time, I told them and they were like, 'Okay, cool.' [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

As pointed out by Participant Two, it appears that homosexuality is more 'cool' and 'familiar' to people. This may create the illusion of cultural shifts concerning homophobia in the university context. Weinberg (1972) defines homophobia as the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of being in close contact or associated with homosexual men and women. Literature on sexuality shows that homophobia at an undergraduate level is decreasing and suggests a change in attitudes and perceptions towards sexuality at universities (Anderson, 2010; Bush et al., 2012; Kozloski 2010; Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

While perceptions of sexuality may be shifting, not much can be said about gender diversity, as shown in this study. Participants narrated experiences of transphobia within the university setting:

> So, whereas at [a South African university] it's, I think because, like I said, first year, second year, everything was just so in everyone's faces [during #feesmustfall 2016], like everyone was like, we're going to be inclusive, like it or move out. It was that thing of like even though people think what they still think, people are transphobic and homophobic [Participant Six, Black, gender diverse, commerce student].

> So, like I do move aside a lot of negative energy that is in my way and there are times [that is] transphobia, homophobic [treatment], etc. [Participant Four, Black, transman, humanities student].

Participant Six reported that while the institution attempts to be inclusive of queer and trans* students, these efforts have not changed people's perceptions, attitudes and treatment towards trans* people and the issues they face. Even with the implementation of the sexual orientation policy, the university is yet to address the challenges experienced by trans* students in their daily lives on campus. Most participants described on-campus experiences of victimisation, harassment and being uncomfortable. Beemyn (2005) and Goldberg (2018) agree that even though policies acknowledge the importance of gender issues, many institutions are yet to address and control aspects of trans* students' experiences regarding structural and systemic dilemmas of discrimination and stigma.

Trans* students face numerous and enormous difficulties when interacting on campus. Participants also reported feelings of transphobia. Transphobia is defined by Hill and Willoughby

(2005) as the feeling of emotional disgust towards individuals who do not conform to society's perceptions and expectations of gender. In contrast to sexuality, gender becomes more challenging to hide, especially when students decide to transition (i.e., through presentation, the use of specific pronouns or hormonal replacements) and may face a greater chance of experiencing transphobic treatment. For example, Participant Two said, "I could hear people being transphobic." Prejudice and discrimination against trans* students are established phenomena, and much attention is still required for the effective implementation of inclusive policy. LGBT students are often sceptical and distrustful of their campus climate in terms of the extent to which there is sexual and gender minority acceptance (Rankin, 2003). In a study in the United States, in which students were asked about their experiences of college campuses, LGBT students described instances of harassment and the experience of transphobia within their general campus climate (Rankin & Garvey, 2015).

For queer and trans* students, coming out can be challenging and hurtful. Participant Three expressed her annoyance after coming out:

> Like if someone misgenders you, it's just like constant coming out, having to explain [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

Coming out may be especially stressful for transgender students as this process involves self-disclosure through the use of pronouns and being gendered correctly. Misgendering is a form of identity misclassification, and the experience of having one's social identity invalidated is psychologically disruptive (Bosson et al., 2012). In particular, the number of times that participants were misgendered was linked to feeling pessimistic about their chosen gender identity. Such experiences further undermine an individual's sense of belonging and coherence in relation to their preferred gender identity. Transgender identities by nature are complex, and when placed within the university context, transitioning processes cause students to mask or voluntarily hide their identities when necessary (Dugan et al., 2012; Pusch, 2005): "I always have things running in my mind and I'm like now maybe I should just keep quiet and keep on moving (Participant Three)". Students endure stress and discomfort from constantly educating, reminding and correcting staff members of their affirmed pronouns (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018b; Nicolazzo, 2016).

Classroom situations play a significant role in reinforcing stigmatisation and toxic treatment towards trans* groups. Classrooms as microcosms of university may exacerbate stress through interpersonal interactions with lecturers and students and affect trans* students' overall self-concept when misgendered (Meyer, 2003; Thoits, 1992). Participant One had this to say about misgendering in the classroom and the lack of organisational repercussions from the institution:

> I've never heard a lecturer, or anyone at the university, ever not call a student her or she or sir or whatever. Or use any gender-neutral pronouns, as this policy kind of encourages people to do, so, that's what I mean when I say I don't know if this is happening or yes. And I also have never seen anybody being disciplined, punished, dismissed or warned or anything about misgendering a student or about, I don't know, disrespecting a student's identity. I've just never seen [it] [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

Participant One recounted her experience of microaggression from interpersonal interactions with lecturers and students. She further insisted that lecturers are not made aware of pronoun use within the institution and mentioned that they are not held responsible for their actions. Participant One highlighted the contrast between policy and implementation. According to an existing policy for inclusivity of sexual orientation, academic staff and tutors are encouraged to review their language use and conduct lectures to ensure adherence to inclusive and non-discriminatory practices. However, as demonstrated by participants there appears to be no consequences for staff and students who ignore this instruction. Participants explained the effect of a lecturers' behaviours:

> I felt so uncomfortable because this lecturer was talking about trans people like they were a disease and I'm a trans person and I felt very uncomfortable [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

