WHAT THE BINARIES CAN(NOT) HOLD:
EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF
INTERSECTIONAL PRAXIS AS GENDER
LIBERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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What the Binaries Can(not) Hold: Exploring the Possibilities of Intersectional Praxis as Gender Liberation in Higher Education

Issue Editors: Chase Catalano, T.J. Jourian, & Rachel Wagner

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Editors' Introduction

Chase Catalano, T.J. Jourian, & Rachel Wagner

Abstract

> *This special issue highlights research, practice, and commentaries about gender liberation and resistance to sexism and trans* oppression. The manuscripts explore how gender liberation and other liberatory efforts meet/conflict/intersect/strengthen each other in higher education and student affairs practices.*

Keywords: Sexism, trans* oppression, higher education, gender binary, gender justice, gender liberation

When we began the process of working on our call for proposals for this special issue, our desire was to seek out the potentialities for research, practice, commentaries, and other manuscripts about gender liberation (resistance to manifestations of sexism and trans* oppression). From our initial inception of this special issue our intention was to center the limitations of binaries, using gender as an entry point to address issues of power, privilege, and oppression in higher education. Our hope was to create an issue that explored how gender liberation, racial justice, economic justice, disability justice, and other liberatory efforts meet/conflict/intersect/strengthen each other in higher education and student affairs practices. We expected optimism amidst critique, and potentialities in presumed hopeless spaces. The questions we posed to potential contributors included: What do we mean when we talk about gender in higher education? What kind of attention do we give to the expansive categories of gender in our work? What do we imagine as the possibilities for gender liberation in higher education? How do we reconcile the tensions and potentialities of liberation from gender oppression, whether theoretical, practical, or some other conceptualization? Authors throughout this special edition provide explorations of how both gender liberation and manifestations of oppression influence the experiences of students, faculty, staff, and campuses. Cris Mayo's introduction to the volume offers a framing of these manuscripts that acknowledges how even within our current limitations and imperfections in our pedagogies and practices, we persist in moving forward in our emancipatory possibilities.

Unfolding Trans Epistemologies, Lessons, and Solidarities

Cris Mayo

Abstract

> *This introduction explores how trans epistemologies unfold within and against tradi-tions of gender theories and pedagogies, suggesting that such a process will continue to develop in ways we do not yet understand. Then, the introduction summarizes and dis-cusses the contributions to this special issue.*

Keywords: *transgender subjectivity, transgender pedagogy, time, relationality*

When we teach and learn about and through gender subjectivities, we engage what it means to be in the midst of social change, but also what it means to be living in subjectivities in the here and now. The various trans pedagogies so well envisioned and organized by Chase Catalano, T.J. Jourian, and Rachel Wagner, and within this special issue offer innovative, thoughtful, and divergent approaches to teaching and learning about trans selves and communities. Taken as a whole, this collection of trans pedagogues set out both externalized praxes aimed at bringing communities together through differences and internalized reflections through autoethnography that sustain trans subjectivities as processes. Trans communities are not settled, indeed in their best intersectional forms such communities are actively involved in decolonizing, antiracist, antimisogynist projects. These are social justice goals that will take considerable time and effort as the long work unfolds. These authors remind us, too, that trans communities and students are present now and even as we work on the long duration of justice, we must also be immediately attentive and responsive. In short, the time of trans praxis moves forward to as yet unknown possibilities but also recognizes the necessity of being in the now.

The projects of trans learning and teaching in higher education emphasize the need for reading, articulation, recognition, ethics, and politics—all of our classes, our committee work, our centers, our departments, and our larger universities are bound together by these critical practices. Strategic insistence on substance, ontology, and presence may seem to clash with the more poststructurally and political emergent project of trans and nonbinary politics, but such strategic essentialism has come, variously, out of queer and decolonizing movements too, as a way to bolster intensity against ongoing denial of existence and rights. As the authors in this special issue discuss, that insistence—whether on existence or politics—happens within insti-tutions and histories that have shaped social relations, rights, and definitions and so our projects begin with and against where we are. Re-reading an engagement with Audre Lorde, as Alex-ander does, raises for us not only wonderments about what her writing as a gender non-con-forming Black lesbian poet means in conversation with trans theories, but also what her insist-ence on the simultaneity of analysis on race, sexuality, class, and gender meant for her politics in relation to contemporary trans people of color. Alexander's re-reading in conversation, too,

pushes us further into the future to wonder what our own temporally-bound understandings of gendering and re-gendering will mean later as those with whom we teach and learn will learn and interact with new political formations. As we teach and learn, this sense of shifting time always follows us, whether a conversation in class changes how our communities think or changes in policies and insurance coverage changes how more people will be able to live their gender identities through embodied practices.

Re-reading feminisms, too, can resituate our understandings of gendered possibilities. If we return to liberal feminism without understanding its institutional critique has roots in women not having access to property, education, and political participation, we miss that their focus was intent on demanding such access for its possibilities, not because they had a limited understanding of what the political realm could be. In other words, as Brown and Ismail point out, such strategies have to be seen within a critique of inequality, like the radical feminist focus on the need to change men (and not only men, reading Charlotte Bunch would, for instance, make it clear that radical feminism had to address the root causes of all equalities, global, class, and racial, not only sexism and misogyny). Likewise, an analysis of feminist psychoanalytic theory can help explore the dynamics of power imbalances beyond gender but a focus on gender, at a time when uses of psychoanalytic theories were bolstering gender differences, is potentially quite radical for rethinking what women and men could be. Could those theories now move forward into thinking what gender is beyond the binary? They can and do, in much the same way that women of color feminism can and does also move into fuller consideration of shifting gender conceptions and the need to address violences against men of color, even as it also insists on addressing the experiences and political needs of women of color. That multidimensionality has been present in long histories of theories with which we still engage, but over time, too, we've unfortunately tended to level out theories that came before, not looking at what they were trying to do but looking at how they did not accurately predict what we might be thinking now.

Our own theories, of course, will be insufficient for the next generations even if we hope they are in some way generative. As we might attempt to deploy poststructuralist critiques of gender, our challenges to institutions are also shaped by the structures in which we live and work. Part of the challenge of living and working educational institutions is that we know that our work is defined in and through revision, we know that many of our strategies are not-yet sufficient even if they do represent the best possibilities for resistance as we can think and act now. Sometimes our backward-looking critiques may be our strategies for assuring ourselves that we've done better but those backward glances also remind us that we are shaped through struggles we ourselves have not had to live through. We can imagine cross-temporal solidarities and also know we may not share the same scale of injustices (but it's Oct. 8, 2019 and part of me thinks that optimism will be short-lived).

Francis and Jaksch explore the continuing work of resistance in everyday trans lives in higher education. Joining a growing number of studies on trans students, and also joining those who study the experiences of violence and sexual assault that cisgender women experience on campus, their analysis remind us of the significant effort expended by trans students to just make it through universities. Like similar studies on students of color and international or immigrant students navigating institutional and daily interactions designed to keep them at a remove, the daily expenditures of energy trans students must work against exclusion remind us of the costs of intersecting normativities. Jaekel and Holmes explore a different resistance—

that of faculty resisting trans inclusion. Jaekel and Holmes suggest working against faculty resistance by employing more dialogic, problem solving strategies, pushing for assessment of exclusionary practices, and building their own forms of mitigating those exclusions. Lange pushes us to see, too, that any activity in higher education is implicated in colonialism and other histories of insufficient attention to intersecting forms of injustice. Even if we laud the activism that created such spaces, they are nonetheless complicit in the historical and contemporary exclusions of higher education. No matter what work we do to improve education and higher education, we know our work is incomplete and it occupies stolen ground and stolen labor.

Nicolazzo takes her labor to virtual space, and just to bond for a second, her process reminds me of my own search, years ago, for an avatar, a search that wound up generating images of automobile transmissions (*did you mean transmissions?*) and never-grouchy enough gnomes. Given that so many of the authors in this special issue critique the very foundations of the university, Nicolazzo's return to a version of trans monstrosity refigures the world-changing monster into the finest social justice pedagogue. Self-creation, critical authenticity, and interconnected struggles for justice need to be part of our real and virtual pedagogies, including those focused on ourselves and those created through community. Robles, Kennedy, Dews, and Garvey embark on such a communal autoethnography related to an action project to improve trans lives as part of a class on college students. Their explorations of visibilities and invisibilities provide a textured account of how obstacles can impel trans assertion or indicate the need for safety. Their discussions of kinship and allyship, too, chart the variations in connections to mistakes and distances and to the problematic tokenization of trans students in the class.

What each of these accounts do so well is push at the complications to any approach to teaching and learning with and through trans lives and theories. Trans lessons in higher education need to keep this energetic sense of the complications going. We need to continue to recognize the power in such both/and/and-more claims: insisting on authenticities *and* realizing radical situatedness *and* mitigating complicities as we keep the work of trans theories going.

Brother Insider: Towards a Trans* Onto-Epistemology

Qui Dorian Alexander

Abstract

This paper is an autoethnographic exploration of my engagement with Audre Lorde's Sister Outsider (1984). The purpose of this exploration is to theorize what Lorde's work offers to the conception of a non-binary transmasculinity and how that offering might impact my pedagogical practice as a transmasculine educator. By critically reflecting on my own "crisis of unlearning" while engaging Sister Outsider, I articulate that experience, what I refer to as brother insider, by writing a letter to Audre Lorde and re-reading my experience by analyzing the letter. In writing and re-reading the letter, I am able to identify and challenge my own assumptions to address gaps in my analysis. I then discuss implications for my pedagogical practice and future education research centering Black feminist thought.

Keywords: Audre Lorde, Gender, Trans, Non-binary Masculinity, Black Feminist Thought*

This paper is an autoethnographic exploration of my engagement with Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984). This exploration serves to articulate my experience as a queer Black trans*[1] person, analyze my own reading of Lorde, and re-read (Kumashiro, 2002) my experience to re-orient my work within an onto-epistemological framework. By reflecting on my own experiences, I acknowledge and process the tensions that exist in my own learning. I do this by writing a letter to Audre Lorde in an effort to process my feelings and thoughts of the text. I use letter writing to not only engage my own recursive thinking, but as a way to be in active dialogue with *Sister Outsider*.

The purpose of this exploration is to theorize what Audre Lorde's work offers to the conception of non-binary transmasculinity and how that offering might impact my pedagogical practice as a transmasculine educator. By critically reflecting on my own "crisis of unlearning" while engaging *Sister Outsider*, I articulate that experience, what I refer to as *brother insider*, by writing a letter to Audre Lorde and re-reading my experience by analyzing the letter. In writing and re-reading the letter, I am able to identify and challenge my own assumptions to address gaps in my analysis. I then discuss implications for my pedagogical practice and future education research centering Black feminist thought.

This (recursive) engagement with Lorde's work challenges me to hold both theory and emotion in my own work, leading me towards new understandings of my assumptions in my teaching and scholarship. I call for both an ontological and epistemological shift in how we understand (and teach about) trans* experiences. In moving away from understanding trans* identity within the context of how cisgender identity is constructed, a trans* onto-epistemology orients us towards

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1. I use trans(*) specifically as an umbrella term for whom Jourian & Simmons (2017) referred to as "people who move across genders, who challenge or deviate from the traditional binary in some way, and/or transcend gendered expectations" (p. 61).

new ways to think about gender identity and supports creating a paradigm that deconstructs the cis/trans* binary.

Context and Theoretical Framework

During my doctoral studies I participated in a class on queering curriculum and teaching at the intersections of identity. As a queer Black trans* person, I often take up the question: what does it mean to queer one's teaching? And, what does that queering actually look like in a class-room? Reading Audre Lorde's (1984) *Sister Outsider* generated my thinking around that question. A collection of both written essays and speeches, Lorde explored the realities of being a Black, lesbian woman and how her lived experiences both shaped how she understood the world and how she thought about social change. *Sister Outsider* is now a foundational text within feminist thought, still resonating with audiences more than 30 years later.

Audre Lorde herself said that she was not a theorist; she identified as a poet, yet she is considered a central figure in the development of feminist theory. Lorde's work was profoundly personal and therefore, deeply subjective. As theory is often considered objective, this type of writing blurred the lines between self-expression and meaning making. "The white western patri-archal ordering of things requires that we believe there is an inherent conflict between what we feel and what we think--between poetry and theory" (Bereano 1983, p. 9). Lorde's *Sister Outsider* is a fundamental text in challenging the binary of emotion and theory. Lorde's work is the embod-iment of the refusal to separate the emotional impact of one's sense making of the world. By writ-ing from a place that evokes emotion, she gives us insight into the ways her identities shape her lived experiences. Her work becomes auto-ethnographic (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008) in that way, situating herself within a larger cultural context. It is for these reasons that a class on queering curriculum and teaching at the intersections would include Lorde and her contributions to queer and feminist thought.

Lorde's work is not only an expression of Black, lesbian woman identity, but a larger per-spective on understanding the impact of systems of oppression (specifically racism, sexism, and heterosexism) on our everyday lives. By situating herself within a larger context of white suprem-acist cis-heteropatriarchy, Lorde illustrates how her unique positioning creates language for her to articulate the pervasive ways overlapping systems of oppression operate. Lorde simultaneously experienced racialized heterosexism from Black communities and queered racism within les-bian/queer communities. Her writing illustrates the unique challenges she faced because of the ways in which her identities overlap and connect.

In *Troubling Education* (2002), Kumashiro used queer and feminist readings of poststruc-turalism to explore the ways oppression plays out differently in different situations. An example of this would be Lorde's experiences of racialized heterosexism in one context and queered racism in another. Lorde's text provides tangible examples of what Kumashiro asks educators to under-stand about oppression; it [the text] exemplifies the ways in which "oppression is multiple, inter-connected and ever-changing" (p. 52). Kumashiro's conceptualization of oppression offers insight into what queering teaching might look like within the context of teaching about social change. The result of such a pedagogical approach is students understand that their experiences are partial, and context informs how they read how oppression is operating in their everyday lives, both inside and outside of the classroom.

What does one do with this new information? Particularly if it is contradictory to the information and socialization we have received about what oppression is and how it operates in people's lives? Turning to queer and feminist readings of psychoanalysis, Kumashiro (2002) theorizes about the crisis of learning and unlearning. He wrote, "we resist learning what will disrupt the frameworks we traditionally use to make sense of the world and ourselves" (p. 57). In order for anti-oppressive practices to inspire change, the resistance to do that change must be addressed and engaged. There is an emotional discomfort that comes with unlearning, or troubling previously learned oppressive ideas and behaviors. This "crisis" is necessary for change but is often avoided by educators.

> Consequently, educators need to create a space in their curriculums in which students can work through crisis. Shoshana Felman (1995) discusses how her students worked through a crisis they experienced by giving testimonies (self-reflections and analyses) of their experiences of the crisis. She argues that teaching and learning really take place only through entering and working through crisis, since it is this process that moves a student from being stuck into a different intellectual, emotional and political space. (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63)

Lorde's writings also serve as an example of what Felman refers to as testimonials. Her work is a reflexive engagement of her own meaning making based on her lived experience of embodying the contradictions societal norms of what it means to be Black, queer, *and* a woman. Her writing is an expression of how the crisis space might manifest; an understanding of the multiplicity and inter-connectivity of personal identity and larger social structures; an opportunity to understand the world from a different intellectual, emotional and political space.

