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## **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

### **Recommendations of transgender students, staff, and faculty in the USA for improving college campuses**

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**Notes**

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+ This study was conducted as part of a dissertation, and portions of the literature review, methodology, and results are adapted from this source.

**Word count:** 8,998

**Abstract**

Research indicates that transgender individuals frequently experience marginalization and interpersonal victimization within college and university settings. Missing from the literature is a discussion of what can be done to address such patterns in higher education, based upon empirical data gathered from transgender and gender non-conforming students, staff, and faculty. The present study aims to fill this gap by reporting on solutions offered by a sample of 30 individuals in one U.S. state while integrating a lens of intersectionality. Five resulting themes include: (a) offer education, campus programming, and support for trans individuals; (b) improve university systems and procedures for recording one's name and gender; (c) encourage greater inclusivity and recruitment of diverse groups; (d) make physical changes to facilities; and (e) hold people accountable. These findings suggest institutional actions and policy changes for higher education administrators and others committed to improving campuses for transgender and gender non-conforming people.

*Keywords:* transgender, higher education, qualitative methods, recommendations, intersectionality

As noted by Beemyn (2005b), a growing number of transgender individuals are choosing to be 'out' while enrolled in a college or university in the United States. Yet, few college campuses are comprehensively prepared to meet the needs of transgender students, let alone staff or faculty members. Research indicates that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals tend to experience multiple forms of marginalization and interpersonal victimization on campus, including: (1) being denied access to or questioned within campus housing and bathrooms (Bilodeau 2007; Finger 2010; Seelman 2014); (2) harassment, bullying, and sexual assault related to gender identity and gender expression (Bilodeau 2007; Grant et al. 2011; Rankin 2003); (3) a lack of acknowledgment of transgender people on campus (Bilodeau 2007; Seelman et al. 2012); (4) forms, applications, and record change procedures that do not recognise non-binary and fluid gender identities (Bilodeau 2007; Mintz 2011); and (5) a lack of curricula, competency, and knowledge among staff and faculty about transgender individuals and how to support them (McKinney 2005; Rankin 2003; Seelman et al. 2012). Generally, these challenges reflect how the behaviours, goals, norms, and values of higher education institutions reflect an underlying assumption or belief that people who are not transgender or gender non-conforming are more 'normal,' 'healthy,' and 'real' and therefore treated as 'superior' to transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. As Beemyn (2005a) argues, if colleges and universities are committed to supporting campus members of all genders, administrators need to address how the very structure of a college campus upholds a binary conceptualization of gender that makes campus life more difficult for transgender people.

Missing from the literature is a discussion of what can be done to address such patterns in higher education, based upon empirical data gathered from transgender and gender non-conforming students, staff, and faculty. The present study aims to fill this gap by reporting on

solutions offered directly by this population based on their lived experiences. This paper begins with a review of the literature related to transgender people's experiences in higher education and relevant theoretical frameworks, starting with definitions of a few key terms.

In this paper, the term *transgender* is defined as:

a range of gender experiences, subjectivities and presentations that fall across, between or beyond stable categories of 'man' and 'woman'... [The term *transgender* includes] gender identities that have, more traditionally, been described as 'transsexual,' and a diversity of genders that call into question an assumed relationship between gender identity and presentation and the 'sexed' body. (Hines 2010, 1)

The word *transgender* (or simply *trans*) is used herein as an umbrella term that incorporates other gender-different identities such as cross-dresser, FTM (or trans man), MTF (or trans woman), two-spirit, third sex, and genderqueer, among others (Burdge 2007; Davis 2008; Stryker 2006; Walters et al. 2006; Wilchins 2004). Not all people who challenge the binaries of sex and gender understand themselves as transgender or feel welcomed by the trans community, including some people of colour and those from indigenous communities (Roen 2001; Wilchins 2004). Therefore, within this paper, the term *transgender* will often be partnered with the phrase *gender non-conforming* to acknowledge those who don't fit into or agree with gender binaries but who might not use the word transgender to describe themselves.

The term *cisgender* is an identity label for those who do *not* transgress gender rules (i.e., they are non-transgender; Koyama 2003). *Cisgender* (or *cissexual*) individuals are people whose 'identity and presentation [match] their physical morphology' and who mirror 'the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated' with their sex (Matthews 1999, under 'Cisgender'). While relatively new to the scholarly literature, this term is key to understanding the oppression of transgender people. Just as White people directly gain unearned privileges when people of colour are oppressed, cisgender individuals benefit when society continues to

oppress trans and gender variant people. Therefore, putting a name on this privileged population is quite important.

Building from Serano (2007), I am using the term *institutional cisgenderism* to label the behaviours, goals, norms, and values of higher education institutions that reflect an underlying assumption or belief that cisgender identities are more ‘normal,’ ‘healthy,’ and ‘real’ and therefore are treated as ‘superior’ to transgender and gender non-conforming identities. Such institutional patterns result in systematic privileging of cisgender individuals and identities and marginalization of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and identities.