> So I think [the university] definitely does need to sensitise their lecturers in terms of being more sensitive about pronouns or, I don't know, asking people. Not just assuming peoples' gender identities, you know [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

Microaggressions are systemic and often occur within individual-level and interpersonal-levels interactions. Cisnormativity assumes, at an individual level, that all people are socialised as a specific gender (two-sex binary) and engaged in stereotypical activities while growing up. Microaggressions are experienced regularly through "verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults" (Sue, 2010, p. 3). Participants reported feelings of hostility, guilt and anxiety, and feeling less authentic and worthless in their interactions with others while being misgendered (McLemore, 2018). This may cause trans* students to feel uncomfortable and prefer their transitional status to go unnoticed (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Similar to the point made by Participant One on microaggressive behaviours, Participant Three described her experiences during a teambuilding exercise as a postgraduate house committee member:

> [W]e actually went to like a teambuilding thing at a cadet training. And it was quite like violent because I was misgendered and it was just like a whole thing. So, I was like, I'm not going to participate in this. And then there was like an issue with the bathroom. So, I guess, yeah, the warden just wasn't sensitive to the fact that there were like queer people in the team [inclusion for trans* student accommodation],

> which is unfortunate. I think also just from that experience like I just haven't been able to fully like connect with the team, yeah [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

Departing from the campus and classroom experience, Participant Three mentioned the "violent" treatment towards her gender identity. Participant Three reported on her experience of being misgendered during the teambuilding exercise. For participants in this research study, the use of pronouns and chosen names that reflect their preferred gender is an important issue. Insensitive behaviours by university employees communicates a disregard and lack of respect for participants' gender identities and may enforce explicit communication on silencing and concealing gender identity, even after students inform staff of preferred pronouns and gender. The concealment of gender identity and constant education regarding the use of certain pronouns took up emotional energy and was a unique source of stress for participants (Mustanski et al., 2010; Sevelius, 2013; Testa et al., 2015). Due to the multiple forms of violence that trans* students face when interacting with others this may inherently induce psychological distress, as can be seen from the quote below:

> My hope is that I can be, I can feel comfortable enough to kind of allow people to know my gender identity and still not be worried that they'll suddenly start misgendering me or looking at me differently because they know. [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

> I'd make a big deal out of like pronouns, but now I think I've just started, like if people read me a certain way, then that's it, I'm like, because then it also just gets stressful [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

As seen above, participants mention that being misgendered can become "stressful" or make them feel "worried". From a gender minority perspective, misgendering occurs through identity interruption by cisgender people who fail to acknowledge one's own self-identity. This has the potential to lead to psychological distress (Burke, 1991; Meyer, 2003; Meyer & Frost, 2013). Yadegarfard et al. (2013) argue that trans* persons' psychological well-being is often affected by both external and internal stressors. External stressors include human rights violations, harassment, bullying and discrimination, whereas internal stressors relate to the internalised negative experience concerning gender dysphoria. As expressed by Participant Three, her experience was "quite like violent". This reflects the internal struggles as experienced by the participant. Participant Five elaborated on the experiences of gender dysphoria:

> I've other friends who are in resses [residences] though, so like, yeah, I think it's a personal choice as to whether that's going to make you more dysphoric or less dysphoric [Participant Five, Caucasian, female, commerce Student].

These kinds of experiences of distress for trans* students that do not match their gender identity may affect their mental health. This places trans* students at a higher risk of developing

mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety disorder (Müller, 2013; Yadegarfard et al., 2013). A study in Norway on transgender students' mental health revealed that gender dysphoria is most likely to be related to transgenders' social role rather than bodily attributes. A trans* person who does not pass as a cisgender male or female may unintentionally appear visible to cisnormativity. Negative attitudes are more likely to be displayed towards trans* persons who have not received gender-confirming medical treatment (Budge et al, 2013). For example: "That's all I've ever wanted, just to be gendered correctly" (Participant One). Most of the participants' experiences with misgendering and negative treatment related to harmful forms of micro assaults and discrimination. Such forms of interpersonal stressors may lead to feelings of invisibility and isolation for trans* students. According to Lockhart (2013), LGBTQ students hardly report incidents of campus violence and harassment due to a lack of institutional response to issues related to gender identity. Since considerable efforts are not made, a majority of students choose to conceal their sexual and gender identities on campus.

Sub-theme: Resilience and coping strategies

This sub-theme emerged from participants' ability to be resilient and overcome challenges, despite institutional and interpersonal discrimination. Consistent with general stress theory, the minority stress model extended to transgender experiences (McLemore, 2018) accounts for coping and social support structures that help buffer the effects of stressors such as gender minority status and minimise the negative effects of health outcomes. To avoid and reduce unpleasant health outcomes, resilience plays an integral part in the process of coping with stress. Identity and social support are important features of resilience. To illustrate the point of resilience, Participants had this to say:

> [F]or me, personally I'm not too, I'm not sure if the word is 'pedantic'. Or like I'm not too picky [about my] my pronouns. I'm not going to lie. I think, for me, my gender identity is mainly in my expression than anything else [Participant Six, Black gender diverse, commerce student].