Crisis and Reflection

Lorde's work is an embodiment of what Kumashiro's visions of anti-oppressive education can offer, as well as a tool to engage the crisis space of recognizing one's complicity in oppressive behaviors and ideas. As a queer, Black trans person I expected to read Lorde's work with reverence and understanding. I understood what it was like to have a racialized and gendered body; I understood the ways that oppression was layered in my own experiences and how that shaped how I navigated the world. But I never thought Lorde's work would send me into my own crisis space.

I was particularly struck when reading Lorde's essay "Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response" in which she talked about gender. My reading of the essay was informed by my assumptions about the context in which it was written. "Man Child" was originally published in 1979, the same year as Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*. Second wave feminism had a biologically deterministic politic and embraced an anti-trans sentiment. Most (white) feminists at that time where writing about gender in cis-normative and cis-centric ways. Women of Color, lesbians and trans women were often excluded from these conceptions of womanhood. "Each of these groups, especially in their intersections, was perceived as being too masculine to be truly anti-patriarchal in their politics" (Stewart, 2017, p. 296).

It is for these reasons Black feminism resists a gender-essentialist definition of what it means to be a woman. The 1986 statement offered by the Combahee River Collective affirms:

> We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have

the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se—i.e., their biological maleness—that makes them what they are. As black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. (p. 275)

Many would argue that this Black feminist text offers what Susan Stryker (2017) refers to as "an important foundation for trans-inclusive feminist politics" (p. 124). This statement opens up space for trans* inclusivity, combating the gender essentialist notions of what it means to be a woman. I read this as explicitly creating space specifically for trans women and transfemininity but was unclear about its implications for transmasculinity.

I began to wonder: *what would Audre Lorde have to say about someone like me?* A person who is both queer in sexuality *and* gender? A Black Latinx, transmasculine person who moves through the world read as a cisgender Black man. A person who had a girlhood I strongly identified with but grew into an adult manhood. In "Man Child" Lorde reflects on her experiences of being the lesbian mother of her male child. I was struck by Lorde's use of language that I read to assume cisgender status and makes declarative statements about the assumed limits of gender identity.

And our sons must become men—such men as we hope our daughters, born and unborn, will be pleased to live among. Our sons will not grow into women. Their way is more difficult than that of our daughters, for they must move away from us, without us. (Lorde, 1984, p. 73)

What do we make of our sons who *do* grow into women? What do we make of our daughters who *do* move away from their mothers, without them? And what do these questions offer us in how we understand gender in more expansive ways? How do these answers impact how I teach about gender?

Throughout reading Lorde's work, I felt conflicted. I deeply resonated with her writing, as someone who spent 22 years of my life as a woman. Particularly the rage she specifically speaks of in her body as a Black lesbian woman. She recognizes the impact that kind of rage has on a person; when we don't have anywhere for that rage to go, we take it out on each other. I think about all the rage that lived inside me as a Black girl that got buried even deeper when I decided to walk away from womanhood. So repressed, it has manifested into my own internalized misogyny and femme-phobia. What happens when I walk away from womanhood? Do I give up my ability to heal that anger? Or do I have more responsibility to wield that rage into change because I now have more privilege? Is there space for me to hold being privileged and oppressed in the same body? Or must I always choose one over the other?

These questions spurred the catalyst to my crisis space. I wondered *was Audre Lorde transphobic*? I don't think so, but with our limited language of how to describe gender or describe the microaggressions and/or antagonism trans* people face (often conflated with and reduced to transphobia) someone might argue she was. It was my reading of the language of limiting gender possibilities that stuck with me. In the midst of being affirmed by Lorde in all the ways she spoke to how I grew up to understand myself as a Black queer woman, I was rendered invisible in the same breath. My crisis was a combination of my own resistance to critiquing Lorde, my renegotiating my understanding of my own gender identity, and a reaction to both feeling visible *and* invisible in the process. While I saw my younger self reflected in many ways, things didn't always

resonate with the current iteration of my gender. Being read as straight and/or cisgender, particularly by other queer and trans* people, left me often feeling as if I was not really being seen for the totality of my experience. I assumed Lorde would read me the same way.

I became hyper aware of this positionality, what I conceptually named as *brother insider*. I resonated with so much of Lorde's work because I had experienced those things myself. Every time I see a queer, Black woman, my eyes beg to be seen. For them to know that *I was once like them.* I *knew* what those experiences were like, yet I was always just read as another brother. *Brother insider* is the straddling of those identities in different times and spaces. A familiarity and proximity without a congruence.

I began to ruminate in these questions and possibilities, ultimately trying to engage with the crisis that was emerging for me; the implications for embodying these societal contradictions. "In revisiting the crisis through testimony, students are not merely repeating the crisis but are supplementing it, giving it new readings, new meanings, and associations with different emotions" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63) Since I was struggling with the implications of Lorde's work, I needed to develop my own testimonial to processing this crisis, rather than just looking to Lorde's work for examples of manifestations. I hesitated to engage my classmates around these ideas; I was not sure if people would understand my perspective, as there were no other queer Black people or Black women in the class.

This led me to engage testimony in new ways. I decided to write Audre Lorde a letter. I began letter writing as a practice with two goals; to help process my emotions around the discomfort I was feeling (working through the crisis) and to figure out what to do with that information. How does that newfound insight impact my pedagogy? How and what can this crisis offer me about queering my teaching? Instead of speculating what Lorde might think based off my own reading of her work, I decided to ask her directly. Letter writing created a space for me to think through direct questions, noticing my own gaps and assumptions. It gave me an opportunity to be reflective of my experience while also troubling it.

This practice of both reflecting and troubling my own experiences created space for *brother insider* to emerge. I used this letter writing practice to articulate my connections and contradictions to Lorde's work. I complicate her writings with my own story in an effort to push my own understandings of how gender manifests in her work and its implications for my own teaching as a queer Black trans* person.

Dear Audre,

I'm not quite sure how to start this letter, but I knew that I should write to you. Writing has become rather difficult these days. I'm in graduate school, so writing and reading aren't exactly fun all the time anymore. I've been reading your work and surrounding myself with people who constantly invoke your name. I've felt close and so far away from you. I've honestly been a bit scared of you. That's not because you are scary by any means, it's because I am afraid to talk to ghosts. Especially when I know so many of my own have been waiting for me to say something. Fear is something I've constantly struggled with. Things I don't understand, things that make me uncomfortable, things that shake my spirit, things I can't embody. All because of fear. I know that our emotions always teach of something, but this feels complicated. I'm writing you this letter to face my fear.

You would have been 84 this year. My dear friend Marilou just recently passed, she was 84. I was afraid of her too. She had opened the Women*s Center in 1981 and ran it

with an iron fist until she retired. I inherited her beloved Women*s Center. Her legacy was daunting and her shoes way too big to ever fill, but that's not why I was scared. She asked my boss at the time "who the fuck is this man you got, bout to run my center?" You don't know what I look like and I don't exactly identify as a man...But I do get to walk through this world viewed as a man by other people. I was scared of Marilou because I wasn't a woman (anymore). I think Marilou thought she had an idea of what trans looked like and I wasn't it. She didn't understand but she was open with and to me. She was generous and critical. She was receptive to me.

I'm writing you this letter because I can't help but keep thinking, what would Audre have to say about me? What would Audre have to say about my work being in a Black feminist tradition? How would Audre feel about the resonance of her words as if they were on my own tongue? Those are scary questions. I assumed that Marilou wouldn't like me, trust me, care about me. I was wrong. So instead of assuming what you'd think I figured I'd just ask you. What do you think about someone like me? Someone who is trans, who used to be a woman? Who had a girlhood but grew up to a manhood? What do you think about my work being in a Black feminist tradition? How do you feel about me feeling as if your work speaks to me, knowing I move through the world like this?

I am sure you know why I am asking you these things, since your work is so clearly for and centering Black (queer) women. But today your words mean different things. I wonder if my story and experiences give me a place in your work without denying my true self? I think the way woman is conceptualized today is a bit more expansive. I read the way you talk about women as cis-normative and cis-centric. I feel complicated even saying that to you because that language was not a part of how we talked about gender, when you were writing. I wonder if you think I'm a traitor? If I have a right to connect with your work in a way that feels personal? Do I lose my ability to be a part of the audience you speak to and center?

I felt the anger you describe when I read your work. It has been such a visceral reaction. It lives in my body, but my body has changed. I move through the world in a completely new way. Do I still get to talk to you about this anger? Am I no longer allowed to engage with the experience of a woman? What do I do with that rage? I've seen many Black trans men turn that rage into misogyny (including myself). Push as far away as they can from womanhood and femininity. Reject their own histories to embrace a new "freedom." I don't want to do that. I don't want to betray my womanhood and how it shaped me into the man I am today. But I feel complicated even saying that. I'm not a man. Trans for me is not about "opposite," it's about expansion and transcendence. I am not a man, but I am also not a woman. I get the privileges afforded to me of a straight cis male, but I am actually none of those things. It feels like a lie I tell over and over and writing about it is the only truth I have.

I know that my silence won't protect me and nothing I accept about myself can be used against me. Writing feels precarious, but I know I must. I have to if I am going to imagine a different world, a Black feminist world. You're right, poetry is not a luxury, it is often the only way I can create language for the depth of how I am feeling. My voice is sometimes all I have and yet I constantly struggle with it. I learned from you the power of feeling behind my words. No one can take them from you, when they speak your truth. I so often feel like I must objectify my own words. Make them rational, scientific, make them

easy on the white man's ear. But you have taught me something here and I wonder if that is ok?

I look like a man, I move through the world with people reacting to my body like this. But it feels like a lie and yet I still chose this reality. I sometimes wonder if you would have compassion for that? Most would think I chose not to be a woman. I chose to transition, to take hormones and have surgery. But my body isn't the totality of my gender. I don't have breasts anymore, but it feels important to me to never lose my vagina. I don't need a penis to please my lover and I don't need one to please myself. I am a body of mixed genders and sensations. I am not a man and came to that conclusion because I also knew I was not a woman. Do I get to complain about not being seen? Do I get to complain about people's misconception? I do not come from the place where (cisgender) men come from, but often feel held to society's expectations of manhood, I have to take on that narrative even though it is not my own.

I am afraid of what people think of me. Do you think I am just a manifestation of the patriarchy? Do I believe that? Where does that leave me? Someone who grew up like you, cried like you, bled like you. But as an adult no longer moves through the world in the same way. I don't feel liberated, but I feel different. I feel lighter. I dropped the constant harassment to adopting the assumption of harasser. Queer men reject me because of my trans body, queer women reject me because I look like a man. Every day I look in the mirror and wonder where I belong.

I am a teacher and much like you didn't necessarily receive formal training. You said, "I know teaching is a survival technique. It is for me and I think it is in general; the only real learning happens. Because I myself was learning something I needed to continue living. And I was examining it and teaching it at the same time I was learning it. I was teaching myself aloud" (Lorde & Rich, 1981, p. 719). That's how I came into teaching. Sharing and thinking through things I was trying to embody in my own life. Would you still want to teach if you were still here? I wish I could be your student and would be humbled if you were mine. I think we'd have a lot to share with each other. It is on days like this, when I write like this that I miss my dear friend Marilou. She would have so much to say if she saw where my work was headed. I wrote to you because I didn't want to be afraid of you anymore. I didn't want to be afraid of the feelings your writing stirred up in me. I didn't want to be afraid of my own words anymore. I hope you write back. Will you be one of my ancestors? Can I pray to you when I am scared? Will you guide me? Will you teach me to be deliberate and unafraid? I hope you'll consider. Until next time.

Re-Reading Brother Insider

Writing the letter proved to be more difficult than I anticipated. It was a challenging engagement of both emotion and theory; an articulation of feelings while also attempting to analyze how I construct my own identities and the contradictions that exist in my own lived experience. Re-reading the letter created an opportunity for me to recognize my own assumptions and gaps in my analysis. Upon re-reading I noticed incongruencies with how I was describing my own experience and how I theorize about trans identity. In the letter I refer to myself as someone who "used to be a woman" and who "looks like a man." Later, I conceptualize trans* identity as a transcendence of gender yet I refer to my own experience within binary constructions. I read this contradiction as a manifestation of my own struggle between theory and emotion.

I have been taught that (a) man is recognized by certain sights, sounds, touch, smells, and tastes. Yet, given my location in the academy, I have also been trained in the critical theoretical paradigms that resist it. Therefore, I find myself stumbling over this rejection of gender essentialism. Postmodern feminism and queer theory disrupt the premise that biological sex determines gender identity or that biological sex is itself static (Jourian, 2015). Yet, gender is constructed socially in community with others and awareness of academic theories of gender seems inadequate to refute the internalized gender essentialist and phallocentric definitions of (a) man and masculinity. (Stewart, 2017, p. 293)

Here, Stewart (2017) described the tension that arises when trying to conceptualize (their) masculinity outside of its hegemonic norm; something I also struggled with. Being socialized within a cissexist society, I have internalized the theorization of masculinity within binaristic norms. Because of this, I had internalized the idea that the only way to be respected as someone who was "not a woman," I would have to be a man. Even as I intellectualized a different conceptualization, I have often assumed that I must explain my gender identity in binaristic ways for people to respect my identity. This also caused me to assume the way people perceive my gender expression. While I do not identify as a man, I have chosen to medically transition; and with a balding head, full beard, flat chest, and traditionally masculine aesthetic, I am often read as cisgender, even by other trans people. This phenomenon brought up feelings of being misunderstood and unseen; feelings I felt when I first started to reconcile that I might be trans*. I assumed that medically transitioning would do away with this feeling, but it only got stronger as I moved closer to my masculinity.

I had hoped that a medical transition would shift how I was being perceived by others, but was unsure about what that new perception might actually look like. I also noticed that as my perceived gender identity shifted, that shift also impacted my perceived racial identity. As a person of both Puerto Rican and Black American descent, before medically transitioning I was constantly read as a (masculine) Latina woman, but after I began to medically transition, I was read as a Black man. As a visible shift in my masculinity occurred, my proximity to Blackness also shifted. As a light-skinned person, I was noticing the ways that my gender presentation was being attributed to my Blackness, rather than my actual skin tone.

This reading of how I am perceived by others, informed by my socialization of hegemonic masculinity (Jourian, 2017) within the gender binary, created a plethora of assumptions for the best way to navigate how people were interacting with my gender. Because of my own fears of how gender is policed in my family and communities, I assumed that being read as cis-gender would be the safest manifestation for me to walk through the world. But it was those feelings of being misunderstood, the very feelings that lead me to exploring my transness, that created a dissonance that ultimately caused me to write a letter to Audre Lorde.

Brother insider then emerged differently for me. It manifested as a space that held the contradictions of unlearning hegemonic masculinity (Stewart, 2017). It became a catalyst for shifting my understanding of my own gender identity. A moving away from womanhood, without it being a rejection; a moving towards masculinity, without investing in (hegemonic) manhood. It became the space to articulate my disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) with a binary gender identity. Building my capacity to hold contradicting conceptions of gender in these ways creates new understandings of how gender and power manifest in everyday life. How I intellectualized my gender was through cis-gendered norms, constantly mapping my experience onto a construct that actually couldn't

contain the totality of my being. I assumed that Lorde would also read my identity from that place. That I would be read incorrectly, withheld from the opportunity for self-determination. I both assumed and expected that I would be read that way.