### **Research on transgender individuals’ experiences of higher education settings**

To begin with, I will be exploring the literature related to transgender people’s experiences in higher education and relevant theoretical frameworks. Although colleges and universities are seeing a growing number of transgender individuals (Beemyn 2003; Carter 2000), the scholarship about this population’s experiences on college campuses is quite limited (Mintz 2011; Renn 2010). What we do know from previous research is that transgender and gender non-conforming people often experience multiple forms of marginalization and interpersonal victimization, whether occurring at a micro, mezzo, or macro level on a campus. These experiences include being questioned or thrown out of campus housing and bathrooms (Bilodeau 2007; Finger 2010; Seelman 2014), being harassed, bullied, and sexually assaulted (Bilodeau 2007; Grant et al. 2011; Rankin 2003), and being treated as an invisible population on campus (Bilodeau 2007; Seelman et al. 2012). Additionally, researchers have documented that forms, applications, and record change procedures in higher education generally do not recognise non-binary and fluid gender identities (Bilodeau 2007; Mintz 2011). Further, there are seldom staff or faculty on campus who demonstrate competency about transgender individuals and how

to support them, and few courses integrate transgender content into curricula (McKinney 2005; Rankin 2003; Seelman et al. 2012). All of these experiences are occurring within a modern context in which multiculturalism is often framed as being in the interest of colleges and universities, and many campuses have created diversity initiatives—such as offices of ‘institutional diversity’—that are meant to present a message of inclusivity (Ahmed 2012). However, the presence of an institutional policy or goal related to diversity is sometimes used as a substitute for actual institutional action on diversity (Ahmed 2012). For example, while more American colleges and universities—731 at the time of this writing (Campus Pride n.d.)—have added gender identity and/or gender expression to their non-discrimination policies in recent years, and the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (2014) recently issued guidance indicating that transgender students are protected by Title IX from discrimination and violence, such policies are only one dimension of creating campuses that are welcoming to transgender people. Other institutional practices may still reflect belief systems that marginalize transgender people and privilege cisgender identities, thereby undermining non-discrimination policies. For instance, few colleges or universities in the U.S. offer gender-inclusive housing, health insurance that covers transition-related medical expenses, or procedures for transgender individuals to change their name and/or gender on university records (Transgender Law & Policy Institute 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d).

Bilodeau (2007) articulates a theoretical perspective on the ways that institutional practices in higher education marginalize transgender people that can be helpful in understanding the dimensions of this problem. Bilodeau used a grounded theory approach to identify “the practical issues and unseen power structures of binary gender systems on campus[es]” (6) by studying 10 transgender college students in the Midwestern United States. The four



characteristics of binary gender systems identified by Bilodeau include: (1) an automatic labelling of all individuals into male or female; (2) a system of social accountability in which individuals who deviate from gender norms are at a greater risk for punishments from others; (3) a process of marginalizing transgender people through the privileging of cisgender identities; and (4) widespread invisibility and isolation of transgender and gender non-conforming people. Bilodeau's (2007) research indicated that these institutional patterns were occurring across campus settings, from classrooms to admissions, campus employment, LGBTQ<sup>2</sup> organisations, residence halls, and bathrooms. An additional study (Seelman 2013) has documented similar patterns in campus health centres and affecting transgender faculty and staff as well as students. This theory base articulates how structures beyond interpersonal interactions comprehensively impact trans and gender non-conforming people.

Although the theory base informing institutional cisgenderism has a primary focus on gender, this is not to say that all transgender and gender non-conforming people experience the college environment in the same way. There is thus an importance in using a lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) to explore how, for example, trans people of a lower class are impacted by the intersections of both cisgenderism and classism on campus. Hines (2010) observes a great need for transgender-related scholarship that utilizes an intersectional lens:

Much work on transgender [people] has lacked such an intersectional analysis with the effect that 'trans people' are often represented as *only that*—as only trans. Hence trans people are disconnected from their intimate, material, geographical and spatial surroundings, and from other significant social signifiers. This problematic is not only (mis)representational, it also acts to homogenise and de-politicise. Thus privileging/de-privileging forces, such as the economic resources to pay privately for surgery, geographical access to 'trans friendly' social spaces, levels of support from intimate networks, [that] structure transgendered experiences are unaccounted for (Hines 2010, 12)

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<sup>2</sup> LGBTQ is an umbrella acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning.

Indeed, emerging research has indicated that there are, for example, differences in access to college housing and bathrooms according to other identities held by transgender and gender non-conforming people (Seelman 2014).

Given that both theoretical and empirical contributions to the knowledge base suggest that higher education institutions are not acting out a commitment to transgender inclusion, there is a need for research that investigates what actions can be taken to improve these settings. While others (see, for example, Beemyn et al. 2005a; Beemyn et al. 2005b) have previously suggested best practices based upon reviews of the literature and knowledge of the transgender community, there is scant empirical research about recommendations for improving campuses based directly on the experiences of diverse samples of transgender individuals (Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet 2012). Additionally, few to no studies have incorporated the perspectives of transgender staff and faculty or examined differences in recommendations that may relate to participants' other identities. The present study aims to address these gaps in the knowledge base.