> I feel like I've gone through so much in life that I don't take things to heart. Like I just brush them off. Like, oh, okay, you did that. I move on because at the end of the day, if I let it affect me, I'm going to be depressed for what? For that person's way of dealing with transphobia. Like, no. I don't let it go to heart, I just brush it off and I move on [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

> You know, if people aren't also trying to make you feel included, I'm also [in this] space in my life where I'm not going to like force myself to be included. Because, yeah, like being like a trans like literally me just being a visible trans woman is, it shouldn't, but it is like a statement. It goes against the bounds, you know, which is taxing. So I try also not to tax myself out too much [Participant Three, Black, transwoman, commerce postgraduate student].

As a positive adaptation to minority stress, resilience assists participants in navigating the negative impact of stress on their health and well-being. Developing coping mechanisms can help

eliminate the effects of stress on an individual's health (Ashmore et al., 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Interestingly, coping and resilience are not simultaneously applicable to positive health outcomes. Developing a threshold and resilience towards life experiences indicates success and overcoming adverse challenges, whereas coping refers to efforts mounted by an individual to adapt to stress. However, coping does not necessarily indicate a successful adaption to stress (Brewster et al., 2012; Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Masten (2007 p. 923) suggests three indicators of resilience: "(a) developing well in the context of high cumulative risk for developmental problems, (b) functioning well under current adverse conditions (stress-resistance, coping), and (c) recovery to normal functioning after catastrophic adversity (bouncing back, self-righting) or severe deprivation (normalisation)". The centrality of identity is especially necessary to better understand one's self-concept, particularly during times of adversity. While confidence in one's self-concept is paramount, minority stress theory emphasises social support as a mental buffer for minority individuals. Three participants reported on social support. This support provided opportunities for mentorship and comfort. Participant One, who is a medical student in the Health Sciences faculty, describes her practical experiences as a prospective medical doctor in the field of medicine. She further mentions that sometimes she's "like scrambling and trying to do the ward work but also trying to attend tuts [tutorials] and trying to attend lectures". It may become "overwhelming" to balance it all. However, with the assistance of her consultant, much of the workload and pressure has been bearable.

> So, then our consultant will always tell us, no, go home when the call is done. You don't have to stay until 17:00 the next day. You can go home, and you can take care of yourself, there are enough students, there are enough other interns to take care of your work. So, she's always adamant about that and she always checks in on us. She actually makes an effort and actually is very cognisant of people's well-being emotionally. You know, so I think I really like that about her, and I think that's made my experience quite different from other peoples' experiences [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

As demonstrated, perceived support, especially during specific life events, may moderate the relationship between stressors and mental health. Social support and perceived availability of this support appear to relate directly to mental health (Cohen & Willis, 1985):

> I met a lady by the name Farah (during orientation training for first years) and she got like she had these things where she would have one-on-one meetings with us and that opened my mind and it helped me grow so much. I'm more confident. I wasn't confident in myself she helped me to be able to grow and become the person that I am today. And because she was that important in my life, I got to think a lot. Like literally think a lot and that's when I decided I need to live my own truth. I need to do what I need to do to be able to get to where I want to be in life. And, yes, she actually played a big role in my life [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

> [W]e went like to this other place and we had a facilitator, and she was like, oh, you look like my cousin and she said something like that. I was just like, she sees me looking like her female cousin, oh my word, that's so affirming to experience [Participant One, Mixed race, transwoman, medical student].

Research has shown that while social support for gender and sexual minorities is limited, where it is indeed present among trans* populations there are fewer mental health issues (Bockting et al., 2013; Budge et al., 2013; Moody et al., 2015; Moody & Smith, 2013; Nemoto et al., 2011). In a study of trans* and genderqueer students, it was found that social support in the form of a supervisor or university leader was negatively related to depression (Budge et al., 2013). Participant Five conveyed the positive impact of social support and described her gender expression since she joined a South African university as a first-year student in 2018 as "positive":

> I haven't really gone through any difficulties at [university], like by [university] workers or anything like that. I think one of the most, one of the best ways I can describe my experience is when USSA [University Sports South Africa] wouldn't let me participate [in fencing] because of my gender. [A South African university] and their legal team sorted the whole thing out. So that's very helpful and that's why I'm saying like [this university] is very good with like trans policies and those type of things [Participant Five, Caucasian, female, commerce student].

Social support within the university context should be specifically tailored to the needs of trans* students, Participant Two adds the importance of wellness services for trans* individuals:

> They [a South African university] offer psychologists in general but I feel like if they offer psychologists specifically for queer people or even trans people, that would be something great because, I feel like they will be helping trans people out to be able to go through their journey. And if I want to get hormones now, I have this background of a psychologist. But I'm not also doing it to get hormones but I'm also dealing with how my life is and can be able to speak to someone and get proper advice or responses from that person [trained psychologist in trans* issues] rather than just talking [to] a friend, So I think maybe that's one thing that could be implemented in a policy. [Participant Two, Black, female, commerce student].