New questions began to emerge for me: How do my assumptions and expectations shape how I conceive of my own gender identity and how I articulate it to others? How do they impact how I hold space for others to articulate their genders? How am I limiting the opportunity for people's self-determination by imposing the restrictions of my own conceptions of gender? What are the implications for my teaching? How can I employ *brother insider* to support me in making space for conceptions of masculinity outside of a cis-normative binary? What are the ways in which my own assumptions and fears contribute to how I expect other people to enact their genders? By examining the ways in which my own lived experiences create both limits and possibilities for understanding gender, I recognize the need for both an epistemic and ontological shift in my own autoethnographic analysis.

Towards a Trans* Onto-Epistemology

"We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). Here Barad articulates an onto-epistemological stance, an assertion that both knowing and meaning are not mutually exclusive; how we know things is contingent on our *being* in the world. So much of how I have understood my own gender identity has been based on how I *think* I can articulate it to others, assuming that those others ascribe to a cis-normative gender binary as well. One of the difficult tensions of being trans* is the lived reality of the experience, while also constantly processing how to make sense of that experience when navigating a cis-centric world. In my own attempts to be legible, I have (often unconsciously) privileged the discourse of trans* identity over the reality of my lived experience. Therefore, my teaching of and about gender inadvertently gets communicated from the same place.

By privileging discourse that centers what it means to identify as trans* within a cisgender context rather than what it means to *be* trans*, we perpetuate the understanding of trans* experiences within a cis-normative gaze. Trans* scholars Jourian and Simmons (2017) defined trans* people as "people who move across genders, who challenge or deviate from the traditional binary in some way, and/or transcend gendered expectations" (p. 61). Rather than offer fixed notions of what trans* identity is, this definition leaves space to understand trans* identity outside of how cisgender identity is conceptualized.

I call for an ontological and epistemological shift in how we understand trans* experience by thinking of trans* as a *transcendence* of gender. This understanding dismantles the cis/trans binary to leave space for what it means to be trans* in multiple, partial, and incomplete ways. The affective reality of what it means to be trans* is often dismissed in an effort to stabilize and quantify gender. With a new understanding of the limitlessness of gender rather than solely its limitations, we create new possibilities for gender. Nicolazzo (2017) called for a trans* epistemology within educational research; "imagining a trans* epistemology moves one beyond just the mere recognition of trans* bodies, but embraces a trans*-centered ethic of approaching knowledge creation and the world in which that knowledge is used to transform society toward liberatory ends" (p. 19). I want to push further for an ontological and epistemological shift in understanding gender. Rather than limit our critique to how our understandings of gender shape knowledge production, I want to challenge us to question fundamentally how we understand gender to be. When we limit our understandings of what it means to be trans* only within the confines of what it means to be

cisgender, it is the cisgender gaze that creates the larger narrative of how gender shows up in systems of schooling. Those are the assumptions that inform how we create possibilities and/or limitations of safer spaces for trans* students.

A trans* onto-epistemology would not render cisgender identity invalid, but rather would open up space for understanding gender beyond the limits of cis-heterosexism. Trans* onto-epistemology would offer an integration of private and public queer discourses. With a trans* onto-epistemology, "closets" wouldn't exist. The gendered assumptions that uphold notions of what "passing" is (or isn't) would be unnecessary. A trans* onto-epistemology would allow folks to identify within a larger web of entangled identities rather a dichotomy of experiences.

> The white western patriarchal ordering of things requires that we believe there is an inherent conflict between what we feel and what we think—between poetry and theory. We are easier to control when one part of our selves is split from another, fragmented, off balance. There are other configurations, however, other ways of experience the world, though they are often difficult to name. We can sense and seek their articulation. (Bereano, 1983, p. 9)

A trans* onto-epistemology offers us a different configuration of experiencing the world. By honoring affect as a critical part of understanding what it means to *be*, a trans* onto-epistemology would embody the connection between theory and emotion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I reflect on Lorde's essay "Poetry is not a Luxury" (1978) as a framework to understand my experience with this autoethnographic engagement. By writing in ways that center both theory and emotion, I can begin to shift my own ontological understandings of my experiences and positioning of my future work. I return to the perspective of *brother insider* and situate it within a trans* onto-epistemology. Lorde (1984) says "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence" (p. 37). Previously I would have read this statement assuming that trans people were excluded from this notion. Understanding that while even if the text does not explicitly exclude trans* people, I (we) am always looking for myself, and when I don't see myself reflected in text, I assume I (we) have been forgotten. Through trans* onto-epistemology the perspective of *brother insider* is considered in this statement. I am reminded, that as both a marginally racialized and gendered body, poetry is not a luxury.

What can a trans* onto-epistemology offer conversations of gender within a Black feminist tradition? I turn to Green's reflection (in Green & Bey, 2017) on where Black feminist thought and trans feminism meet.

> I seek a Black feminist praxis that can hold all of these people, but in order for that to be the case we may have to disentangle ourselves from a reliance on "woman" and instead think through the ways in which femininity and masculinity are moving in and across all kinds of bodies. The category "woman" remains attached to notions of biological authenticity and realness that inevitably reaches its limits when trying to capture bodies that shift, trans bodies. Basically, what I am getting at is that we can and should shift our grammar and language to be more inclusive but understand too that the way we think of women/men,

this binary is undone (and sometimes redone) by transgender and gender-nonconforming people whose gender journeys aren't always linear. (Green & Bey, 2017, p. 442)

A trans* onto-epistemology creates opportunities to articulate an existence outside the limits of the gender binary; it enacts what Green and Bey are asking for. It pushes us to center ways of knowing as constructed through ways of *being* that center marginalized identities while nuancing and contextualizing their experiences. Trans* onto-epistemology is partial, multiple, and contextual, creating space to re-orient conceptions of gender based on the lived realities of trans* people. Rather than understanding trans* within a cisgender context, it articulates the expansiveness of trans* identities as a source of knowledge production. This destabilizes attachments to hegemonic binary gender identities and re-centers what Green and Bey (2017) assert, that "femininity and masculinity are moving in and across all types of bodies" (p. 442).

This process was one of both self-reflection "in which they [students] ask how they are implicated in the dynamics of oppression" and self-reflexivity "in which they bring this knowledge to bear on their own senses of self" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 64). *Brother insider* is my process of self-reflexivity, situating my sense of self within the broader cultural context, destabilizing my assumptions around my own identity and offering insight into shifting my scholarly and pedagogical approach. This exploration serves as a response to the call Lorde offered almost 40 years ago; an integration of theory and emotion, a paradigm shift, a centering of those most marginalized, honoring a Black feminist tradition.

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Feminist Theorizing of Men and Masculinity: Applying Feminist Perspectives to Advance College Men and Masculinities Praxis

Ashley M. Brown & Khaled J. Ismail

Abstract

Since the emergence of feminist scholarship, feminist theorists have advanced diverse perspectives regarding the role of examining men and masculinity to advance gender equity. These contributions, however, are often marginalized and selectively applied in men and masculinities scholarship and praxis. This article provides an in-depth overview of foundational feminist perspectives that underpin men and masculinities praxis, specifically within a higher education context. As men and masculinities praxis continues to gain traction on college campuses through coursework, programmatic initiatives, and institutional policies, the authors present opportunities, limitations, and complexities of various feminist perspectives and approaches to the work, calling upon practitioners to critically engage in a grounded feminist praxis that emphasizes systemic transformation.

Keywords*: feminist theory, men and masculinities, higher education*

Developed out of the U.S. women's liberation movement in the early 1970s, feminist scholarship emerged with the intent to understand the causes and impact of gender inequity by applying the concepts of domination, oppression, and exploitation to women's experiences and advancing anti-sexist theories and methods (Gardiner, 2005; Hanmer, 1990). As scholars worked to deconstruct the category 'woman' and develop more nuanced understandings of sexism and gender (Hill, 2003), they also "have become increasingly wary of yet again preserving 'man' as an ostensibly ungendered subject" (Shapiro, 1994, p. 11). Feminist theorists, therefore, sought to expose and problematize the construction and role of masculinity as part of understanding patriarchy and the dominant positioning of men. These strands of feminist thought played a critical role in the subsequent surfacing of masculinity studies in the academy nearly a decade later. In fact, Gardiner (2005) asserted, "Feminist thinking has been fundamental to the formation of contemporary men's and masculinity studies as intellectual endeavors, academic subjects, and social movements" (p. 36).

As the study of masculinity continues to grow, as evidenced by its expanding presence in college courses, academic journals, books, and professional associations and conferences (Gardiner, 2002), there has been much debate among feminist scholars regarding the role, risks, and meaning of the scholarship. Among the critiques of masculinity studies, a predominant concern is that its scholars do not "explicitly address as a main theoretical priority how feminist theory is used, cited, and analyzed within masculinity theory" (Robinson, 2003, p. 130). Not only does masculinity studies scholarship lack sufficient engagement with the complexities and contradictions of feminism, but many texts fail to even acknowledge feminist theory at all (McMahon, 1993; Ramazanoglu, 1992). Contemporary writing on masculinity has provided emergent examples of

a more thoughtful engagement with feminist theory, yet these approaches remain overwhelmingly limited and selective (Berggren, 2014; McCarry, 2007; O'Neill, 2015). For instance, engagement with feminism is often reduced to "one to two feminists who represent only one strand within a particular perspective" (Robinson, 2003, p. 132), generally acknowledging those perceived to be sympathetic to men's issues. Further, masculinity studies scholars often "mention feminism, without citation, and move on in the usual way to cite another man whose work is as intellectually a derivative of these origins as his own" (Hanmer, 1990, p. 444). By leaving feminist theory critically unexamined, these scholars seem to suggest that feminist scholarship has not yet theorized masculinity (McMahon, 1993), thus elevating masculinity studies to the forefront of the intellectual project. However, the examination of men and masculinity has always been present in feminist theory (Hanmer, 1990; Robinson, 2003), and feminist scholars feel strongly that the study of masculinity would not have developed without feminism's direct contributions (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Gardiner, 2005). Hanmer (1990) wrote, "To reduce women's studies to the study of women and the differences between us is to deny [its] origins" (p. 446) within the women's liberation movement and its critiques of patriarchal constructions of masculinity. To advance goals of gender equity, feminist scholars have taken varied and contested approaches to addressing masculinity, patriarchal power, and the potential for the structural transformation of gender (Gardiner, 2005; Ramazanoglu, 1992).

In this article, we strive to make explicit the feminist theoretical approaches to men and masculinities that lie not only between the lines of masculinity studies scholarship, but also in the praxis it informs. Our interest in understanding feminist theorizing of men and masculinity stems from our personal experiences developing spaces for those who identify as men to engage in dialogue and self-reflection about masculinity, gender, and power. While working on a university campus, Ashley helped design a six-week men and masculinities program, and Khaled served as one of the first facilitators. Khaled has since expanded his masculinity consciousness-raising work off-campus, offering four-hour workshops to interested men in the broader community. While much of our work was directly informed by masculinity studies literature, there were times we experienced feelings of dissonance in our practice and thinking. How, for example, can we hold space for the ways in which men feel harmed by expectations of hegemonic masculinity *and* center the role cisgender men must play in disrupting gendered oppression? How can we acknowledge intersecting identities that shape men's experiences and access to power through a social justice framework? What can we learn from feminist theorizing to understand the opportunities and potential risks of men and masculinities praxis as an approach to advancing gender equity? Through examining various strands of feminist theory, we hoped to find guidance to address our assumptions, intentions, and approaches. In this paper, we looked to liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, multidimensional, postmodern, and poststructuralist feminist theories and their relevant critiques to present varying approaches to examining men and masculinities. We then analyzed the ways in which feminist theories map onto current men and masculinities praxis in higher education, demonstrating how these initiatives can unintentionally ground their approaches in reductive ways. To conclude, we argue for practitioners' recognition of the nuances, limitations, and opportunities that strands of feminist theory present for college men and masculinities praxis and call for their critical application.

Liberal Feminisms

Liberal feminism came out of 18th century Enlightenment thought and its associated ideals of liberty and equal rights (Mann & Patterson, 2016). "In reacting to claims that women were irrational, weak, vicious, and sinful, the early defenders of women repeated a number of strategies," including claiming women as equal or superior to men or launching into an inquiry about the meaning of equality (Gardiner, 2005, p. 36). Mary Wollstonecraft (2001), for example, criticized the "disorderly kind of education" (p. 15) directed at rendering women pleasing; she argued that education must help woman exercise her mind so that she can "become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband" (p. 22). Liberal feminist approaches were mainly defensive, and feminist authors of this era alternated between strategies that imitated and critiqued men as they sought equality with men's power and rights (Gardiner, 2005).

One of the most important contributions of liberal feminism was highlighting the distinction between sex and socially learned gender to demonstrate that "gender roles could be socially transformed through conscious social and political action to foster a more egalitarian society" (Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 49). The sex-role theoretical approach espoused by liberal feminism describes women's oppression as a result of socialized gender role expectations that place men in a dominant position (Pease, 2000). Thus, to advance gender equity, liberal feminist theories contend that changing laws; rethinking childhood socialization; examining the gendering of the media, the state, and professions; as well as fostering education against prejudice could remedy gender oppression (Gardiner, 2005; Pease, 2000). Margaret Mead (1935) appealed to shifting the ways in which children are socialized, for instance, by arguing that "girls can be trained exactly as boys are trained; taught the same code, the same forms of expression, the same occupations" (p. 79).

Because of its focus on social reform politics, critiques of liberal feminism note its lack of historical analysis and under-emphasis of the economic and political power that men exercise over women (Pease, 2000). Critics claim that liberal feminism merely seeks "women's inclusion in current, male-dominated institutions, accepting a restrictively narrow model of equality without questioning the masculine norms" (Gardiner, 2005, p. 37-38). Further, liberal feminism is critiqued for implying that men can disrupt gender socialization and individually transform themselves through consciousness-raising activities without addressing the wider, patriarchal structures at play (Pease, 2000). Liberal feminist theorizing of men and masculinity often prioritizes reform over revolution, thus ignoring the centrality of patriarchal dominance across institutions in the oppression of women (Mann & Patterson, 2016; Pease, 2000). Radical feminist theories, however, present a more pointed critique of men's power, defining masculinity as oppressive by nature and placing men's violence at the center of gender analyses (McCarry, 2007; Robinson, 2003).

Radical Feminisms

Radical feminist theories challenge the centrality of men's power and its overarching oppression of women. Appealing to the interconnected nature of women's oppression, radical feminists confront issues related to biological reproduction, sexuality, labor, rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment and call for the transformation of social structures and individuals for women's liberation (Ashe, 2007; Robinson, 2003). Strands of radical feminist theory specifically demand the dramatic transformation of men and masculinity. Viewing "men's power over women …as the most basic and important organizing principle of social life" (Pease, 2000, p. 13) and most pervasive of all oppressions, these theories portray men as oppressors of women and masculinity

"as both an instrument and sign of their power" (Gardiner, 2002, p. 3). The Redstockings (1969), for instance, "identify the agents of [women's] oppression as men…All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented. *All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women" (p. 100). Not only does radical feminist thinking argue for disrupting male-dominated institutions, but scholars also challenge the ways in which men maintain power through their individual practices.