### **Project overview**

The research question of interest was: What specific institutional actions and policy changes do transgender and gender non-conforming people say are most needed to address the oppression they experience in higher education settings? The study data came from a participatory research project carried out by Colorado Trans on Campus (CTOC), an unincorporated group composed of transgender and cisgender students, faculty, and staff from colleges and universities in Colorado, as well as activists and employees of local organisations serving transgender people. CTOC had heard of many instances of discrimination, harassment, and assault affecting transgender individuals, yet there was no known previous attempt to collect

empirical evidence about such experiences in Colorado. This qualitative research project was initiated to address this gap.

The sampling frame included 30 individuals (age 18 or older) who were students, staff, or faculty at a university or college in Colorado in the previous year and who identified as or were perceived by others as being transgender or gender non-conforming. The interview protocol consisted of questions about participants' gender identities and preferred pronouns, perceptions of the inclusivity of the campus environment, experiences using campus resources, and occurrences of interpersonal violence on campus, among other topics. Data were in the form of digital transcriptions of interviews ( $n = 28$ ) or digital copies of an interviewer's notes ( $n = 2$ ). The author (a coalition member) received permission from the group to conduct secondary data analysis of the interview data. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver on April 29, 2011.

De-identified transcripts, interviewer notes, and participant demographics were shared with the researcher. The researcher used content analysis, defined as 'any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings' (Patton 2002, 453). The researcher deductively searched for themes that answered the research question across the 30 cases (Spencer et al. 2003) and then defined and differentiated these themes. The researcher also conducted a negative case analysis to search for cases that did not fit the themes (Patton 2002).

The researcher used a member checking process in which two trans or gender non-conforming individuals who had been affiliated with a college or university reviewed the tentative themes, definitions, and exemplar quotes and provided feedback. Following the member check process, data were prepared for a calculation of inter-rater reliability (Cohen's

Kappa) by comparing a sample of the researcher's coding to that of a faculty member at the researcher's university. Cohen's kappa is presented in the Analysis section.

## **Analysis and discussion**

### ***Description of the sample***

The sample included 19 students, three faculty, three staff persons, and five people who held roles across more than one of these categories. Participants' ages ranged from 18 – 45, with a median age of 29.5. Length of time affiliated with a campus ranged from just one month to more than eight years. All of the campuses were located in urban regions of Colorado and were of varying sizes, ranging from having fewer than 2,000 students to over 20,000. There were 8 four-year institutions and 2 two-year colleges represented among the sample. Seven of these institutions were public, while three were private.

The research team collected most demographic information through a brief survey distributed before or after the semi-structured interview. This survey contained questions about one's college/university, role on campus, department affiliation, length of time on campus, full-time/part-time status, age, and race/ethnicity. The interview team became aware of some limitations of these questions (such as the lack of questions about dis/ability and socioeconomic status) after conducting the first few interviews. To address this, the interviewers began querying participants about other identities and about intersectionality during the semi-structured interviews. Thus, additional demographic information was recorded for some, though not all, of the participants during the interviews. These additional demographic data indicated that participants represented a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds (from "impoverished" to "well-off"), spiritual beliefs (e.g., Jewish, Christian, engaging in regular meditation, not religious), and mental and physical health abilities. Some of these identities and characteristics were fluid, non-

binary, and context-driven, while others were relatively stable, similar to participants' varying experiences of gender.

Twelve individuals (40%) identified their gender on campus as being either androgynous, genderqueer, trans/transgender, or another non-binary term (i.e., not related to being man or woman, masculine or feminine, etc.); seven (23.3%) identified as a man or trans guy, as female-to-male (FTM), or as another identity on a trans masculine spectrum; four (13.3%) identified as a woman, as male-to-female (MTF), or as another identity on a trans feminine spectrum; and seven (23.3%) used a combination of identity terms that spanned these different categories. This sample was predominately White or Caucasian (70%,  $n = 21$ ), with five individuals identifying as either Latino/a alone or as both Latino/a and White. Two individuals described their race as Jewish, one selected "Other" and wrote in "human," and one person indicated both White and Native American ancestry.

### ***Analysis and discussion of qualitative results***

Content analysis produced five main themes regarding suggested changes for colleges and universities. These themes included: (1) offer education, campus programming, and support for trans individuals; (2) improve university systems and procedures to recognise more than two genders and give people permission to make changes to their name, gender marker, and campus identification; (3) encourage greater inclusivity and recruitment of diverse groups; (4) make physical changes to facilities; and (5) hold people accountable.

In terms of inter-rater reliability, Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.82$  for these five themes, which Landis and Koch (1977) classify as being 'almost perfect' reliability. These five themes will next be discussed in further detail.