A qualitative study on suicide-protective influences among trans* individuals showed that participants who identify meaningful support from others were at lower risk to suicide attempts (Moody et al., 2015; Moody & Smith, 2013). Findings from this study propose that perceived availability of resources and social support are associated with positive mental health outcomes and lower suicide risks among trans* people. Social support concerning the university context would involve the provision of psychological and material resources from a network of staff, lecturers and peers to act as a potential means for buffering minority stress.

Concluding remarks

The current study contributes to our understanding of trans* students' experience with misgendering and the importance of gender minority health from a minority stress perspective. The findings demonstrate that misgendering is stigmatising and associated with psychological

distress. Furthermore, as indicated by the findings, academic staff, wardens and students within the institution are generally insensitive or lack understanding of the experiences of trans* students. Interestingly, there seems to be a lack of practice or incorrect implementation of the inclusivity policy for sexual orientation. Marginalisation and disempowerment occur at many microcosmic levels within institutions. Research indicates that the presence of a diversity policy is often used as a substitute for the actual practice of diversity (Rankin, 2003; Seelman, 2014a). Therefore, institutional practices still perpetuate privileged cisgender identities, thus undermining the implementation of diversity/inclusive policies. Research has indicated that institutional cisgendered structures are deeply rooted in the gender binarism across settings from classrooms to residences (Beemyn & Rankin, 2016; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, an understanding of the experiences of marginalised groups such as trans* individuals is needed to guide institutions in higher education to anticipate inclusivity more effectively and to meet the needs of marginalised groups.

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African university. In this final chapter, I discuss the study's limitations, theoretical contribution, and recommendations for future research. I begin by considering the theoretical contribution and then discuss the practical recommendations for future research. I next proceed with the study's limitations and then I conclude the chapter by highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of trans* students' experiences within the context of diversity and inclusion.

Theoretical contribution

The findings of this study expand on minority stress theory (Meyer 2003) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982), thus assisting to inform our theoretical understanding from a transgender perspective of organisational psychology. To date, transgender research from an organisational psychology perspective is limited and research on trans* students experiences is still developing in higher education, in South Africa (Dugan et al., 2012; Pryor, 2015).

Meyer (2003) developed the minority stress model for gender-binary gay men, lesbians, bisexual men and women. Relative to Meyer's (1995) minority stress model extended to transgender experiences (McLemore, 2018), this study provides insights into misgendering and the importance of transgender health from a gender-minority stress perspective.

In this study, I focused on power as a form of privilege as this topic merits attention for several reasons. The term power refers to a system of dominating cis/het individuals established insubordination of trans* students (O'hagan, 2017). This study sought to address the many processes and practices within the institutions that convey dominant group behaviour as either male or female (Tucker, 2019). This adversely places trans* students in a compromising position to either assimilate or reject the binary, thus navigating cisgender and heterosexual privilege on campus (Sue & Telles, 2007). In an attempt to synthesise power relations within a gendered approach to organisational behaviour, I argue that the content of this paper aligns with the field of Industrial/Organisational psychology rather than clinical psychology. Institutions are often perceived as places that ensure equality, respect and student engagement among students in a way that contributes to their student achievement and align with organisational objectives (Button, 2001). Taking a gender diverse approach to institutional policies promotes fair and equitable treatment of trans* students within the organisational context. Utilising diverse content in organisational policies and practices creates a set of expectations and rewards that indicate to organisational members such as students the kinds of goals that are key and organisational behaviour by which the goals are to be achieved (Button, 2001). Once diverse and inclusive organisational policies, practices, expectations and rewards are audaciously visible a shared sense of commitment may, in turn, guide organisational behaviour to be less cisgender (Button, 2001;

Mousa et al., 2020).

Given this consideration, this study of trans* students' experiences at a South African university could potentially contribute and provide useful perspectives within existing transgender empirical work. This approach offers valuable insights into intersecting identities among marginalised individuals. Drawing upon critical analysis, intersectionality as an approach proposes consciousness into racial, ethnic, class, age, gender and sexuality inequalities while seeking to address structures of disparity (Smith & Segbers, 2018; Kahu, 2013).

Recommendations and Future Research

In this section below, I include participants suggestions from the interviews as well as literature to formulate my recommendations. Participants' suggestions in this chapter were used to substantiate recommendations and illustrate the importance of understanding trans* students experiences in tertiary education settings. Suggestions from participants provide a more realistic perspective of recommendations in their specific context. Considering that research on trans* student experiences is a developing phenomenon in higher education, in South Africa. The suggestions provided by participants could assist universities in South Africa to improve organisational practice and provide support for trans* students, which in turn can have a positive influence on trans* students perceptions towards organisational efforts of diversity and inclusion.

Policy. The alteration of the Sex Description and Sex Status Act 49 of 2003 lacks structural and material support for trans* individuals and remains ineffective in its implementation in South Africa. Lack of effective implementation of legislation has important consequences for trans* individuals and their ability to function in everyday society. Although a South African university launched an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation to allow students to choose their preferred titles and name, the macro dilemma in the legal field counters their efforts. Trans* students who are unable to process their Act 49 applications to alter their sex description and sex status on their birth register might not be able to provide evidence and verify educational qualifications with their gender-preferred name.