Across radical feminist theory, the gendered practice of men's violence serves as a primary focus of analysis and, in some cases, is even characterized as the very definition of masculinity (Gardiner, 2005). These feminists have taken up the theorizing of men and masculinity because "violence and its reduction cannot be adequately understood without an in-depth understanding of masculinities" (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2005, p. 363). Theorizing masculinity from a radical feminist lens provides space for scholars to critically examine and analyze men's material practices to deconstruct their power (McCarry, 2007). By centering men's use of violence against women, radical feminism not only reveals its pervasive role in gender inequity but also creates a platform that necessitates men's transformation. The Redstockings (1969) echoed this sentiment, stating, "We do not need to change ourselves, but to change men" (p. 100).

While radical feminist theorizing of masculinity plays a pivotal role in centering men's power in the oppression of women, these theories have also spurred debate among feminist scholars. A common critique is that radical feminism subscribes to essentialism by casting femininity and masculinity as traits to female and male bodies, respectively. As part of this assessment, some radical feminists are accused of gendering perpetrators of violence as male and, thus, alleging that "all men are immutably violent simply because they are men" (McCarry, 2007, p. 405-406). In essentializing both women and men, radical theorists are also heavily scrutinized for ignoring issues related to race, class, and global location by using a sisterhood framework to embody all women (Gardiner, 2005; Mann & Patterson, 2016; Segal, 1990). Other feminist scholars challenge radical feminism for expressing anti-male sentiments and, thus, harming feminist aims for gender equity. Segal (1987), for example, expressed concern that radical feminist thought castigates men for innate rapacity and violence; she argued that radical feminism, by centering male violence, is giving up on men as they increasingly demonstrate the willingness to embrace feminist ideologies. Similarly, hooks (1998) asserted that the separatism espoused by radical feminism problematically excludes men from the movement. Reuther (1992) agreed that the movement to dismantle patriarchal power must include men, so long as they are able to "acknowledge the injustice of their own historical privileges as males and to recognize the ongoing ideologies and economic, political, and social structures that keep such privilege in place" (p. 17). It is evident that radical feminist theorizing is rife with varying perspectives regarding men's oppression of women and effective approaches for disrupting men's violence. While radical feminist theories problematically presume an absolute gender and sex binary, it is important to also acknowledge their contributions to uncovering masculine dominance in practices and institutions that had been previously deemed natural or commonplace (Gardiner, 2005). Psychoanalytic feminist theories broaden this examination of women's oppression by delving into the internalization of dominance in the unconscious mind.

Psychoanalytic Feminisms

Claiming that ending women's oppression cannot come from sociological factors alone (Mitchell, 1975), some feminist theorists turned to psychoanalytic thought to examine the unconscious formation of masculinity and its impact on both women and men. Mitchell (1975) explained

this turn as rooted in the notion that dominant ideologies are so deeply embedded in women's unconscious that psychoanalytic approaches are necessary to understanding how these ideologies are internalized. Rose (1983) similarly asserted that it is in "the dialogue between feminism and psychoanalysis…[that] the full complexity of the 'personal' and 'sexuality' can be grasped" (p. 19).

Seeking to explain men's dominance of women and even other men, most psychoanalytic feminist analyses are grounded in object-relations theory. Chodorow's (1978) application of this school of thought is understood to be the most influential development of psychoanalytic feminism. Examining the formation of masculinity in men's development, Chodorow (1978) argued that the experience of being cared for by mothers leads to a psychology of masculine dominance and feelings of superiority to women (Connell, 1994; Pease, 2000). As boys experience the disruption from seeing their mothers as primary love objects, the insecure, "defensive and compensatory" construction of masculinity begins to develop from their need to reject her (Connell, 1994; McMahon, 1993; Gardiner, 2005, p. 42). Dinnerstein (1976) argued that this rejection of femininity serves as the basis for men's hatred of and violence towards women. Rubin (1985) further contended that this strand of thought can connect men's violence with their "inability to 'express emotions' and to meet the 'intimacy needs' of women" (as cited in McMahon, 1993, p. 677). Feminist scholars also confront men's dominance in the school of psychoanalytic thought itself. Irigiray (1985) specifically challenged the phallogocentric nature of Freud's concept of penis envy by, instead, developing the theory of castration anxiety to define masculinity "as a condition of lack, vulnerability, and weakness" (in Gardiner, 2005, p. 38). Psychoanalytic feminist theories not only advance our understandings of men's desire to subvert women through emphasizing men's insecurities and fears of femininity, but Cornell (1998) provided an analysis of the ways in which men are also impacted by the construction of masculinity. Arguing that masculinity sets impossible standards which men will always fail to meet, Cornell (1998) believed men will see the value of aligning with feminism in order to seek liberation from such restrictive expectations.

The engagement of psychoanalytic approaches to understanding men and masculinity has divided feminist scholars. Radical feminists, in particular, have opposed this theoretical strand for serving as an ideological tool to manipulate women and uphold patriarchy and heterosexuality (Gardiner, 1992). Dworkin (1987), for example, referred to Freud as a pornographer, while Daly challenged psychoanalyst theories for placing blame on mothers and women (Gardiner, 1992). Brittan (1989) agreed that psychoanalytic theories can "let men off the hook" (as cited in Pease, 2000, p. 195) by focusing on women's role in reproducing the gender system. While psychoanalytic theorists agree with claims that Freud was a sexist product of his time (Gardiner, 1992), they hold steadfast to the influence of psychoanalysis on feminist thought. Chodorow (1989) argued, "Until we have another theory which can tell us about unconscious mental processes, conflict, and relations of gender, sexuality, and self, we had best take psychoanalysis for what it does include and can tell us" (p. 4).

Psychoanalytic feminist theories also receive criticism for failing to address the multifaceted realities of social structures. Object-relations theory, for instance, centers the role of childhood socialization in boys' internalization of masculine dominance without attending to theories of power (Ramazanoglu, 1992). The theoretical strand "ignores the multiplicity of social practices which separate boys from girls…and under-emphasizes the importance of social and ideological structures outside the family…[It also] fails to take class and race differences into account" (Pease, 2000, p 22). Furthermore, unlike liberal and radical theoretical perspectives, psychoanalytic feminist theories do not offer any strategies for social transformation (Sprengnether, 1990). These

critiques highlight how psychoanalytic approaches can deflect from men's practices and their responsibility for creating social change. By presenting the "male psyche as damaged, wounded, [and] in need of repair," psychoanalytic feminist theories can make it possible to view men in a tragic light (McMahon, 1993, p. 687). Further, through exploring how constructions of masculinity invoke men's compensatory behaviors rooted in insecurity and the inability to express emotion, McMahon (1993) contended it becomes possible to think of men as psychologically disadvantaged when compared to women.

Liberal, radical, and psychoanalytic approaches predominantly present ahistorical and binary understandings of masculinity and patriarchy. As a result, men's dominance is understood to be unchanging, fixed, and even rooted in biological determinism, thus oversimplifying structures of gender and power (Connell, 1994; Rowbotham, 1981). Multidimensional theories respond to these monolithic understandings. By situating masculinity in power matrixes (Wright, 2005), multidimensional perspectives explore a hierarchy of masculinities in which men hold varying levels of access to power.

Multidimensional Feminist Theories

Since the emergence of feminist discourse, feminists of color and those influenced by Marxism have challenged the ways in which feminism perpetuates white, middle-class perspectives of women's experiences and excludes voices of women on the margins (Gardiner, 2005). Multidimensional theories of feminism, viewed from lenses such as Black feminist thought, U.S. third-world feminism, and mestiza consciousness (Anzaldua, 1987), acknowledge the interconnectedness of women's oppression due to social location. Through centering race, Black feminists have also paved the way to complicating perspectives on men and patriarchal power.

Just as Black feminist theorists have challenged how whiteness works to essentialize the experiences of women, they also asserted that

> a monolithic understanding of men avoids the violence and discriminatory implications of White racial supremacy, displacing both White women's complicity with men of their own racial group and antiracist bonding across gender…[S]ome men are, in fact, oppressed by women of the prevailing class. (Wiegman, 2002, p. 35)

Instead of viewing men as wielding universal dominance, this theoretical strand acknowledges a plurality of masculinities where "different masculinities stand in different relationships to power" (Ramazanoglu, 1992, p. 342). By examining the experiences of Black men, these theories articulate the shared oppression of Black men and women within white supremacist structures while also grappling with the tensions between them. Combahee River Collective (1977) stated,

> We feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism. (p. 249)

hooks (1998) similarly criticized the separatism of radical feminism, stating that Women of Color, and poor and working-class women have more in common with men within their marginalized racial or class group than with "bourgeois, White women" (p. 266). In claiming solidarity with Black men, Black feminists advance the notion that men can also be oppressed. By identifying Black masculinity (Ramazanoglu, 1992) and balancing both sympathy and critique for Black men, Black feminist theorists situate constructions of gender within the history of U.S. racism to "critically examine the difficulties that men of color face in achieving mainstream versions of masculinity," "critique those forms of masculinity that depend on sexism and male supremacy" (Gardiner, 2005, p. 43), and invite Black men to join them in creating a more just world.

Other U.S. feminists of colors and global feminists have extended perspectives on historically and culturally situated masculinities. To challenge dominant, white, Western culture, these feminist theorists call upon men within their communities to collaboratively seek liberation from their shared struggles (Gardiner, 2005). The contributions of Black feminists and other feminists of colors disrupt previous theorizing of masculinity and have inspired further exploration of how men access differential power through the examination of race, class, sexuality, and other social identities. Ramazanoglu (1992) posited that the notion of multiple and hierarchical masculinities has informed three theoretical directions in feminist thought: deconstructing how masculinity is practiced, seeing men as both oppressors and oppressed, and recognizing the ways in which men exercise power over one another.

Connell (2005) united these theoretical directions in her theorizing of men and masculinities. Arguing that recognizing more than one kind of masculinity is only a first step, Connell examined the power hierarchies between men through the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity.' Hegemonic masculinity describes dominant gendered practices that embody the legitimacy of patriarchy and the privileging of white, heterosexual, able-bodied, wealthy, cisgender men (Jourian, 2018; Smirnova, 2018). By positioning hegemonic masculinity as dominant and ascendant, Connell described how it obscures femininity as well as 'subordinate' and 'marginalized' forms of masculinity which are often rooted in their relation to sexuality, race, ethnicity, and/or class (Howson, 2006). For instance, "masculinity in a straight, White man and masculinity in a gay, Black man are differently valued, reminding us that the relationship between sex, gender, and social power is less fixed than we might often think" (Cox, Johnson, Newitz, & Sandell, 1997, p. 178). Connell, like the aforementioned Black feminist theorists, worked to strike a balance in understanding men as both oppressors and oppressed. Her understanding of hegemonic masculinity "underscores the plurality of hierarchized masculinities and the complicity of all men, even those who enjoy a lesser share of the patriarchal dividend, in maintaining regimes of masculine privilege" (Williams, 2013, p. 163).

The responses to multidimensional notions of masculinity and gendered power are just as nuanced as the theories themselves. While this theoretical shift is embraced as more critical and inclusive, feminists also offer important critiques to the broader conversation. For instance, there has been significant debate related to the use of Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality when analyzing men and masculinity. Crenshaw's analysis centered the erasure and exclusion of Black women in legal policy, specifically. Because she developed the theory when studying Black women experiencing multiple forms of oppression, "some have questioned its appropriateness as a method for understanding the condition of men" (Williams, 2013, p. 165) who, even if socially subordinated, may also hold gender privilege. For Mutua (2013), however, the critique is that intersectionality theory does not adequately capture the complexity of the lives of Men of Color. Mutua pointed to the ways in which Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality frames much

of Black feminist thought on men and masculinity. As noted in the excerpt from the Combahee River Collective, when applied to Black men, Mutua (2013) argued that intersectionality allows for an analysis of how Black men are privileged by gender and subordinated by race. Through using the example of racial profiling, however, Mutua demonstrated that Black men experience gendered racism, thus complicating the notion of men's universal dominance. She consequently argued that an "assumed privileged gender position of men in the context of people of color is not always accurate" (Mutua, 2013, p. 347). As a result, Mutua (2013) called for a theory of multidimensionality to better understand men's experiences in complex hierarchical systems.

Questions also surfaced regarding the impact of conceptualizing multiple masculinities. In one way, understanding masculinities as multidimensional provided space for feminists to claim political solidarity with men in their shared struggle for liberation. hooks (2015) wrote, "To a grave extent, the feminist movement failed to attract a large body of females and males because our theory did not effectively address the issue of not just what males might do to be antisexist but also what an alternative masculinity might look like" (p. 70). She (1998) also asserted that without men as 'comrades in struggle,' the feminist movement will not progress. A feminism inclusive of men, however, may complicate the fight for ending gendered oppression. Through the historically-situated frame of positioning men as both oppressors and oppressed, there is a risk that the focus of gender analysis moves to the individual rather than the structures that maintain social inequities (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012). As many feminist theorists believe all men benefit from the current gender order (Bridges, 2008), they may have concerns about a shift that deflects from men's access to power. Even hooks, who argued that feminism should recognize that men can suffer under patriarchy, believes a multidimensional approach must not fail to place responsibility on men for gendered oppression. "Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness" (hooks, 1998, p. 278).

Across the literature are varying perspectives regarding the role of multidimensionality in understanding constructions of masculinity and dominance. Berggren (2014) explained that these challenges stem from "reconciling an attempt to capture historical variability with the presumption of a transhistorical structural notion of men's power over women" (p. 234). While Williams (2013) argued that theories of multiple masculinities have worked to destabilize essentialized gender ideas by highlighting the "contingent relationship between masculine privilege and male bodies," (p. 175), Whitehead (2002) believed that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, despite its efforts to acknowledge different forms of masculinity, still reinforces a dominant and "fixed (male) structure" (p. 94). Multidimensional approaches, along with liberal, radical, and psychoanalytic feminist theories, depict the difficult task of theorizing masculinity without insisting upon binary and biological notions of gender. Even when multidimensional theories question essentialist categories of 'men' for ignoring experiences influenced by race and sexuality, many still rely upon group concepts such as Black men and Men of Color. Peterson (2003) contended that the "specific historical and social constructions of masculinity cannot be dissociated from constructions of femininity" and terms such as 'male,' 'men,' 'female,' and 'women' (p. 58). In response, postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theories strive to dismantle the very concept of gender and the binary to achieve liberation.

Postmodern and Poststructuralist Feminisms

Emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, postmodern and poststructuralist feminism offer new methods for conceptualizing and analyzing gender. Theorists work to identify what has been neglected, silenced, or taken for granted about gender (Hare-Mustin, 2004) to deconstruct dualistic and essentialist thinking and concepts that "serve to regulate behavior and exclude others" (Mann & Patterson, 2016, p. 301). In fact, instead of providing direct critiques of men, masculinity, and patriarchal power, postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theories name the consequences of investing in gender and assert that the dismantling of gender itself is the only way to eliminate gendered oppression. Postmodernism and poststructuralism theorize gender as socially constructed, discourse-dependent, fluid, negotiable, and created through repeated performances (Gardiner, 2005; Mann & Patterson, 2016). To effectively challenge the heterosexist power structures of gender, theorists critically examine how concepts, categories, and ideologies have been discursively fabricated (Peterson, 2003). In other words, postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theorists strive to denaturalize sex and gender (Peterson, 2003) and decouple gender identity from sexual identity (Gardiner, 2005) to imagine a new social order that previously seemed impossible. Anne Fausto Sterling (2000), for example, wrote *Should There be Only Two Sexes?* to demonstrate how the social construction of the male and female binary precludes us from acknowledging alternatives, such as people of ambiguous or multiple sexes. Lorber (1994) similarly argued that gender is used as a form of social control and calls for the validation of many forms of sexuality.