*Theme 1: Offer education, campus programming, and support for trans individuals*

The first theme indicates that universities need to improve their ability to support transgender individuals by offering additional: (1) trans-inclusive educational content, resources (e.g., library materials), and classroom curricula; (2) trans-inclusive campus programmes and organisations; and (3) other forms of support for trans individuals (e.g., competent health and counselling providers, coverage of transition-related care through insurance, mentorship programmes, advertisement of allies and safe spaces). Such solutions would help address two particular dimensions of institutional cisgenderism that are manifested in higher education systems—the privileging of cisgender identities, and the invisibility and isolation of trans and gender non-conforming people.

Participants report that campus trainings, workshops, orientation sessions, curricula, and other educational resources lacked adequate content about transgender and gender non-conforming people and the meaning of cisgender privilege. One of the key points made by participants is that, while there are connections between educational content related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people with that of trans people, there are also significant differences—and there continues to be a need to educate the campus about transgender people in particular. A genderqueer person at one campus offered:

I really wish that... in all schools, that issues for genderqueer or trans folks were just brought more to the forefront. It almost seems like it gets pushed aside or put in with like gay people...it is a different set of issues and experiences, so... I mean, I get to talk about it explicitly in my class, but I wish it was more a part of the diversity, they have explicit diversity training here, and I wish that I was hearing on campus that this was a really regular part of that diversity training.

While the above quote focused on diversity trainings, a similar suggestion was offered by another individual related to curricula:

I think we have curricular problems to solve and...there is an important allegiance between GLB issues and trans issues. They need to have a relationship and a shared

agenda and then there are also places where they diverge. It's in those points of divergence where the GLB community needs to have more education about the trans issues and has to stand as a strong advocate for those issues.

Such data suggest that, in order to address cisgender privilege and bias in educational trainings and curricula, critical conversations and actions need to happen regarding the simultaneous linkages and separations between trans identities and others within the LGBTQ umbrella. It is not enough to simply lump gender non-conformity with sexual minority populations, as this risks minimizing and making invisible the experiences of trans people and how their lives look different from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people (Bilodeau 2007).

A faculty member highlighted another issue—that curricular coverage of transgender-related content is not only often lumped with LGBQ populations at large, but may be relegated to one small lecture, a 'multicultural minute':

[I'd suggest] maybe having [trans issues] incorporated more into the curriculum as a broader picture, instead of, "Okay, well, here's our two-hour class for today. We're going to talk about GLBTQ, and then we'll never mention it again." ... I don't know where that needs to start, but making it more of a part of what you teach because the truth is it's always there. It's very fluid. It's not like here's the one day that we talk about this and then you're an expert about it. You did your multicultural for a minute. *[laughs]*

For there to be significant visibility of gender content in curricula, such content needs to be infused throughout coursework and across classes, rather than split into small, one-time portions.

Participants also noted that having programmes and organisations that address topics of relevance to transgender people would markedly improve their experience on campus.

Recommendations in this area included: student, staff, and faculty groups related to the LGBTQ community; women's/gender studies programmes and organisations; LGBTQ offices; violence prevention programmes; and organisations and programmes that focus exclusively on the transgender community. Several participants noted that, even when such programmes or

organisations may exist, they often did not know about them because of ineffective advertisement. As a social sciences student shared:

I'd love to see a trans group here, and... maybe if they were more visible, they'd actually find that more students *are* transitioning. I mean, there are, I don't know, [over 20,000] students on this campus or something. So, there's got to be probably more [trans students] than just me...

By creating groups for transgender people (particularly on large campuses, where a critical mass of trans individuals is most likely), a university makes the population more visible and communicates a commitment to supporting this population. Where trans-specific support groups are not feasible due to small numbers, other campus organisations might consider offering programming, training, or discussions about transgender lives and experiences. Such action helps counteract the patterns of institutional cisgenderism that result in the isolation and invisibility of transgender people. Some participants in the present study said that such trans-related groups were present on their campuses, but needed to be greatly improved, whether by encouraging greater participation, doing a better job at welcoming and including trans people, or making changes to programmes and activities related to transgender issues and topics. Others reported that such groups are in need of better funding from the university.

Participants discussed a few other suggestions regarding 'supports' for trans people in higher education, including: (1) supports for building on-campus community; and (2) improvements to on-campus health and mental health services. Participants voiced the need for strengthening efforts to build a strong community on campus, both among transgender individuals and the campus in general. Such efforts could include LGBTQ orientation sessions, mentorship, and networking opportunities; distributing lists of off-campus resources for transgender individuals; offering a support team who are trained in answering questions and



providing assistance to trans individuals in navigating campus services; advertising the presence of safe spaces and trained allies; and providing social events.