Trans* terminology. To further foster greater inclusivity for trans* individuals, universities should pay attention to the use of language and naming of policy. It is unclear whether the policy addresses gender, as the term 'sexual orientation', refers to a person's sexual attraction and not gender (Meiners & Quinn, 2012). Included in the list of definitions is the term 'trans*', which refers to a person's gender identity/expression and not sexual orientation. Insufficient understanding of these terms and their related experience at policy level would mean that trans* individuals who are transitioning might not feel that the environment is sufficiently safe and welcoming towards their preferred gender (Goldberg, 2018; Redpath et al., 2013).

Sensitivity training. The findings of this study suggest that misgendering is stigmatising

and associated with psychological distress. The findings revealed that academic staff, wardens and students within the institution were generally insensitive or lack understanding the experiences of trans* students. It is recommended that staff who demonstrate insensitive behaviour towards trans* students should be reprimanded and have issues seriously addressed. Mandatory sensitivity training should be provided for university employees, especially for lecturers and resident wardens who interact with students. University employees should be trained to understand the experiences of trans* students with misgendering and the importance of trans* terminology, especially regarding the use of preferred pronouns.

Gender-inclusive structures. It was found that the participants in this study faced safety risks when using the bathroom. It is recommended that gender-inclusive restrooms be included in all new building plans. Gender-neutral bathrooms should be advertised and visible. Current male restrooms should include sanitary bins for transmen and gender diverse students. The university should ensure the effective placement of trans* students in residences who have indicated their preferred gender on student system database. Wardens should be made aware of trans students and particularly cautious when arranging residence activities. Health care counselling services should have specific staff designated and specially trained to deal with trans* students only. While training for all staff is necessary in order to effectively develop an inclusive culture, dealing with trans* health should be prioritised. It is suggested that future research can explore the experiences and relationship of staff and trans* students, with a focus on support provided to trans* individuals at universities. This suggests that in order for trans* individuals to receive support, staff are aware of existing trans* issues and have received the necessary sensitivity training to create inclusive spaces.

Limitations

The present study was not without limitations. Firstly, the exploration was sensitive, and accessibility of participants was difficult as trans* students are less likely to disclose their gender identities, to prevent marginalisation. The findings in this study revealed that trans* students are more likely to conceal their gender identity as behaviours of others even after the disclosure of preferred pronouns may lead to misgendering and feelings of gender dysphoria (Dickey & Singh, 2017). However, since trans* experiences are under-researched and still a developing phenomenon, the size of the sample was considered appropriate for the study. While other institutions of higher learning deal with anti-discrimination policies more broadly, a South African university has an explicit existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation. Therefore, it was regarded as an appropriate context in which to assess the influence and implementation of diversity and inclusion policy and practices in South Africa.

Secondly, the recruitment of the sample proved to be difficult. This was influenced by two

factors, namely, I was a new student at a South African university and a cisgender/heterosexual female unfamiliar with queer and trans* spaces within the institution. As the current study did not form part of any existing projects, and trans* student identities were a sensitive matter, a considerable amount of planning and insight were required to find participants. The research was located at a South African university and after consultation with the President of a campus-based society that seeks to create awareness on LGBTIA+ matters, I was able to recruit participants by distribution of a recruitment letter. However, to ensure that participants would be obtained for the current study, during my initial research planning I became familiar with an organisation known as Gender DynamiX in Cape Town. Gender DynamiX is the first registered Africa-based public organisation to focus solely on trans* and gender diverse communities. While no participants were recruited or referred by the organisation, their valuable input on trans* challenges within the South African context provided an additional understanding of marginalisation faced by trans* individuals.

Thirdly, the sample consisted of students at a South African university where I, too, was a student. This was challenging concerning the extent to which participants were comfortable to share personal information with a fellow student.

Fourthly, as an outsider who was interested in trans* experiences, I needed to be alert to appropriate terminology and pronouns (him/his; she/her; their/them) to avoid assumptions of misgendering and being insensitive towards participants. During the interviews, I introduced myself by using the pronouns she/her and asked participants their preferred pronouns. To shield participants from any discomfort or stress during the interview, I addressed each person by their preferred pronoun. Findings in this study found misgendering to be stigmatising and associated to psychological distress (Bosson et al., 2012). Furthermore, with the assistance of Gender DynamiX, I was made aware of referring to non-binary students as gender diverse individuals. While research mostly utilises the term 'non-binary' which suggests identifying as neither male nor female, the nuanced label of 'non' implies an erasure and marginalisation of one's identity in society (Davis, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2016; Roen, 2001, Tebbe & Moradi, 2016).

Lastly, although both the participants and I come from historically unfavourable racial discrimination under the apartheid system, participants' gender identities remain oppressed in present-day South Africa. I acknowledge my privileged position as a cisgender female embedded in the two sex-binary, as my gender has never been brought into question. The participants and I share experiences of marginalisation as persons of colour within the context of a South African university and located within the post-colonial west coast of Africa. A South African university established in the 1800's as a college for white males and built on masculine-gendered foundations, still predominantly imitates this culture of privilege. I am the first in my family to be part of an

institution highly ranked in higher education. From an intersectionality of identities point of view, the participants and I share experiences of oppressed statuses in White, wealthy and hegemonic spaces. However, my reflexivity throughout the research report created an awareness in me to ensure participants' lived experiences were reported rigorously and were not impeded by unconscious bias or judgment (Coolhart et al., 2018).