Butler (1990, 2004), a prominent figure in postmodern and poststructuralist thought, scrutinized the ways in which gender is categorized and essentialized. Butler (2004) specifically argued that "discourse insists on binary of man and woman as an exclusive way to understand gender…[and] forecloses the thinkability of its disruption" (p. 43). Working to reveal the artificiality of conventional gender norms, Butler (1990, 2004) theorized that gender is produced through performance and discourse. Foucault's conceptualization of discourse also underpins much of postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theory. Connecting knowledge with power, discourse analysis provides a tool for examining how "essentialism and dualistic distinctions are embedded in the categories and concepts that they employ" (Peterson, 2003, p. 56), including 'men' and 'masculinity.' For instance, men become materially produced subjects through their participation within networks of power and discourse (Heller, 2009). Even if men attempted to reject normative identities, poststructuralist thought would say that they cannot because their normative identities are "still engulfed in power" (Butler, 1990 as cited in Heller, 2009, p 584).

In an effort to decouple the concept of 'masculinity' from 'men,' postmodern and poststructuralist theorists also acknowledge alternative masculinities. Sedgwick (1985) developed the concept of homosociality to deconstruct the "divisive system of sexual categorization" and demonstrate how homosexuality and masculinity are interdependent (as cited in Edwards, 2005, p. 61). Sedgwick's (1985) research framed her later argument that masculinity does not solely relate to men. Halberstam (1998) similarly stated that it is possible to study masculinity without men. Arguing that masculinity is most complicated and transgressive when not tied to the male body, Halberstam (1998) believed masculinity cannot be fully understood unless female masculinity is also acknowledged. Halberstam's theorizing of female masculinity is part of the larger postmodern and poststructuralist project to disrupt gender and sexual categories that fail to address diverse and alternative arrangements of identity.

In calling for the disruption of binary thinking about gender, postmodern and poststructuralist feminist theories have caused concern. Some feminist theorists believe that "postmodernism

is a ruse by which dominant groups once again rob women of a voice, this time by doing away with a category like Woman, or the reality of women's lived experience" (Hare-Mustin, 2004, p. 17). By challenging identity categories, postmodern and poststructuralist theories are believed to make feminist political action impossible by centering individualism and delegitimizing organized communities (Pease, 2000). Feminist theorists also argue that postmodernism and poststructuralism fail to interrogate the ways in which patriarchy and masculinity are structurally reinforced (Edwards, 2005). While some contemporary feminist theorists support the postmodern agenda in rejecting essentialist gender categories, they also recognize the need to occasionally employ essentialism for strategic purposes, also known as strategic essentialism (Sayer, 1997; Spivac, 1988).

Mapping Feminist Theories onto College Men and Masculinities Praxis

Since the emergence of feminist scholarship, feminist theorists have advanced critical and diverse perspectives regarding the role of examining men and masculinity in the struggle for gender equity. In masculinity studies scholarship, however, these foundational contributions have been utilized in narrow and limiting ways, ultimately impacting the praxis it informs. Men and masculinities praxis in higher education, which includes faculty or staff-led programmatic and educational initiatives primarily geared towards college men and the examination of masculinities, often draw from various strands of feminist theory, even if these theoretical influences are not explicitly named. In this section, we will draw connections between feminist theories and college men and masculinities praxis to explore the implications of varying approaches to the work.

Across college men and masculinities praxis, radical feminist perspectives are prominent in violence prevention initiatives and other interventions. Aiming to disrupt men's violence and other harmful behaviors, campuses have developed peer education opportunities, credit-bearing courses, judicial interventions, and dialogue programs to engage college men in conversations about their personal responsibility as men to transform both themselves and the broader campus culture. The radical-orientation of these initiatives is evident in their intention to "redefine traditional male behavior" (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005, p. 580). Through providing developmental opportunities for men to explore examples of positive masculinity (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005); reflect upon issues related to misogyny, sexism, and homophobia (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011); and gain skills to challenge other men and intervene in potential sexual assault situations (Barone, Wolgemuth, Linder, 2007), these examples of men and masculinities praxis work to "reduce the frequency of alcohol-related incidents, physical and sexual assaults, and other unwanted behaviors disproportionately committed by male students" (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005, p. 583) on campus. These types of practical interventions employ a radical feminist perspective that centers men's material practices and aims to disrupt their gendered power to create change. As feminist theorists have indicated, however, applications of radical feminist theory present a serious risk of reinforcing biological essentialism, heterosexism, and fixed, binary understandings of gender (McCarry, 2007).

While radical feminist perspectives are present in violence prevention and other programmatic interventions, examples of liberal and psychanalytic feminist approaches are evident in the many types of college men and masculinities praxis that center men's personal growth and their individual responsibility to develop critical consciousness. Through dialogue programs, themed living-learning communities, workshops, health and wellness initiatives, and mentorship initiatives, to name a few, campuses provide opportunities for men to engage in critical reflection and dialogue to redefine masculinity and embrace a wider range of healthier, more authentic ways of

being (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Harper, 2008; Harris, 2010). Such approaches to college men and masculinities praxis can play a pivotal role in transforming individual men's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to gender. However, these practical interventions problematically rely upon liberal and psychoanalytic strands of thought that serve to keep dominant structures intact in a number of ways. Liberal approaches to college men and masculinities praxes, for instance, emphasize individual men's consciousness-raising and transformation. The primary pedagogical approach from this perspective relies on the assumption that if we support men in rethinking childhood socialization, unpacking current manifestations of gendered learning and gender role expectations, and learning about discrimination and oppression, then violence and harm, particularly against women, will be reduced. The core limitation of this approach is its focus on reforming individual actors without also working to dismantle oppressive patriarchal and other structures (Pease, 2000). In many ways, this dynamic reduces men's responsibility to their own individual transformation and the transformation of those immediately within their locus of influence, rather than focusing energy on shifting structures of power and privilege, changing policies and laws, or redistributing resources, for example.

Psychoanalytic feminist frameworks are similarly found in individual-centered praxis. By grounding the work in the notion that the gendered construction of masculinity and manhood, as well as the operating norms of patriarchy and gender-based oppression, negatively impact the well-being of men, practitioners rely upon psychoanalytic perspectives. Instead of engaging men and masculinities praxis grounded in moral responsibility, the entry point becomes that of men's own liberation from restrictive and harmful expectations of hegemonic masculinity. A prominent example of this tension in practice is the screening of the documentary *The Mask You Live In* (2015) on numerous college campuses across the country. A synopsis of the documentary explains:

> The Mask You Live In follows boys and young men as they struggle to stay true to themselves while negotiating America's narrow definition of masculinity…[O]ur protagonists confront messages encouraging them to disconnect from their emotions, devalue authentic friendships, objectify and degrade women, and resolve conflicts through violence…creating a maze of identity issues boys and young men must navigate to become "real" men. Experts in neuroscience, psychology, sociology, sports, education, and media also weigh in, offering empirical evidence of the "boy crisis" and tactics to combat it. (The Mask You Live In, 2015, "Synopsis", para. 1-3)

Screenings of this documentary can provide effective entry point approaches for men to understand and engage in gender equity work; however, these types of approaches run the risk of overemphasizing the impact of patriarchy on boys and men in a manner that then deflects from the ways that men's socialization, and the systems that enable it, are in place to maintain patriarchy and dominance.

This dynamic can be further examined through the lens of psychoanalytic object-relations theory. Object-relations theory, perceived as an approach that is sympathetic to the ways in which men are also harmed by patriarchal structures, has analytical utility for engaging men in supporting gender liberation while striving to simultaneously free themselves from restrictive gender roles (Ashe, 2007). Many scholars and practitioners, for instance, focused their critiques of patriarchy on the emotional cost of masculinity to men (Messner, 1998). This preoccupation with men's victimization is referred to as 'masculinity in crisis,' a belief that "manhood as we know it…requires such a self-destructive identity, a deeply masochistic self-denial, a shrinkage of the self…that the

man who obeys the demands of masculinity has become only half human" (Horrocks, 1994, p. 25; Traister, 2000). Often serving as an underlying principle to college men and masculinities praxis, 'masculinity in crisis' proposes that dominant masculinity is an abstract concept that, in reality, serves very few individual men (Robinson, 2002). Through relying on object-relations theory, these types of initiatives may unintentionally promote men's engagement in feminism through self-interest, consequently denying their agency in the maintenance of patriarchy and disruption of gendered oppression (McMahon, 1993; O'Neill, 2015; Stoltenberg, 1977).

Multidimensional feminist perspectives also ground varying approaches to college men and masculinities praxis. Intended to provide various types of support for men holding marginalized identities, these programs acknowledge the plurality of masculinities and their differing relationships to power. For instance, many of these initiatives take the approach of supporting men of color in navigating systems of racial oppression. Recognizing the need to improve the retention and graduation rates of Black men, for instance, some programs provide opportunities for Black men to explore alternative definitions of masculinity through mentorship, dialogue, and relationship-building (Harper, 2004). Pelzer (2016) argued that these spaces must continue to emerge in higher education to examine the intersections of Black men's experiences and create an "environment where Black men feel supported to expect more of themselves, are asked to achieve higher standards, and are comfortable voicing their lived experiences" (p. 22). Similar initiatives continue to emerge that engage Black and Latino men, as well as Men of Color more broadly to improve retention and academic outcomes and foster a sense of belonging on campus (Brooms, 2016; Harris & Wood, 2013; Saenz et al., 2015). Researchers have also called for increased multidimensional approaches across other social identities (Berila, 2011; Chan, 2017; Gerschick, 2011; Longwood, Muesse, & Schipper, 2004). Aiming to better support gay men on campus, for example, Anderson-Martinez and Vianden (2014) stated,

> [A]cademic courses and co-curricular activities should be inclusive of gay men's identity development…[S]exual assault prevention efforts must be inclusive of gay men…services for LGBT students should actively seek to encourage gay men's gender identity development, particularly in engaging them in conversations about gender performance, concealing sexual orientation, peer relations, and campus climate. (p. 295)

A multidimensional framework for men and masculinities praxis provides the critical opportunity to work with men within their communities to collaboratively seek liberation. By focusing on the ways in which men might experience oppression in their intersecting identities, however, it becomes possible to divert attention from their responsibility to dismantle gendered oppression.

Postmodern and poststructuralist feminist approaches to college men and masculinities praxis have attempted to engage diverse masculine embodiments. These types of initiatives work to disrupt binary and restrictive understandings of gender to "push for the reconstruction and transformation of all masculinities…and [allow] for a broader range of gender expression and identities to exist" (Jourian, 2018, p. 5). The utilization of these approaches is limited on college campuses, and, in response, several scholars offer recommendations for pushing this theoretical direction forward. Catalano and Jourian (2018), for example, called upon LGBTQ center practitioners to utilize strategies that disrupt normative understandings of gender; they argued that LGBTQ centers can create dialogue spaces focused on how "gay men and trans* men inhabit and perform hegemonic masculinity or how queer women may reinforce hegemonic masculine norms" (p. 45). Using a similar framework, Kupo and Castellon (2018) argued that women's centers need to continue

engaging in more complex and expansive understandings of gender. For instance, they point to how some women's centers now have critically moved beyond the binary to include trans*, non-binary, and masculine-of-center experiences. Additionally, some centers "recognize that masculinities apply to more than cisgender men and are actively attempting to demystify the mission of women's centers by educating and complicating notions of gender" (Kupo & Castellon, 2018, p. 20). Postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives attempt to assess local power relations rather than large, abstract social structures (Anyon, 1994) and often view identity, gender specifically, as constructed through performance (Butler, 2004). Understanding power relations and performance in the context of men and masculinities praxis is necessary for disentangling cisgender men from masculinity and for moving beyond essentialist understandings of gender, sex, and the body. Still, feminist scholars have debated the utility and practicality of postmodern and poststructuralist approaches in working towards gender liberation, particularly when attention and analysis is diverted from the institutional manifestations of patriarchy to individual power relations (Bhavani & Coulson, 2003; Currie, 1992).

This analysis, through drawing connections between feminist theoretical perspectives and college men and masculinities praxis, provides critical insight on the limitations of narrow or oversimplified approaches to the work. To move this work forward, practitioners must better understand and apply diverse feminist perspectives related to men, masculinity, and power. Doing so will provide practitioners with the opportunity to critically reflect upon the opportunities and risks of their approaches to engaging topics related to men and masculinities. Specifically, practitioners must call into question the theoretical underpinning of their approaches, understand the purpose and limitations associated with them, and interrogate how their programs or initiatives work to unsettle systems that have maintained dominance over women, trans*, queer, and non-binary people on college campuses and beyond.

Application of Feminist Theoretical Perspectives

Men and masculinities practitioners must go beyond just understanding and acknowledging critical theoretical perspectives, they must also apply them in praxis. This process requires practitioners to examine "whether and how…frameworks of contemporary masculinity theory are being challenged and changed by a thorough incorporation of different feminist stances" (Robinson, 2003, p. 134). Applications of nuanced and sometimes at-odds theories related to disrupting the gender binary; analyzing the roles of individual, institutional, and systemic power; and recognizing the interconnectedness of oppressions through multidimensional frameworks offer liberatory possibilities for men and masculinities praxis that reductive, selective, and uninformed approaches cannot. To conclude, we offer a starting point for practitioners to critically consider and apply feminist perspectives to their praxis.

Like masculinity studies scholarship, men and masculinities praxis in higher education often fails to engage in balanced analyses of gender and power. Jourian (2017, 2018) called attention to the exclusion of critical theoretical perspectives in men and masculinities scholarship, and arguably the praxis it informs, by examining the ways in which current approaches reify hegemonic masculinity, genderism, and whiteness. For instance, Jourian (2017) demonstrated that "masculinities continue to be theorized as exclusively shaped and embodied by [white, heterosexual,] cisgender men" (p. 245) and argued that utilizing post-intentional, queer perspectives, Women of Color feminism, and critical trans politics in men and masculinities scholarship and practice can offer "liberatory potentials for everyone, including cis men and women, and trans*people" (p 246).

Through applying critical theories to the examination of men and masculinities, Jourian (2017, 2018) challenged taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and urges practitioners to engage diverse masculine people and embodiments in their praxes.

Catalano, Wagner, and Davis (2018) similarly called upon practitioners to apply critical and expansive understandings of gender in men and masculinities praxis. As evident from previously explored examples, men and masculinities initiatives often express aims of awareness, analysis, and action while overlooking the focus on "understanding our responsibilities to others for our actions, contributions, collusion, and absences" (Catalano, Wagner, and Davis, 2018, p. 15). Drawing from Barbara Love's (2013) model for liberatory consciousness, the authors developed a gender-aware framework that demonstrates that awareness, analysis, and action must be coupled with accountability. Through offering a gender-aware approach based on multidimensional theoretical perspectives, Catalano, Wagner, and Davis (2018) urged practitioners to not only engage others in understanding how masculinity informs interactions and sense of self, but also analyzing the role of gender and masculinity as organizers of social relations. Gender-aware practice offers a both/and approach that men and masculinities scholarship and praxis, particularly approaches relying on the 'masculinity in crisis' narrative, must utilize.