Regarding on-campus health centers, participants noted that providers were often not trans-competent. Specific challenges included providers who addressed trans clients with incorrect names or pronouns, were not knowledgeable about what it means to be transgender, and blamed trans patients' health problems on their decisions to transition. Participants said they would like to see more training of health and mental health providers about how to better serve transgender patients in order to address such issues. A few participants also discussed the importance of providing health insurance to students, staff, and faculty that includes coverage for trans-related care (hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgeries<sup>3</sup>, and mental health treatment).

Intersectionality played a key role in how participants discussed the need for education, programming and support on campus, particularly in that many initiatives that attempt to reach this population generally ignore other aspects of their selves. As a staff person shared:

I find it problematic that in higher ed there seems to be a rift between values and talking about valuing authenticity and whole selves, and what happens I think—not only in our office in with queer folks, but across the board in terms of women and survivors, disabled folks and people of colour—is that people get told to separate them, and I don't know about anybody else, but some days it can make me feel [like I have a split personality].

This comment reflects a need for campus support systems to take a comprehensive approach to supporting people, reflecting that not all transgender people look alike or have similar backgrounds, and that every person brings a multitude of identities with them onto the campus.

There is thus a need for programmes and supports to effectively address gender identity and

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<sup>3</sup> Also known as gender reassignment surgeries or sex reassignment surgeries, gender-affirming surgeries encompass 'the process of changing/reassigning one's anatomy through one or more surgeries...Generally, phrases like "the surgery" or "sex change" are not preferable because they hide the reality that there are many different types of surgeries...' (Sex Reassignment Surgery, as cited in Seelman et al. 2012, 34). Some people within the transgender community either cannot afford or do not wish to undergo gender-affirming surgeries of any type.

expression *alongside of* other identities such as religion, race, citizenship, dis/ability, etc. An example of such a support would be a trained network of staff and/or faculty who act as advocates and supports for students who hold marginalized identities and are aware of the various institutional barriers that may occur *across* these multiple dimensions of identity.

*Theme 2: Improve university systems and procedures for recording one's name and gender*

Participants recommended improving campus procedures for recording one's name and gender. These suggestions primarily concerned: (1) providing a wider range of sex or gender options on campus forms; (2) allowing individuals to change their name and/or gender on records without having had a legal name/gender change; and (3) simplifying the process for requesting such record changes.

Participants, particularly those who used non-binary terms to describe their gender (genderqueer, androgynous, etc.), wanted to see campus forms that had more options than only male or female. As one staff person expressed: 'I would like the common app<sup>4</sup> to actually ask [for] sex and not gender. If they're going to ask [for] gender, that they have more options.' This is a reflection of the aspect of institutional cisgenderism in which social labelling is used to categorize each person into either male or female identities. Such a process does not match the reality of identification for some—though not all—trans people, and the process of choosing one gender category (man or woman) can be isolating, infuriating, and marginalizing for trans and gender non-conforming people. While campus administrators may point to the need for collecting information on male/female demographics for federal reporting purposes, there are ways to still collect such information while also giving people the flexibility to self-identify. One

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<sup>4</sup> Short for 'common application,' a standardized application form used by many American colleges and universities.

option would be to allow individuals to choose between male, female, and self-identification (write-in) options, with the campus deciding how to treat write-ins for external reporting purposes.

In addition to the way forms are structured, another important aspect of university procedures around name and gender identification is the process of requesting a change to one's recorded name and/or gender marker on campus records. Being able to change one's name and/or gender marker on campus records is a key process for some trans individuals, particularly those who are transitioning, that helps to make their campus experiences more affirming. This suggestion thereby highlights another dimension of intersectionality—that a person's desire to transition from one gender to another impacts their experience of institutional systems around the labelling processes that occur within institutional cisgenderism.

Some trans and gender non-conforming individuals may request record changes without having yet changed their name and/or gender marker on legal documents; this is particularly likely for lower income individuals, who may not have the connections or resources to seek identity changes or to pursue gender affirming surgeries. In such circumstances, campuses should offer a way for individuals to update their campus records without having to produce new legal documents. Colleges could accomplish this by giving individuals a way to indicate a 'preferred name' that takes precedent over the legal name within campus communications and permitting individuals to update the sex or gender marker without having to 'prove' they have undergone gender affirming surgery/ies. As a participant discussed:

[I would like to see] some sort of legitimate system in place...for folks that can't change their name [legally] or can't for a while, [they] can get their initials [changed]...so that they can go to their professors and say, 'Hey... this is my name.' And something, something in place...[so that the wrong gender designation] doesn't show up at [student health centre]...Because to get the M and the F switched, people are [currently] really hooked on you having to have had surgery, and that's so not okay and it's certainly not a reality for many college students. So a system and policies in place so that someone could

go one place and say, ‘Look, here’s what’s up. Can you use my initials and can you switch my gender designation?’