Conclusion

This study explored the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African university. From the analysis of the interviews, it emerged that trans* students have to navigate the power of privileges and face institutional oppression as marginalised identities. Trans* identities are misaligned and invalidated by their campus experiences such as utilising cisgender bathrooms and not demonstrating typical cisgender physical characteristics. Understanding transgender health from a gender minority perspective is important as misgendering leads to stigmatisation and psychological distress.

While universities are perceived as inclusive and tolerant environments of student learning, poorly implemented policies and practices enforce an exclusive organisational culture for trans* and gender diverse identities. A lack of understanding of gender minority experiences reinforces the idea that binary expectations are acceptable. Higher education institutions should be proactive in creating inclusive and comfortable spaces for marginalised identities. Participants in this study perceived the university environment as intolerable and exclusive of persons with trans* identities despite transformation initiatives and the introduction of diverse and inclusive policy. Hence, to ensure the effective implementation of current policies and practices related to diversity and inclusivity, an understanding of trans* students' experiences can assist organisations to improve existing policies and examine effective practices for marginalised students.

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Appendix A: Commerce Faculty Approval

Faculty of Commerce

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701
2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 4375/ 5748 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 4369
E-mail: com-faculty@uct.ac.za
Internet: www.uct.ac.za

@Commerce UCT **UCT Commerce Faculty Office**

04th June 2019

Ms Miché September
School of Management Studies
University of Cape Town

Dear Ms September

REF: REC 2019/000/047

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE MEANING THAT TRANS* STUDENTS ATTACH TO THEIR EXPERIENCES AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY.

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid for 1 year and may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

Shandre Swain
Administrative Assistant
University of Cape Town
Commerce Faculty Office
Room 2.26 | Leslie Commerce Building

Office Telephone: +27 (0)21 650 2695 / 4375
Office Fax: +27 (0)21 650 4369
E-mail: sl.swain@uct.ac.za
Website: www.commerce.uct.ac.za<http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/

"Our Mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society."

Appendix B: Division of Student Affairs Research Permission Approval

RESEARCH ACCESS TO STUDENTS | DSA 100

NOTES

1. This form must be **FULLY** completed by all applicants who want to access UCT students for the purpose of research or surveys.
2. Return the fully completed **(a) DSA 100** application form **by email**, in **the same word format**, together with **your: (b) research proposal inclusive of your survey, (c) copy of your ethics approval letter / proof (d) informed consent letter** to: Moonira.Khan@uct.ac.za. You application will be attended to by the Executive Director, Department of Student Affairs (DSA), UCT.
3. The turnaround time for a reply is **approximately 10 working days**.
4. NB: It is the responsibility of the researcher/s to apply for and to obtain **ethics approval and to comply with amendments that may be requested;** as well as **to obtain** approval to access UCT staff and/or UCT students, from the following, at UCT, respectively:
(a) **Ethics:** Chairperson, Faculty Research Ethics Committee' (FREC) for ethics approval, (b) **Staff access:** Executive Director: HR for approval to access UCT staff, and (c) **Student access:** Executive Director: Student Affairs for approval to access UCT students.
5. **Note:** UCT Senate Research Protocols requires compliance to the above, **even if prior approval has been obtained from any other institution/agency. UCT's research protocol requirements applies to *all* persons, institutions and agencies from UCT and external to UCT who want to conduct research on human subjects for academic, marketing or service related reasons at UCT.**
6. **Should approval be granted to access UCT students for this research study, such approval is effective for a period of one year from the date of approval (as stated in Section D of this form), and the approval expires automatically on the last day.**
7. **The approving authority reserves the right to revoke an approval based on reasonable grounds and/or new information.**

SECTION A: RESEARCH APPLICANT/S DETAILS

Position	Staff / Student No	Title and Name	Contact Details (Email / Cell / land line)
A.1 Student Number	SPTMIC003	Ms Miché September	sptmic003@myuct.ac.za/ michesentember1@gmail.com / 067 088 9207
A.2 Academic / PASS Staff No.			
A.3 Visitor/ Researcher ID No.			
A.4 University at which a student or employee	University of Cape Town	Address if *not* UCT:	
A.5 Faculty/ Department/School	Commerce/ Organisational Psychology/ School Of Manangement Studies		