To critically apply strands of feminist thought, we offer the following questions to prompt reflection and action for college men and masculinities program design or evaluation:

- What is the purpose/intention of the initiative? How did the initiative emerge on campus?
- Which feminist theoretical perspectives predominantly inform the initiative's current intention, approach, and aims?
- In what ways do these theoretical perspectives offer opportunities for supporting gender equity rooted in systemic transformation? How do you know? How might they be better integrated into your praxis?
- How does the initiative include gendered experiences as they intersect with other social identities (race, sexuality, class, ability, etc.)?
- What limitations and potential harms exist? What is missing? How can you draw from feminist theoretical perspectives to directly address these limitations in your praxis?

We hope these questions can serve as a starting point to support how we, as a practitioner community, hold the nuances, contradictions, limitations and opportunities that the evolution of feminist theories offers to men and masculinities praxis.

Feminist theories are complex, ever-evolving, and not without limitations, providing multiple approaches and perspectives to advancing gender equity. Instead of strategically relying upon the feminist theoretical frameworks that are most friendly to the aims of our initiatives, we must challenge ourselves to learn and critically apply diverse feminist perspectives in advancing gender equity work. As an example, the narrative of 'masculinity in crisis' that has undergirded much of men and masculinities praxis de-centers the conversation from those who are primarily harmed by gender-based violence and oppression, instead focusing the call to action for men's investment in gender-equity as a self-serving project. Programs also overwhelmingly engage men's understandings and tensions with masculinity by using the constructs of 'men,' 'male,' and 'masculinities' interchangeably and solely restricting masculinities to "men's experiences, all of whom are assumed to be or are cis men" (Jourian, 2017, p. 245). While understanding the negative impact of gender socialization on cisgender men can serve as an initial approach to inviting them into the

conversation, initiatives must examine how gender socialization is a systematic process through which power is maintained and reproduced over women, queer, trans*, and gender nonconforming people. It is therefore critical to recognize the feminist theoretical approaches that are often over-looked in praxis, particularly postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives that disrupt normative, binary understandings of gender. Through engaging men and masculinities in a grounded, feminist praxis, practitioners can facilitate opportunities for critical gender consciousness-raising while simultaneously naming the impacts of patriarchy and multiple systems of oppression on all people without creating false equivalencies or symmetries.

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Intersectional Transfeminist Student Activism: *Trans*forming U.S. College Communities Through Everyday Anti-Cissexism Resistance

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Abstract

Trans student voices and activism have been the impetus for trans inclusion on college campuses. Yet, institutional narratives on trans inclusive campus communities cast the administration as changemakers driving gender diversity initiatives - ignoring trans students' agency and activism. By focusing on trans students' everyday gender liberation activism our project emphasizes trans students' daily work to create trans liberatory campus communities through intersectional transfeminist praxis that centralize their standpoints.

Keywords: *Cissexism, Gender Liberation, Trans, Intersectional, Transfeminisms*

> *If cis folks want to call segments of higher ed privileged bubbles of safe spaces...that's fine. Just let us have them! Because the need for safe spaces and gender neutral or gender liberated restrooms [and] classrooms, stems from the fact that mainstream society, you know, "white-straight, cis, male, affluent, neurotypical, and able-bodied society" is a system designed to protect those in positions of power and authority...trans folks, I think, simply wish to have a sanctuary or a share in public society...[T]he maintenance of "safe spaces" is to contest or escape the onslaught of hate that trans communities and in particular Black and Brown trans young adults face (V, trans student activist, NJ state college, 2017).*

Historically, trans student voices and activism have been the impetus for trans inclusion on college campuses (Beemyn & Rankin, 2016; Case, Kanenberg, Enrich, & Tittsworth, 2012; Johnson, 2014). Yet, most institutional narratives on efforts to create trans inclusive campus communities cast the administration as benevolent changemakers driving gender diversity initiatives while ignoring trans students' agency and activism. We argue that trans students' resistance to cissexism on campus dispels narratives that locate the institution as the instigator of social change. The continuum of trans students' resistance involves open acts of defiance and covert daily challenges to cissexism that include what one trans participant calls "cutthroat cis-heteronormativity" (V, 2017). Compared to their cisgender peers, many trans students, particularly trans students of color, are targeted for verbal, physical, and sexual violence at disproportionately higher rates simply for existing as non-normatively gendered bodies (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011). For this reason, *trans existence is resistance*. Trans students who resist cissexism risk intensified discrimination and hate violence on campus (Beemyn & Rankin, 2016; Johnson, 2014). Despite the dangers they face, trans students are not waiting for institutional authorities to create equitable campus communities.

Rather than concentrating solely on legal reform efforts to address violence and discrimination, this article focuses on attempts to improve transgender students' quality of life in higher

education (and beyond), particularly at our college, a New Jersey state public institution, from the vantage point of trans student activism. To date there is little scholarship that highlights the activist work of trans students on college campuses (Johnson, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2017a). Our research contributes to a small but growing field of scholarship that reconfigures the narrative on higher education to center the work of trans students, redefining activism in the process.

Trans epistemology, intersectionality, feminist, and critical trans politics are key theoretical frameworks, perspectives, and analytic tools that constitute the feminist mixed methods approach shaping this research. To honor and make visible the labor, struggles, and voices of trans students, we researched in dialogue with them, applying a feminist methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2013) to collect and organize data. In this way, our research crosses disciplines, integrating feminist, trans, people of color, whiteness, and higher education studies. The interdisciplinarity of a feminist approach allows us to combine theories and methodologies to access and explicate trans students' variegated experiences of oppression and daily resistive practices.

By focusing on trans students' everyday gender liberation activism we begin to shift the dominant discourse from one defined, in part, by negatives and erasures to one that prioritizes trans students' subjectivities or standpoints (Collins, 1990). Our project emphasizes trans students' daily work to create trans liberatory campus communities through intersectional transfeminist praxis that centralize their standpoints. Trans student subjectivities are central to the development of what Nicolazzo (2017b) called "trans* epistemologies," that is, the unique way in which trans students "creat[e] truth and knowledge" (p. 4) in order to transform higher education or create gender liberated campuses. Generated through a careful articulation of trans people's various standpoints is trans* epistemologies. In this case, trans students produced digital *testimonios* (Anzaldua, 1987), or testimonies, that convey their standpoints and epistemologies—i.e., their uniquely transgender perspectives, knowledges, and truths.

Trans student testimonios reveal that despite its location on the cutting edge of policy shifts that address trans students' rights, our college, a New Jersey state public institution (NJSPI) remains a site of structural cissexism. NJSPI is a community that trans students must constantly work to make tolerant, if not accepting, momentarily supportive, if not dependably safe, and moderately accessible, if not wholly inclusive. Policy and legal changes are vital to trans people's liberation, but formal rights alone will not create trans inclusive and liberatory communities. Some of NJSPI's trans student activists discern the limitations of policy change driven by neoliberal approaches to diversity and inclusion. One trans student, Zara, called neoliberal inclusion practices a "numbers game" that forecloses students' ability to transform campus communities due to the overemphasis on providing basic accommodations—which often only exist on paper or online (Erlick, 2018).

For our college's trans student activists, instituting concrete long-lasting change demands intersectional transfeminist politics. The politics of intersectional transfeminist activism are grounded in an understanding of the significance of intersectionality to emergent transfeminist theories and positions. Jack Halberstam (2018) argued that "[i]ntersectionality remains a very important tool within any attempt to understand the historical arc of relations between trans* people and feminist and queer communities precisely because, while white women were often exclusively focused on issues of womanhood, people of color could not afford a singular focus" (para. 21). Intersectional transfeminism is a lens through which some trans student activists come to understand the complexities and consequences of overlapping, co-constitutive identities and oppressions. For these students, intersectional transfeminism provides a framework for envisioning and creating a campus community that is affirming and inclusive of trans people across lines of race,

class, ability, sexuality, size, immigration status, and so on. We only need to listen to their voices and follow their lead.

To that end, we begin by contextualizing trans student activism within the emergent field of trans studies in higher education, then we explain the theories and methodological approaches that undergird our research followed by an analysis of the intersectional transfeminist frameworks, and practices that inform and animate trans student activism. We conclude with a summary of our findings and discuss trans student activists' visions for creating gender liberated campuses.

Literature Review

Higher education trans studies is a small but important and expanding field with few studies that centralize trans students as change agents. The limited body of scholarship on trans college students offers crucial insights into their gendered self-conceptions, experiences of anti-trans discrimination, and persistence in the face of cissexism on campus (Bilodeau, 2005, 2009; Catalano, 2015; Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Jourian, 2017; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo 2016a, 2016b, 2017a; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Pusch, 2005). A large body of work focuses on strategies for creating trans inclusive campuses (Beemyn & Rankin, 2016; Squire & Beck, 2016). Several reports examine the status of trans students' rights especially after 2001, the year the Transgender Pride Flag was first publicly displayed and over a year after Transgender Day of Remembrance was first observed (de'Carlo, 2018; Lambda Legal, 2016; Leveque, 2017; Sausa, 2002). These studies included testimonies from trans students who engaged in organized and unorganized daily acts of resistance to cissexism on campus. For instance, filing a lawsuit to gain access to campus bathrooms that align with a student's (trans)gender identification served as a formal or organized resistive act carried out with the help of others; while, a lone individual's insistence that campus offices update official school records to reflect their chosen name and correct pronouns demonstrated an informal or unorganized resistive act (Lambda Legal, 2016; Transgender Law Center, 2015). Most of the literature documented the isolation, transphobia, enmity, and violence to which trans students are subjected (Nicolazzo, 2017a). Establishing a record of trans students' oppression is necessary to developing effective strategies for creating gender liberated campuses. A singular focus on oppression, however, is an incomplete portrayal of trans students' lived experiences that are also defined by persistence and resistance to discrimination. Scholarship that analyzes anti-trans oppression while acknowledging and emphasizing trans students' ability to endure, and in some cases, thrive in these repressive contexts advances a narrative that both educates cis people and empowers trans students.

Higher education trans studies introduces and explores a long neglected and crucial experience in the world of academia, but there is a dearth of scholarship on trans students with multiple identities. Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, and Savage (2002) and Nicolazzo (2017a) offered insightful studies into the ways disability structures trans students' identities and experiences of cissexism. The ways ableism, cissexism, and white supremacy converge at an ideological and institutional level, however, remains an uncharted terrain of scholarly inquiry. The virtual absence of comprehensive studies on the positionality of trans students of color on college campuses is particularly disturbing given the greater rates at which they are targeted for discrimination and violence compared to white trans students (Grant et al., 2017). Higher education trans studies tends to centralize white trans students' experiences while providing no meaningful interrogation of whiteness as an intersection with transness. There are a few notable exceptions to this trend such: as Beemyn's (2019) anthology, *Trans People in Higher Education*, which includes multiple works that name

and interrogate whiteness as an intersection with transness; T. J. Jourian's (2017) discussion of the ways in which race and white supremacy are invisibilized and enacted through white trans masculinities even as these forces shape and constrain trans masculinites of color; Johnson's (2014) intersectional analysis of trans student activists' racial, sexual, dis/abled, religious, and national identities; Nicolazzo's (2016b) examination of Black non-binary trans students' experiences of isolation on campus due to racism in white cis and queer spaces and cissexism in Black cis spaces; and Brook's (2016) report on Indigenous trans students.

Scholarship on trans students as change agents on college campuses documents the institutional and microaggressive cissexisms to which trans students are subjected as well as their resistance to it (Case et. al., 2012; Johnson, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a). Nicolazzo's (2017a) *Trans* in College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and Institutional Policies for Inclusion*, the most recent book-length exploration of trans students' experiences on campus, mad   es a vital contribution by highlighting trans students' agency. Nicolazzo emphasized trans students' "resiliency practices," or coping mechanisms, and survival strategies. She also explored the "hidden" and open liberatory acts that constitute the exhausting daily labor of confronting cissexism on campus. To create trans affirming campuses, she insisted that institutional authorities go beyond policy shifts and grand declarations on diversity and inclusion. Building on the work of Dean Spade (2011), Nicolazzo (2017a) encourages administrators and faculty to adopt a "trickle up" (p. 138) approach to creating change that centers the needs of the most marginalized and endangered groups on campus. In so doing, institutional authorities privilege trans students' voices and concerns, an indispensable step towards creating gender liberated campus communities. Scholarship on trans student resistance demonstrates that where institutional authorities fail to acknowledge and elevate their needs and concerns, trans students are not waiting for them to end discrimination. Trans students persist in challenging and enduring cissexist oppression on campus.

Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

To honor the labor, struggles, and voices of trans students, we conducted this research in dialogue with them, applying a transfeminist approach (Koyama, 2003) to the interview methods used to collect, organize, and analyze our interview data. A transfeminist research methodology that centers trans people, acknowledges the multiplicity of their social identities, supports their struggle for liberation, and allows us to identify the ways in which trans students mobilize their truth and knowledge to create trans inclusive campuses. A transfeminist methodological approach also permits us to discern and analyze the liberatory potential of trans students' everyday activism (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2017). We weave trans students' testimonies together with the emergent literature on trans students in higher education and legal reform approaches to transgender rights on college campuses. Our transfeminist interview research method provides a framework for understanding trans students' everyday actions as important practices by emphasizing specificity—the sort of attention to particular instances that complicates an understanding of overgeneralized, taken-for-granted, and totalizing views of being and knowing. Feminist inflected research critically investigates the dialogic relationships between agency and social structures, subverting the notion that subjects are passively produced through institutions and highlighting the ways subjects produce themselves with and against material and ideological forces (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

Our own intersecting identities and positionalities in higher education stimulated our interest in trans students' subjectivities, experiences of oppression, and resistive practices. As non-

binary trans identified professors assigned female at birth (AFAB), we live at the intersections of privilege and oppression and use interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship as tools to interrogate and challenge social injustice. One of us a Black middle class immigrant and untenured faculty member whose teaching and scholarship merges Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), African American Studies, and U.S. History, and the other, a white U.S. born first-generation tenured faculty member with working class roots whose teaching and scholarship blends WGSS, Transnational Feminist and African Studies. For us, trans students and trans inclusion are central to a broader liberatory project. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from, teach, mentor, and support trans students who work to make their campus safe, affirming, and transformed.

To amplify the voices, center the vantage points, and support the resistive efforts of trans students on our campus, we invited several trans student activists at our college, NJSPI, to participate in this research project through two confidential online questionnaires. The design of the questionnaires function as digital interviews in which we posed open-ended short answer questions. In these digital interviews, we asked students to name their intersecting identities, discuss their experience of being trans on campus, and describe their activist strategies for negotiating campus cissexism. To ensure accurate reporting of student responses, allow time for thoughtful response and editing, and to preserve the authenticity of student voices, we distributed the questionnaire through email. After reviewing their initial responses, we followed-up with requests to expand on or clarify their answers. The six participants included in this research are trans identified, although they vary in how they locate themselves within the broad category of trans (see Table 1).

The questionnaires connect to our overarching research questions: How much are trans students included, considered, or consulted in the creation of college and university policies, task forces, and practices? How much do these changes reflect trans students' activism and concerns? When institutional policies are changed, in what ways do the changes make trans people more vulnerable?