Being addressed with an incorrect name or pronoun can result in ‘outing’ a trans person, particularly someone whose identity had not been widely disclosed to others, which can put the individual at greater risk for psychological and emotional distress as well as victimization at the hands of other people (Finger 2010; Grant et al. 2011). By integrating greater flexibility into recordkeeping related to names and gender markers, campuses can more effectively serve the needs of this population and honour their privacy during gender transition. A student participant voiced a desire for colleges to allow individuals to indicate a preferred name that is then used to address the person:

At the [student] orientation, I think that they should use preferred names instead of the name that [is] officially on your document[s]... [Currently,] they call you by your...legal name, instead of your preferred name.... and it just seems to me that if on the application, you have a little section that says ‘preferred name,’ you could at least...call the person by that name.

Allowing individuals to designate a ‘preferred name’ for campus events, such as orientation sessions, is a rather easy option that campuses can implement that has an ability to make trans and gender non-conforming people feel more welcome.

Participants also advocated for simplifying the record change process so that there is a one-stop method to initiate name/gender change requests across all of campus. This suggestion hinges upon having a synchronised campus-wide computer system. Those whose gender identity was non-binary (e.g., genderqueer, trans, etc.) most often voiced this recommendation. A trans-identified person suggested:

Small, immediate improvements would be fixing the computer systems so that if you change your name or your gender in one location that it populates to all the other computer systems...I’d like there to be more privacy around somebody who is changing a name or gender in the system so that that information is—if it has to kept for bureaucratic reasons—that it’s kept at a very high level.

The process of coming out as trans or gender non-conforming to campus staff in order to request a record change has the potential to be quite nerve-wracking as it is. Expecting trans people to go through this process *multiple times* due to bureaucratic inefficiencies unnecessarily creates additional difficulty for this population. During the member check process, one person reviewing this theme suggested that campuses could consider the procedures they use to allow heterosexual women to change their names following marriage and determine whether a similar process could be adopted for transgender people who want to change their names and gender markers. This is an example of how institutional flexibility that is offered to one group privileged by sexual orientation (heterosexual women) could be used as a model to enact change a group that experiences widespread oppression (trans people).

*Theme 3: Encourage greater inclusivity and recruitment of diverse groups*

Participants want to see their universities put forth sustained efforts to recruit and retain transgender people, as well as other underrepresented populations such as people of colour, first generation college students, and people with disabilities, some of whom may also identify as trans or gender non-conforming. Comments on this topic related to policy change, funding mechanisms and scholarships, administrator actions, and other efforts at the systemic level to support the long-term presence of trans staff, students, and faculty. This included the suggestion of having a mission statement and other visible articulated commitments from campus leaders that emphasise support for transgender people. One way to articulate this commitment, according to those interviewed, would be to incorporate protections for transgender and gender non-conforming people into college non-discrimination policies:

[I would like to see] the [university governance board]'s taking that final step and actually passing, adding gender identity [and] expression to the non-discrimination policy for the [university] system. That's like the big thing, I think, and that's something that's doable that can be done in the next six months, I think. That's certainly my hope, and we're feeling pretty hopeful about it right now.

According to the latest data from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2013), 17 states in the U.S. and D.C. have transgender-inclusive non-discrimination laws that cover transgender people, extending to both public and private employers. Further, as of early 2014, 731 universities and colleges across the U.S. currently have non-discrimination policies that include transgender people (Campus Pride n.d.). This means that a good number of the 1,672 public and 2,823 private institutions in the U.S. do NOT have such a policy (U.S. Department of Education 2010). However, the recent announcement by the Department of Education that transgender students are covered by Title IX indicates that universities and colleges receiving federal money are expected to protect transgender students from discrimination, sexual assault, and violence based on gender identity and gender expression (U.S. Department of Education 2014). Nonetheless, this still leaves the important question of how institutions will take up this policy commitment and put it into action.

Several participants said they would like to see a more diverse campus population, including diversity in gender expression. Throughout the interviews, participants highlighted the importance of intersectionality in relation to the campus population. A staff person discussed this topic in relation to efforts to improve the campus culture:

Other things [I would like to see improved on campus] is just continuing to work with other offices on campus to make it easier for trans people and to continue to work on the campus culture that will be more trans-inclusive... More fully recognising those intersectionalities because we all come with a bag of identities. We don't come just as trans or just as bisexual or just as whatever. So that's really important to me, too, to see real improvement on that. To make [university] a more welcoming campus to queer people, trans people, people of colour, because the issue of people of colour has been a vexing one for the campus.

This participant's words reflect how the efforts of a campus to support diversity can be most fully realised when the institution is working to support diversity across many different dimensions of identities for all members of the campus and how colleges often face challenges

not only with trans inclusion, but also with inclusion across race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, etc. A student of colour offered a suggestion of having scholarships that support trans students, just as colleges might offer scholarships that encourage racial and ethnic diversity among the student body:

It'd be awesome if there were some scholarships specifically for queer students or something like that. 'Cause that is part of... I find that it feels good to know that the university values my presence or participation as a [student of colour], partly in because of how they give money. I think that should be a part of how they give money. I don't know. I think that'd be cool.