A.6 APPLICANTS DETAILS If different from above	Title and Name	Tel.	Email

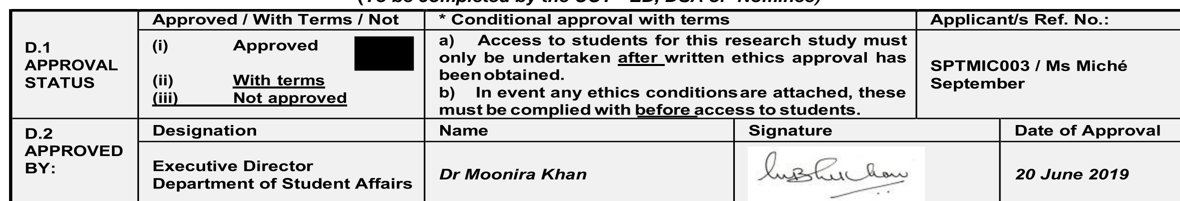
SECTION B: RESEARCHER/S SUPERVISOR/S DETAILS

Position	Title and Name	Tel.	Email
B.1 Supervisor	Dr. Linda Price	082 687 0291	lindaprice@mweb.co.za
B.2 Co-Supervisor/s			

SECTION C: APPLICANT'S RESEARCH STUDY FIELD AND APPROVAL STATUS

C.1 Degree – if applicable	Master of Commerce
C.2 Research Project Title	An Exploration Into The Meaning That Trans* Students Attach To Their Experiences At A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY
C.3 Research Proposal	Attached: Yes ■ No □
C.4 Target population	Transgender / Gender Diverse / Non-Identity Conforming Students
C.5 Lead Researcher details	If different from applicant:
C6. Will use research assistant/s	Yes □ No ■ If yes- provide a list of names, contact details :
C.7 Research Methodology and Informed consent	**Research methodology**: Qualitative semi-structured interviews **Informed consent:** Yes, informed consent advised to participants
C.8 Ethics clearance status from UCT's Faculty Ethics in Research Committee /Chair (EiRC)	Approved by the UCT EiRC: Yes ■ With amendments: Yes □ No ■ (a) Attach copy of your UCT ethics approval. Attached: Yes ■ No □ (b) State date / Ref. No / Faculty of your UCT ethics approval: 4/06/2019 Ref./Faculty.: 2019/000/047

SECTION D: APPLICANT/S APPROVAL STATUS FOR ACCESS TO STUDENTS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSE
(*To be completed by the UCT - ED, DSA or Nominee)*



	Approved / With Terms / Not	* Conditional approval with terms	Applicant/s Ref. No.:
D.1 APPROVAL STATUS	(i) Approved ■ (ii) With terms (iii) Not approved	a) Access to students for this research study must only be undertaken after written ethics approval has been obtained. b) In event any ethics conditions are attached, these must be complied with before access to students.	SPTMIC003 / Ms Miché September

D.2 APPROVED BY:	Designation	Name	Signature	Date of Approval
	Executive Director Department of Student Affairs	*Dr Moonira Khan*	[signature]	*20 June 2019*

Appendix C: Letter of recruitment

Dear students,

My name is Miché September, and I am currently a master's student in the Section of Organisational Psychology, School of Management Studies, at the University of Cape Town. I am writing to request your possible involvement in a research study.

I previously studied at Rhodes University, where I completed my BA honours degree. For the research component in my honours year, I conducted a qualitative study to understand how individuals who are attracted to members of the same-sex perceive equality policies in their workplace and how this influences their job satisfaction.

As a continuation within the field of diversity in organisations, the study for my master's researchis an exploration into the experiences amongst trans* students at a South African university. The research also explores the extent to which university policies and practices resonate with participants' experiences of university life.

The research project has been approved by the University of Cape Town's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any point in time. Your involvement would involve a voice recorded one-on-one interview that will last forty to sixty minutes. Participants would be expected to sign consent forms and no personal identifiers will be disclosed in the write up of the dissertation. The information and data collected will be kept confidential. Findings of this research might be published in an academic journal. Therefore, participants would be kindly asked to sign a publishing agreement.

If you would like to participate, or have any questions about the study, please contact me on067 088 9207 or micheseptember1@gmail.com.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

Miché September

Appendix D: Consent, recording and publishing forms

Appendix D: Consent, Recording, Publishing Agreement forms
This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. University of Cape Town - DEPARTMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I____(participant's name) agree to participate in the research project of Miché September on the exploration into the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African university.

I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a master's degree at the University of Cape Town. The researcher may be contacted on 067 088 9207 or micheseptember1@gmail.com. The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s) and is under the supervision of Dr. Linda Price in the Organisational Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town, who may be contacted at lindaprice@mweb.co.za.

2. The researcher is interested in exploring the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African university.

3. My participation will involve taking part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I understand that while my identity and the information I provide will be treated as confidential by the researcher, my membership to a small group on campus might still make it possible for someone to recognise me through my responses to some of the interview questions.

4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose. I also accept that talking about personal aspects of my life might be emotionally unsettling and I understand that the researcher will put me in touch with Student Wellness who may be contacted for further support through an online booking system on http://www.dsa.uct.ac.za/student-wellness/about-student-wellness or may be contacted directly on (021) 650 1017. Alternatively, UCT Student Careline may be contacted after hours on 0800 24 25 26 or SMSed on 31393 free of charge.

5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction.

6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours. They will be presented anonymously but there is a possibility that they might be linked to me personally (as laid out in section three (3) above).

8. The stored audio recordings and interview transcripts will only be available for researcher's use for researcher and/or publication purposes.