Telling Our Stories: Toward Transfeminist of Color Standpoints and Epistemologies

My hope is that my activism—telling my story, pushing for better conditions, creating spaces for us to exist—will be able to show cis people what challenges we actually face and make them think about the various things that they take for granted. (Zara)

Our questionnaire method builds on the political tradition of emphasizing lived experience through testimony. Latina feminists (Anzaldua, 1987; Latina Feminist Group, 2001) developed the practice of *testimonio*—giving testimonies that tell life stories—as a way to reclaim and generate knowledge based on lived realities, thus politicizing their identities and fostering possibilities for coalition building. This approach is buttressed by the work of women of color feminist *standpoint* and *situated knowledges theories* (Collins, 1990) which adduce that research on relations of power must start with the lives of marginalized people who are socially located in ways that heighten their awareness of inequality. Collins argued that because of their positionality within the intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, and class, Black women as a group possess a distinctive standpoint and situated knowledge—a "unique angle of vision" (p. 22) and expertise on the social world. Rooted in everyday experience, Black women's standpoint is marked by an intersectional under-

standing of oppression and a history of struggle against it. We use Collin's (1990) standpoint theory as an entryway into trans experiences of struggle and resistance. It is through the process of giving testimony that we are able to access the lived experiences that constitute transfeminist standpoints and epistemologies. Feminist research thus authorizes testimonies of marginality as a site of epistemic authority and privilege.

We link the concept of *testimonio* to research on trans college students' campus activism. Johnson's (2014) analysis of trans students' *testimonios*, or stories of their lived experiences, led him to conclude that individual (versus collective) action is activism when it serves an "emancipatory role in the lives of...students" (p. 6). Historian Robin Kelley (2011) uses the term *infrapolitics* to describe working-class Black people's unorganized daily acts of resistance to white supremacy. We interpret trans students' activism through the prism of infrapolitics as everyday, unorganized acts of resistance to cissexism. Trans students' activism includes daily gender affirming actions that, as V stated, permit them to "express vital and authentic parts of [themselves]..." and facilitates their safety and survival in cissexist campus communities.

Demographic Information of Research Participants

The trans student activists in our study understood themselves as occupying multiple vectors of difference that fundamentally shape their trans identities and experience of being trans.

Pseudo-nym	Trans Identity	Race/ Ethnicity/ National-ity	Age	Pronoun	Major	Other Noted Identities
Andy	Trans Non-binary	White U.S. American	21	they/them/ their	Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS)	Bisexual Mentally ill Graduate student AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth)
Alexandria	Trans-woman	Mexican Jewish Person of color	23	She/her	English & WGSS	Working class Graduate student Educator AMAB (Assigned Male at Birth)

Zara	Trans-woman	Jewish Israeli "off-white"	20	She/her	WGSS	Queer Femme Fat Disabled First-Gen-eration Col-lege Stu-dent AMAB
Jack	Non-binary	White U.S. American	23	they/them ze/hir	Biology, Public Health & WGSS mi-nor	Queer Soft femme Middle class Graduate student AFAB
V	Non-binary or trans	Romanian Person of Color	23	they/them/ their he/his//him	History & WGSS	Femme Adopted Gender fluid Middle class Graduate student AMAB

Table 1. Participant Demographics

It is important to note that this research is institutionally specific and as such, is not a representative sample, nor is it meant to be generalizable. We argue that localized contexts are important as they are differentially embodied, varied, and disparate. The site of our study, NJSPI, is a small, state public comprehensive college whose students, faculty, and staff are predominantly White, cis, and middle class. The campus has a small community of trans students that are also majority white and middle class. While NJSPI's trans students receive structural support and affirmation that does not exist at most colleges and universities (Campus Pride, 2017a), they are continually subjected to cissexism on campus. An intersectional transfeminist politics inspires and fuels the daily resistive practices that facilitates their survival in the face of persisting discrimination.

Intersectional Transfeminist Theories and Activism.

Intersectional feminisms is a key theoretical framework shaping this research. *Intersectionality*, first conceptualized by the Combahee River Collective (Eisenstein, 1978), a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), discussed in Collins' (1990) conceptions of Black feminist thought,

Francis & Jaksch—Intersectional Transfeminist

and expanded upon by Collins and Bilge (2016), is built on the premise that oppressions based on race, gender, class, sex, and sexuality are interlocking, inseparable, and experienced simultaneously. Intersectionality theories connect to the complex work of trans student activists as they critically engage with existing bodies of knowledge, institutional policies and practices, and the politics of everyday life.

Our work also builds on the revolutionary work of transfeminist scholars, artists, and activists of color (cardenas, 2016; Green & Bey, 2017; Gossett, 2015; Koyama, 20030 Tsang, 2012; TransWomen of Color Collective, n.d.; Vaccaro, 2010. Koyama, a genderqueer Asian intersex activist and writer, coined the term *transfeminism* in 1992, which she described as "a movement for and by transwomen who view their liberation [as]...intrinsically linked to the liberation of women and beyond" (p. 203). While cis feminists have traditionally framed sexism as rooted in patriarchy, some transfeminists argue that the gender binary (e.g., being non-consensually assigned female or male at birth) is a more useful way of understanding sexism's many forms, especially discrimination against and the marginalization of gender nonconformists (Enke, 2012). We use Koyama's (2003), Nicolazzo's (2017b), and Strykers' (2006) transfeminist theories to emphasize and map an alternative epistemological genealogy of transliberation in relation to students' everyday anti-binarist activism (Bettcher, 2017; Bettcher & Garry, 2009; cardenas, 2016; Enke, 2012; Enke, 2018; Hines, 2017; Koyama, 2003 Nicolazzo, 2017b; Stryker 2006). By doing so, we situate transfeminisms as arising from various tensions within trans and cisgender women of color feminisms and theories, including dominant queer (white/cisgender) theoretical framings of trans liberation (Bey, 2017 Cohen & Jackson, 2015; Green & Bey, 2017; Green & Ellison, 2013; Snorton 2017). Moreover, we emphasize the transfeminist concepts of *intersectional cissexism* (anti-trans discrimination that intersects with other forms of oppression) and *racist transmisogyny* (racially infused hostility against transwomen of color) as significant entry points into exploring what we call *trans visibility practices* or *erasure resistance*. The terms trans visibility practices and erasure resistance describe the variety of covert and open ways trans people push back against cissexist discourses and practices that silence and exclude them or render them invisible.

Kenji Yoshino's (2006a) *covering theory* adds critical insight into the institutional forces that prompt trans students to resist erasure. Yoshino interrogates the normative standards and assimilation practices impacting the civil rights of minority groups. Yoshino uses the term *covering* to describe the hegemonic practice of expecting, encouraging, pressuring, or compelling subordinate groups to change the way they express themselves to assimilate into dominant society. Through covering, dominant groups explicitly and implicitly demand that subordinate groups conform and downplay aspects of their identity in order to facilitate their success, safety, and survival. Higher education institutions that self-identify as trans inclusive, but fail to function as such, are engaging in covering practices that force trans students to conceal their gender identities, adopt normative gender presentations, and repress their gender non-normative views in order to protect themselves from cissexism. Yoshino (2006b) argued that many current forms of discrimination do not target subordinate groups as a whole. "Rather, it aims at the subset of the group that refuses to cover...[or] assimilate to dominant norms. And for the most part, existing civil rights laws do not protect individuals against such covering demands" (Yoshino, 2006b, para. 11).

Trans students' daily intersectional transfeminist activism is a mechanism through which they resist covering practices. Intersectional transfeminist discourses stress the multiple oppressions that are enmeshed in cissexism. For example, transphobic violence is largely perpetrated against "trans people who are poor, who are of color, and/or on the trans female/feminine spectrum" (Serano, 2007, p. 46). However, as Talia Mae Bettcher (2017) observed, "since trans men

are also vulnerable to sexism, transphobia, and the inter-blending thereof, trans feminism would be ill advised to exclude them from its purview" (p. 2). Ultimately, we suture women of color feminist theoretical approaches to a trans* epistemology in order to center trans students' voices and experiences in a narrative of change on college campuses.

Living Our Authentic Selves: Intersectional Transfeminist Student Activism

In the sections that follow, we explore NJSPI trans student activist's philosophies and practices. Through our narrative analysis of their digital testimonios, we collaboratively organized their responses around common patterns and themes that emerged from their testimonios. Intersectional transfeminist theoretical perspectives informed our thinking in the organization of the data, resulting in the themes highlighted in the following sections: *trans activism histories*, *cissexist oppression, institutional inclusion myths, intersectional identities, labor*, and *intersectional activism*. The contours of the following sections are marked by excerpts from student testimonios. We foreground these headings to signal that we are literally and symbolically following students' lead.

Trans Activism Histories in the Making

The history of trans students' anti-cissexism activism on college and university campuses is quite literally a history in the making. This is not to say that trans students' activism is new. Trans people were as present and active in the earliest queer campus movements as they were in the broader queer resistance struggle that played out, in part, on the streets of San Francisco, Greenwich Village, and Washington, D.C. from the 1950s through the 1990s (Beemyn, 2014; Feinberg, 2006; Frye, 2000).

Trans student activism in higher education is one sphere of this larger trans liberation movement. Two years after the Stonewall Rebellion, Gay Liberation activist groups such as the Student Homophile League were established "at hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the [U.S.]" (Beemyn, 2014, p. 22). For decades, trans students worked to foreground trans people's concerns in anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-immigrant, and anti-imperialist movements (Feinberg, 1998).

Over the last four years participants in our research at NJSPI engaged in various forms of activism. For example, Alexandria's activism included raising awareness about and serving immigrant and U.S.-born trans people of color in impoverished communities, and Andy's sexual violence prevention activism on campus addresses the experiences of trans students, students of color, students with disabilities, and students with intersecting gender, race, and ability identities.

With their activism, trans students are filling a void generated by institutional neglect. Zara, an undergraduate Jewish transwoman, names, analyzes, and experiences cissexism on campus, including the college's abandonment of trans students. She noted that offices and departments tasked with supporting trans students are chronically "understaffed....and while [the department that hosts her major] has a bit more institutional support, its academic status and limited budget curtail its ability to fully support trans and other marginalized students" (Zara). To Zara, the "lack of funding indicates an unwillingness from [NJSPI] to 'put its money where its mouth is' in terms of supporting [the campus'] marginalized and trans communities." Her comments highlight trans students' ability to identify and assess power relations on campus, critique a vacuum of structural support, and hold institutional authorities accountable to official declarations of diversity and inclusion.

Francis & Jaksch—Intersectional Transfeminist

An Overview of Everyday Anti-Cissexist Resistance: "Calling out Cissexism in Everyday Life"

Trans students' shared experiences of exclusion and symbolic erasure catalyzes their everyday resistance. Zara poignantly stated, "[C]is people do not realize what I have to face every day." She suggested that, in action, cissexism is a caustic form of "[i]gnorance. As a rule, cis people just don't get it, or else they don't care." She views cissexism as a barrier to the cisgender college community developing an understanding of how discrimination impacts trans students. In this context, the work of *being* trans, addressing cissexist microaggressions, combatting trans-invisibility, and resisting internalized cissexism is a vital form of activism (Pitcher, 2016).

Trans student respondents described the daily activist labor that is intrinsic to being trans. Jack stated that their activism "took the form of calling out cissexism in everyday life, like insisting on...[correct] pronouns, refuting biological essentialism, and asking how...those around me...inclu[de] trans individuals." Dean Spade (2018) stated that cisgender faculty, administrators, and students who misgender trans people practice the "hostility and erasure" that most trans students face. Misgendering is a form of symbolic erasure that invalidates trans students' identities, stifles their voices, and for some, contributes to anxiety, depression, and suicidality (Spade, 2018). When Jack challenged pedagogical practices that uphold binarist gender norms, then, they not only engage in the daily praxis of erasure resistance and the production of "trans*-centric" truth and knowledge that is potentially transformative; Jack is fighting for his life and the lives of every trans student on campus. Jack's activist work, their individual unorganized anti-cissexist resistance is a vital everyday act of survival (Nicolazzo, 2017a).

Some of the daily resistive labor of being trans is internal. V, an undergraduate trans student of color, is clear about the psycho-emotionally assaultive nature of cissexist microaggressions and the repressiveness of cisnormative gender and sex classifications. They recognize trans rights as crucial, but struggle with internal fears of transgressing cisgender norms that many trans people experience as "cutthroat." For V, the work of combatting cissexism starts with self-reflection. V stated, "Activism around trans issues, for me, was...about dismantling my inner prejudices and notions around gender and the intersecting oppression that keeps us closeted." V's comments highlight the problems with a trans inclusive strategy that largely focuses on legal reform without addressing the cissexism embedded in the institutional and broader campus culture. In their everyday lives, trans students are subject to the direct control of legal and administrative systems that V recognizes as "designed to protect mainstream society…those in positions of power and privilege...[i.e.,] white-straight, cis, male, affluent, neurotypical, and able-bodied society."

For some trans students, coming out relieves the burden of internalized oppression. The act of openly self-identifying as trans is an empowering trans visibility practice for some trans people who are navigating binarist communities. Andy is a white non-binary trans undergraduate student who most people perceive as cisgender. Trans people who are misread as cisgender are constantly confronted with the decision to resist erasure by disclosing that they are trans or conceal their gender identities and remain undetectable, which could protect them from discrimination and violence (Yoshino, 2006a). Andy chooses open resistance to erasure, a trans visibility practice. They discussed their experience of coming out in a majority cis campus community. Andy began to identify as trans as a first-year student at another institution, asking close friends to refer to them using they/them pronouns. As a sophomore, they transferred to NJSPI where they had greater freedom to explore and express a non-normative self-identification:

[N]ot long after I was at [NJSPI]...I felt comfortable introducing myself to strangers as [non-binary trans]. Part of what made me comfortable doing so...despite negative responses from people close to me claiming feminine gender expression meant I "wasn't really" trans, I faced nothing like that at [NJSPI]...[M]y friends became a strong support system and having a fresh start—[being at] a school where no one knew me—gave me the confidence to be stricter with people. [I]t made more sense...to allow myself to be stricter with pronouns because there was no "excuse" of having known me in the past—I could remind people politely and hope the response wasn't something about how it was hard to change—there was no change; I...was [always] trans at [NJSPI].

Andy's openly expressed non-binarist gender identity, the intentionality in and routineness of making themselves visible as trans, which includes an insistence that cis people use the right pronouns, illustrates the everyday activist work inherent in *being* trans in any space. The presence of trans students' bodies and the articulation of *trans* gender perspectives ruptures the cisnormative culture that undergirds institutional cissexism on campus.

Inclusion Myths/Exclusion Practices (a Provocation for Resistance): "I Don't Feel very Included or Welcomed; I Feel Barely Tolerated, to be Completely Honest."

Trans student interviewees shared the feeling that some college communities are more amenable to non-normative gender identities than others,[1] but even on these campuses many trans students feel isolated and lack institutional support. They attribute this lived reality, in part, to the absence of trans employees. Alexandria, a transLatina graduate student, said, "Despite [NJSPI] being a progressive campus, there was no representation of trans staff or support...regarding my [gender] identity." In their testimonies, trans students asserted that institutional reform should address the gender segregation of higher education employees.