Scholarships directed towards supporting students with marginalized backgrounds can reflect an institution's commitment to having a multicultural student body as a means to enrich all students' educational experiences. However, implementing such funding mechanisms can be quite a challenge, particularly when universities are cutting budgets and when powerful stakeholders, politicians, and others threaten withdrawing funding for efforts that are seen as supportive of transgender people. One suggested approach for working around these limitations is to seek to fund such scholarships from private sources, such as foundations, alumni, or other individual donors who are committed to transgender inclusivity.

#### *Theme 4: Make physical changes to facilities*

Participants also discussed the need for improving buildings such as restrooms, locker rooms, and on-campus housing to be more inclusive. Suggestions included having some facilities on campus that are gender-inclusive (aka gender-neutral)—welcoming to people of any gender—and/or single-occupancy as a way to avoid the frustration, stress, and risks for harassment that trans people can face when using spaces that are 'women-only' or 'men-only.' This theme directly connects to the characteristic of institutional cisgenderism regarding social accountability and related punishments for people who are gender non-conforming—a prime example of 'punishment' occurs when cisgender people challenge or harass trans and gender

non-conforming people when using campus bathrooms, locker rooms, and dormitories. A genderqueer individual shared, ‘I would like to see gender-inclusive restrooms be required in any new building that goes up on campus and any single stall existing restroom have their signage changed.’ Changing signs on some existing single stall bathrooms in each building to indicate that they are available to all genders is a relatively inexpensive change that campuses can make that provides bathrooms that everyone can use without being challenged, including people with disabilities who have differently-gendered caregivers. Further, incorporating at least one gender-inclusive restroom into new construction is a best practice that at least six U.S. universities have already put into practice (Beemyn n.d.). Suggestions for creating gender-inclusive spaces tended to emerge from participants who either primarily identified their gender in non-binary ways or used gender identity terms that spanned multiple categories. Trans women and trans men less often spoke to this topic; perhaps these subgroups prefer to use facilities that match their gender.<sup>5</sup> Participants also voiced the importance of ensuring that campus facilities are safe and private by having locking stall doors and privacy barriers in bathrooms, locker rooms, and changing areas.

Even when gender-inclusive spaces exist on a campus, a significant obstacle often exists in terms of educating the campus about how to use such spaces so that they do not become spaces only used by transgender people. A person in multiple roles at a university reported that educating cisgender people about why these spaces are important and how to use them is an important piece to integrating these resources on campus:

The bigger barrier there is just this great discomfort with a gender-neutral space that is going to take a lot more comfort, a lot more experiences, before people say, ‘Actually, this is no different from my own bathroom at home.’

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<sup>5</sup> This perspective—that some trans people prefer to use men’s or women’s restrooms rather than gender-inclusive spaces—was something I have heard in discussions with community activists.



Because gender-segregated bathrooms and locker rooms have been the modern norm in public spaces in Western society, directly challenging these longstanding norms through changes to facilities requires confronting cisgenderist assumptions through education of the general population. For example, advocates can provide education that debunks myths that trans people are more likely to be ‘predators’ in bathrooms. Colleges may also consider having clear guidelines about reporting problematic *behaviours* in bathrooms and locker rooms rather than reporting people based upon gender identity or gender expression.

On-campus housing is another area of concern for trans individuals, as voiced by a participant:

I would like for there to be safe housing, and I almost wonder if there could be somewhere that wasn't the [LGBTQ-specific housing] for trans folks where there was a gender-neutral bathroom that they could be safe and/or single rooms—no roommates.

This individual indicates a need for housing that offers single occupancy rooms and is not a part of ‘LGBTQ-specific’ housing, which is not always a safe or preferred setting for trans individuals who do not wish to have their identity disclosed to others. Again, this is another example of being aware of and challenging cisgenderist privilege in the sense that transgender people do not always have the same needs as LGBQ people on a campus.

#### *Theme 5: Hold people accountable*

The final theme focuses on implementing consequences for those on campus who treat transgender individuals with disrespect, do not adequately prepare themselves for working with transgender people, or blatantly disregard a campus' commitment to diversity and inclusion. Participants called for greater accountability whereby campus members are held responsible for incompetence and discrimination targeting transgender people and appropriate reprimands are carried out. This type of accountability reflects the idea that policy alone cannot stand as evidence of the institutionalization of diversity (Ahmed 2012). Further, participants expressed a

need for having a remediation process in place for reporting instances of discrimination and mistreatment. While this theme was discussed only by a small portion of the 30 participants, those who spoke to this topic were of a variety of races/ethnicities, campus roles, and departmental affiliations that generally reflected the overall distribution of the sample.

Participants' campus experiences reflected how a basic level of accountability for transgender inclusion was often lacking within higher education settings. A participant at a public university discussed how simply having a non-discrimination policy is not enough: 'I would like a non-discrimination policy with teeth to it, so for me it's not enough to have gender identity and expression in the non-discrimination policy, I want to know how people are going to get held accountable.' There needs to be an institutional mechanism for ensuring that such a policy is carried out, perhaps by requiring trainings for staff and developing sanctions for employees who do not comply and who discriminate against gender non-conforming individuals.