9. The audio recorded data will be stored in password protected computers which will be kept safely in locked cupboards

Signed on (Date): ___________________________

Participant:_______________________Researcher: ______________________________

USE OF TAPE RECORDINGS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES PERMISSION AND RELEASE FORM

Participant name & contacts (address, phone etc)	
Name of researcher & level of research (Honours/Masters/PhD)	**Miché September, Masters**
Brief title of project	***Exploration into the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African university.***
Supervisor	**Dr. Linda Price**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Declaration
(Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statements)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">*1. The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me*</td><td>**verbally**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**in writing**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">*2. I agree to be interviewed and to allow tape recordings to be made of the interviews*</td><td>**audiotape**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**videotape**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">*3. I agree to take part in and to allow tape-recordings to be made.*</td><td>**audiotape**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**videotape**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">*4. The tape recordings may be transcribed*</td><td>**without conditions**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**only by the researcher**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**by one or more nominated third parties:**</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">5. I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilised for the following purposes and under the following conditions:</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Signatures</td></tr>
<tr><td>Signature of participant</td><td></td><td>Date</td></tr>
</table>

The findings of this study may be published in an academic journal. By participating in this study, I understand that this study may be published in an academic journal

Title: ____

Journal: ____

The information and data collected for this study will be kept confidential and password protected. The findings for this research will be made anonymous (no names, department, or the participants faculty will be mentioned).

____

Signature of participant: Date

____

Signature of researcher: Date

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Currently, what is your year of study and have you previously studied at any other university?

How would you describe your experiences as a student at your university?

How have you adapted to the life of being a student and how do you ensure that you retain a balanced life?

How do you view your university's commitment to creating an inclusive culture?

How have you been made aware of existing diversity policies within the university? And in particular, have you been made aware of an existing inclusivity policy for sexual orientation?

What is your view on these policies and how they are implemented?

Can you think of examples of times when you have felt comfortable with your gender expression at your university? Are you open to sharing these experiences?

Can you think of examples of times when you have felt uncomfortable with your gender expression at your university? Are you open to sharing these experiences? How have you coped with these challenges? How has being trans* played a role in your relationships with fellow students, lecturers and administrative staff?

What are your hopes as you continue moving forward in your student journey?

Appendix F: Analysis of data example

An exploration into the meaning that trans* students attach to their experiences at a South African university.		
1. How do trans* students experience the university environment?		
2. How do the experiences of trans* students shape their academic, social and professional lives?		
Theme	**Overarching themes**	**Codes**
Navigating the power of privilege and institutional systemic oppression.	Heteronormative and cisgender behaviour perpetuated through social structures "de-gendering spaces" (e.g residence).	• Structural Adherence to gender binary • Uncomfortable spaces (residence) • Educating non-trans is burdensome • Residence is gendered
	Intersected identities determine rank and value in society (privileged vs marginalised group status).	• Society makes you the outlier • Being trans: Feel like an outlier • Coming out in a religious family
	Privilege represents itself in the form of identity formation within society such as economic, social, and cultural rank	• Transgender in transformed spaces • Disadvantaged financially • Reality is not inclusive • Navigating my space
	Assimilation to dominant group identities informs gender perceptions and experience	• Privilege of being identified in a two-way binary of gender • Presumptions of gender • Pass well (as a female) • No hatred or prejudice for trans
	Organisation pressurised by students' transformation/political efforts (fees must fall).	• Nothing but discussions • Lack of commitment from UCT • Lack of implementation
Misalignment and invalidity of one's gender identity on campus.	Structural adherence to gender binary either male or female (restrooms)	• Encourage gender neutral bathrooms • Stares using female bathrooms • Inclusive restrooms • Few gender-neutral bathrooms compared to two-binary bathrooms • Gender neutral restrooms in dodgy places • Don't feel comfortable
	Marginalisation while in transition is a hurtful experience	• Social gender roles, norms and attitudes

		• Normative binary categories • In-group vs outgroup experience • Homogenous peer group reaction and behaviour
	Misaligned practice of policy (only great on paper)	• Lack of structural support (physical environment) • Structural barriers such as bathrooms • Lack of recognition and trans awareness • Rigid presumption of gender • Reactive vs proactive • Creating awareness channels for policy change
	Transitioning and resisting the norm	• Transitioning physically and socially • Presenting and dressing more feminine/masculine • Hormonal replacements • Gender reassignment surgery (top and bottom surgery • Facial feminisation surgery
The importance of understanding transgender health from a gender minority experience	Gender minority experience and the consequences of misgendering	• Preferred pronouns • Discomfort of being misgendered • Coming out, not trans with friends • Familiarity with other identities (homosexual) • Disclosing gender identity • Concealing gender identity to be safe • Homophobia vs Transphobia • Transaffirming • Feelings of prejudice and discrimination • Staff desensitisation • Teaching practice sensitivity • Classroom etiquette • Feelings of vulnerability
	Positive influences on trans identities	• Self-awareness of mental health and well-being • Social support structures

		• Importance of supervisor support • The positive of humanity • The good in mentorship support • Student wellness centre • Need for psychologists trained on trans issues