Another participant suggested having a specific point-person that trans individuals can go to seek help and report exclusionary experiences. A Latina individual shared:

It would great if there was some avenue for recourse... I should have somebody, and I should know who that is that I can go to and I can say, 'This happened. What's the next step?' ...So that would be a big first step—give me someone I can go to to say something and have some sort of policy in place that talks about how, how you're going to address these issues. Is it going to be provide more training?... Is it going to be to have mediators available who...I can call on to take into an interaction with a professor to... help mediate the situation because there's a power imbalance?

If college and university administrators want to support trans and gender non-conforming individuals effectively, there need to be procedures in place for both reporting and responding to instances of violence, transphobia, discrimination, harassment, and marginalization on campus. These mechanisms are important because these negative experiences are going to occur even when there are institutional or federal policies in place stating that these actions are illegal.

## Conclusion

The goal of the present study was to offer recommendations for how to improve institutional practices in higher education to better support transgender and gender non-conforming people, highlighting some of the nuances in recommendations in terms of the intersectionality of identities. The results of this qualitative study align with the work of other advocates and researchers (Beemyn 2005a; Beemyn et al. 2005b; Bilodeau 2007; Finger 2010; McKinney 2005; Rankin 2003) by recommending improvements in areas related to: curricula, programming, and training; health care and health insurance coverage; supports for building transgender community on campus; record keeping systems and processes for changing one's name and/or gender marker; and facilities (restrooms, locker rooms, and housing). However, the present study is unique in providing recommendations that emerge directly from empirical research with trans students, staff and faculty. Other findings of the present study—such as encouraging greater inclusivity and recruitment of diverse groups and holding people accountable for instances of discrimination, harassment, and violence—are less often discussed in the literature. While some researchers (e.g., Rankin 2003; Rankin and Beemyn 2012) have made mention of the need for grievance procedures for reporting harassment, this study is an important step in documenting that such a recommendation is supported by empirical data gathered from trans individuals.

This study identified how recommendations connected to the intersectionality of identities held by individuals, of which gender identity and gender expression are just two aspects. For example, participants suggested that campuses provide support and programming that recognise the *whole* person—all of the identities a person brings with them onto campus—and the complexities that entails. Participants spoke to the difference between transgender

experiences and those of LGBTQ people, consequently calling for curricula, educational programming, and campus organisations that recognise the distinctiveness of these populations. Further, participants discussed how on-campus housing labelled as “LGBTQ” is not always something that meets the needs of transgender individuals. Some gender subgroups of the sample offered different recommendations than others. For example, those whose gender identity was non-binary (e.g., genderqueer, androgynous, transgender) more often discussed the needs for a wider range of gender identities on campus forms and applications, a simplified process for changing names and gender markers on campus records, and gender-inclusive facilities. There were also indications that individuals who are transitioning from one gender to another and those who have a lower household income have particular needs for changing their names and/or gender markers on campus records without having to produce evidence of having undergone surgeries and/or legal name changes. Participants discussed ways that campuses can use strategies that have worked well for other groups to best meet the needs of transgender people—such as scholarships targeted to students of colour and record change procedures that are in place for heterosexual women who get married. These suggestions highlight the ways that experiences of a college or university environment are highly connected to the many identities that a person holds and the relative degree of visibility, privilege, and power that such characteristics are vested within a college or university.

### ***Limitations***

There are several key limitations to the present study. First, the 30 individuals interviewed were predominately White and young (less than 30 years old), and all were affiliated with urban campuses in just one U.S. state. While qualitative research does not aim to be generalizable, the recommendations offered by trans people of colour, older college students,

trans people in rural areas, and those in other regions and countries would likely differ from those of the present sample. However, there are a number of characteristics of the CTOC sample that indicate transferability of findings, such as the inclusion of staff and faculty participants.

Secondly, the interviewers did not consistently collect data about participants' spiritual or religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, citizenship, and physical/mental abilities due to limitations in the demographic survey instrument. Future researchers are encouraged to consistently and holistically gather such information when studying trans populations. Lastly, although two individuals reviewed the interview transcriptions for accuracy by listening to the audio recordings, participants did not have an opportunity to read their transcripts and offer input about corrections or misinterpretations, which could have further established the reliability of the data.

### ***Implications for Future Research***

Researchers who wish to study the transgender community's interactions with higher education settings will need to continue to refine sampling procedures to recruit hard-to-access subgroups, such as those affiliated with rural campuses, those who are older, trans people of colour, and others who are not connected to dominant LGBTQ campus networks. Additional in-depth inquiry is needed about how trans faculty and staff experience the campus environment. The hope is that future researchers use the qualitative themes and group differences identified in this study to develop assessment measures, to test these suggested strategies and interventions, and to evaluate whether these recommendations indeed predict positive outcomes for transgender individuals affiliated with higher education settings.

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