Trans students unequivocally stated that opportunities to connect with trans faculty and staff would make their experience of the campus's gender culture more positive. Throughout college, Jack, a white non-binary trans undergraduate student, says there were many indications of their discomfort with a cisnormative gender identity. Seeing trans people in official positions on campus, connecting with trans faculty and staff, would have helped Jack to understand their gender identity conflict (Garner, 2014). Jack said, "I didn't know being trans...was a possibility; those thoughts were there but I had no context. If I had more queer and trans role models...I would have figured it out much sooner." A faculty and administration that includes trans people is critical to stemming trans students' disproportionate dropout rates and fostering an inclusive campus community (Grant et al., 2011). At institutions that have few or no trans employees, trans students' work of surviving the social isolation wrought by institutional cissexism is a daily act of resistance (Pryor, 2015).

Several of our respondents noted the paradox in an institution crafting and adopting inclusion statements and discursively promoting itself as inclusive versus *practicing* inclusion. Zara emphasized that for her, there is "a distinction between inclusivity and a welcoming atmosphere/climate." She astutely stated that for marginalized and underrepresented students, "welcoming is what brings you in and inclusivity is what makes you stay." Zara continued,

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1. Andy is a transfer student and interviewees frequently referred to their time at other colleges, visiting friends on other campuses, etc.

[T]o many trans students…[w]elcoming refers to actively encouraging trans students to come to the college and involving us in [the development of] documents such as the mission statement of the college... Inclusivity, on the other hand, refers to the state of being automatically included on campus—for example, having well-funded, accessible services to meet [trans students'] basic needs, using [trans] inclusive language automatically without prompting or self-congratulation, and centering or at the very least including transgender voices.

Zara said that she and other trans students feel as though NJSPI has failed to create a campus community that is both welcoming and inclusive. She asserted that institutional authorities "make half-hearted gestures towards trans equality…[that] are inclusive in theory only." V agreed when they said institutions with a "serious commitmen[t] to trans liberation and holistic equality" must reject superficial statements on diversity and inclusion. In the absence of a better informed campus community and policy enforcement, Zara sums up the sentiment of many trans students: "I don't feel very included or welcomed; I feel barely tolerated, to be completely honest."

Zara's frustration with the institution and its failure to act comprehensively on its commitment to inclusion is compounded and complicated by her acknowledgement that she does not always openly challenge trans exclusive practices on campus. Zara, who describes herself as "a pre-estrogen trans girl," is frequently perceived as a cross-dressed cis man. She sometimes does not correct faculty, staff, and students who misgender her because that work "is intimidating and exhausting." Zara grapples with her own invisibility and silencing as a transwoman while also carrying the burden of choosing, at times, not to engage in the trans visibility practice of explicitly advocating for herself in the face of cissexism. The work of resisting her symbolic erasure would be constant if Zara chose to challenge every act of misgendering. In these instances, Zara bears the weight and assault of symbolic erasure even as she persists and endures in being who she is: a transwoman. In a context of unrelenting discrimination where Zara knows her "safety…cannot be guaranteed"—in the moments when she chooses self-preservation—Zara both embodies and signifies what it means to practice resilience and erasure resistance through persistence and existence by being trans.

Zara's safety concerns are well-founded. Trans youth experience alarmingly high levels of physical and sexual assault and harassment in school and Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Black, and mixed race immigrant and U.S.-born youth are targeted for these violences at even higher rates than white trans youth (Grant et al., 2011). One in four trans and gender nonconforming students report being sexually assaulted (Cantor et at., 2015). Twenty percent of trans and gender nonconforming undergraduate students state that campus security officers treated them with "hostility" (Lambda Legal, 2016, p. 39). Many trans students leave higher education due to the highly disruptive nature of cissexist harassment and trauma of violent victimization (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011).

Adopting trans inclusive policies does not guarantee that trans students are seen, safe, and supported. Trans student respondents agree that policy shifts alone will do little to address the cissexist culture trans students encounter daily. As of 2017, 1,036 colleges and universities have trans-inclusive anti-discrimination policies (Campus Pride, 2017b). Of these, 782 institutions made these policy changes after 2008 (Schneider, 2010). While these advances in the trans student rights movement are significant and inspire optimism, it is critically important to note that most colleges and universities—a whopping 75%—have not institutionalized anti-bias provisions for trans students and employees, nor do most state laws protect trans students (Infoplease, 2006).

Nondiscrimination policies provide trans students with an institutional basis for demanding an end to cissexist practices on campus. However, policy change alone does not stimulate a shift in institutional and campus community culture. On campuses with trans inclusive nondiscrimination clauses like NJSPI, gender non-normative students are routinely confronted with cissexist administrative, pedagogical, and peer violence. As Jack stated, these institutions "must continue to work to make every part of [the campus]...inclusive." In cissexist campus communities, trans students' most effective strategies for daily and immediate self-preservation, liberation, and survival are individual daily acts of resistance (Taylor, 2010).

Intersectional Identities, Intersectional Cissexism and Erasure Resistance: "Nothing Affects All Queer People the Same Way, Including...Transphobia."

Trans students link living their authentic selves to everyday resistance to intersectional cissexism, that is, anti-trans discrimination that intersects with other oppressions, particularly in the form of erasure. Student activists allude to the ways academic institutions discipline students and demand respectability in gender presentation through adherence to white middle class cisgender norms (Yoshino, 2006a). This demand for conformity, or covering practice, is a form of white cis-supremacist administrative violence (Spade, 2011), yet many institutional authorities view trans students as the source of the "problem." Alexandria, a working class transLatina graduate student, describes her struggle to come out as trans as overdetermined by white cisnormativity:

> I have always carried my [transgender] identity with me, but it has been something I kept to myself as I feared I wouldn't be able to succeed in life if I transitioned. I balanced my personal happiness with what I saw as a need to perform [traditional] masculinity to get through college and become an educator. Although I did not experiment with cross-dressing or drag before I entered college, I knew deep down that the clothes and style in which I presented myself was not [authentic]...[At] [NJSPI], I knew there were trans and non-binary students...around me. Despite this, I still felt that as one of the few queers of color, and as a queer brown teacher...there were expectations that I conform to masculin[e] [norms] which made [cisgender] people...comfortable.

Alexandria's resiliency practice, her tactical decision to conceal her trans identity and adopt a cisnormative gender presentation, was a hidden way of coping with a particular form of racialized and classed cissexism entangled with a "trans* normativity" (Nicolazzo, 2016a, p. 1174) that essentializes trans as the state of having biomedically transitioned. Alexandria's performance of traditional masculinity reflected white supremacist middle class cissexist norms that permitted her to be undetectably trans, which she experienced as necessary to succeed in college (Aizura, 2014). Being perceived as a middle class queer Mexican cisgender man did not strip Alexandria of her trans identity and trans experience—despite a traditional gender presentation, she was always trans. Further, while presenting as an affluent Mexican cis man did not protect Alexandria from racism, heterosexism, and xenophobia, it did shield her from an intensified degree of transmisogyny.

As Alexandria's experience illustrates, trans students' daily resistive actions are defined by the themes of overlapping identities and oppressions. She agrees with Zara's observation that "even queerness is not...a guarantee of understanding trans needs." As president of a student-run

LGBTQ center whose participants are overwhelmingly cisgender, white, and affluent, Alexandria devoted her time to exploding racist transmisogynist stereotypes in white cis and LGB spaces. She organized a "Trans Latina Conference," featuring trans Latina speakers, who she reported:

> share[d] with students what *they* saw as the immediate issues facing transLatinas as opposed to...the [dominant] narrative on college campuses...[M]any [cis] students assumed that the women presenting were sex workers and were surprised that they were business owners and managers. The conversation opened up a discussion of *talking with trans women as opposed to talking about them* to assess needs for the community…[S]tudents need to understand that transwomen have complex identities, and not every story is the same.

Alexandria's story about dismantling racist-cissexist stereotypes is a crucial form of erasure resistance. The assumption that transwomen of color are sex workers erases the multiplicity and complexity of their gender identities, sexual practices, and labor statuses—an erasure practice for which Alexandria is targeted. Because she identifies as a transChicana educator and navigates predominantly white queer and heterosexual spaces on campus, Alexandria understands what V means when they say "[t]he oppression of marginalized groups hinges upon the creation and maintenance of myths, stereotypes and blatant falsehoods." Alexandria asserted that assuming transwomen of color are sex workers criminalizes and endangers them. A transwoman of color who is suspected of performing sex work is vulnerable to street harassment that includes stops, searches, arrests, and/or violence from police (Saffin, 2015). While it is true that the collision of institutionalized white supremacy, misogyny, and anti-trans discrimination pushes disproportionate numbers of transwomen of color into extreme poverty that forces some to perform sex work in order to survive (Saffin, 2015), it is wrong—and dangerous—to assume that all transwomen of color are sex workers.

Alexandria practices erasure resistance when she imagines a livable life for transLatinas that defies racist transmisogynist stereotypes. This is very difficult to do in an environment rife with white supremacist cissexist beliefs and institutional barriers to transwomen of colors' well-being. According to Marquis Bey (2017), "Black and trans* are both disruptive orientations indexed imperfectly by bodies said to be black or trans* and thus can succumb to logics of white supremacy and cissexism" (p. 278). By creating a platform for transwomen of color to generate an anti-racist, anti-cissexist trans-centered truth and knowledge through the articulation of their experiences, shattering stereotypes, and educating white cis LGB students, Alexandria disrupts white supremacist cissexist logics that simultaneously universalize transwomen of color as sexual "deviants" and criminalize those that do sex work for economic survival.

Alexandria's understanding of racialized gender power relations within interpersonal, disciplinary, and cultural spheres demonstrates the ways that intersectional politics centers structural factors and drives erasure resistance. Thus, Alexandria's approach counters neoliberal pressures to focus solely on personal inequality as a way to upend trans oppression.

White trans respondents' erasure resistance is also centrally defined by an intersectional politics that acknowledges that anti-trans discrimination is racialized, and therefore, produces divergent experiences of cissexism for trans people across race lines. As a white middle class trans person, Jack indicated that intersectionality is critical to their activism. They stated,

[There is] [n]o way to talk about queer people or trans people accurately without specifying raceclass, ability, and so on. To talk about any issue for "queer people" as a whole would be ludicrous [because] nothing affects all queer people the same way, including...transphobia. I incorporate intersectional concerns by not homogenizing all queer or trans people and being intentional when discussing oppression.

Jack's intersectional activist practices are woven into the process of investigating trans and queer people's experiences of racism, classism, and ableism. For Jack, intersectional activism and erasure resistance means asking who is reflected in campus events, film screenings, speaker panels, and course materials at a predominantly white middle class cis institution. Similarly, Andy's anti-violence activism is shaped by the demographics of a predominantly white campus and an awareness of the ways in which their white privilege changes their experience of cissexism. Andy shared their attempts to decenter whiteness and combat erasure by using their skin color and other privileges to connect with trans people of color on issues that "affect [them]…in different ways, usually less harshly":

[W]hile I hesitate to speak for other people, I…use my position as a white transperson to educate and check other white people as a person [who is not]...vulnerable [to racism]....[Since] my community is very white, and since there is little understanding and knowledge of trans people, I am often talking about myself. Therefore...while...understanding that I hold [racial] privilege, I make it a point to get as educated as possible...and check in with the people in my life...who do not have the same social identifiers as me: trans people of color. While I am trans on campus, I know there are [other] trans people on...campus whose experience is very different from mine because...[they have intersecting] identities [that differ from mine].

Andy's activism is shaped by an awareness of the ways in which white supremacy renders invisible trans people of color and their oppression. They also know that their whiteness intersects with their trans identity—mediating and often mitigating the anti-trans discrimination they face. Even as white cis supremacy erects countless barriers to the freedom of trans people across race lines, Andy understands that white privilege protects white trans students like themselves from the racist oppression and violences animating the cissexism trans students of color endure.

Zara, who identified as an "off-white" Jewish transwoman, lives in a space where race and gender identity is both liminal and overlapping. She experienced the racialized gender alienation wrought by an intersectional cissexism that leads people to perceive her as a white cis man when her identity as a Jewish transwoman leaves her outside the realm of both Anglo-Saxon whiteness and cisgender maleness. She, therefore, simultaneously occupied a space in between whiteness and Brownness and a space in between binary cisgender identifications. Zara was aware that she accessed the privileges that come with passing as white, privileges that, in white cis spaces, are constrained by her transfeminine gender presentation. Because she is a "white passing" transwoman, police do not profile her as a sex worker when she is on the street—a cissexist assumption that Black transgirls like Cece McDonald regularly face (Pasulka, 2012). Zara's transfemininity, however, may make her a target for police and civilian harassment and violence—terrorism that, for Cece McDonald, was racist, transmisogynist, inescapable, and compounded with incarceration.

Zara's alienation from white cis masculinity and embracement of a sense of self grounded in an ethno-gender identification as a Jewish transwoman infuses her daily acts of resistance with

Francis & Jaksch—Intersectional Transfeminist

an intersectional ethos. She says trans student activists "must make sure that as many identity categories as possible are accommodated and embraced at all times, or else the work...perpetuates the exclusion and oppression that many of us already face." For her, "intersectional activism can be as simple as pointing out a queer workshop on intersectionality is being held in a non-ADA accessible room." While Zara describes this action as "simple," we recognize this approach as a transfeminist intersectional praxis that builds an inclusive campus community.

For Jack, the daily labor of intersectional anti-cissexist activism not only leads to emotional exhaustion or gender fatigue, it serves as the locus of a transfeminist politics of anger. Jack described:

> In biology classes, I highlighted the history and work of trans people both as researchers and the researched. In [gender] classes, I consistently asked how our work reflected the existence of trans people and transwomen in particular. I accepted the reputation of 24/7 trans advocate and fielded questions or got angry when needed…[T]rans issues were a hypothetical to [cis] students and staff.…trans issues would be...[addressed through] theory or understanding transness as a concept *rather than a lived reality for people in the room*. It's hard to get [cis] people to take inclusivity seriously when they don't see or know who it's affecting in everyday terms.

By routinely questioning the silencing and erasure of trans voices and experiences in the curricula, Jack engaged in erasure resistance that involved the exhausting daily work of educating cis professors and peers. In classes that address trans experiences, Jack reminds us that it is important to go beyond theorizing trans. To understand cissexism, we must explore trans people's lived realities. As Jack's testimony reveals, at times, anger inspires trans students' everyday acts of resistance. Like Audre Lorde (2007), who embraced Black women's rage as a strategic and subversive response to white supremacy, Susan Stryker (2006) encouraged transfeminist activists to own and express their politicized anger against cissexism: "May your rage inform your actions and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world" (p. 254). For some trans students, the expression of rage is a transformative and liberating aspect of their everyday activism and as such is a legitimate source of resistance.

Concluding Thoughts: Creating Gender Utopia by "Push[ing] Trans Issues Forward"

Trans student *testimonios* (Anzaldua, 1987; Latina Feminist Group, 2001), or testimonies, demonstrate the myriad ways in which trans students engage in struggle against cissexism. Through the lens of *infrapolitics* (Kelley, 2011), trans students' everyday unorganized acts of resistance are rendered visible. An *intersectional transfeminist politics* (Koyama, 2003) both emerges from and inform students' *trans* epistomologies*—a uniquely transgender truth and knowledge (Nicolazzo, 2017b) about injustice and propels trans students' everyday resistance to *covering practices* (Yoshino, 2006a) that silence, erase, exclude, and inspire hate violence against trans people. Students' intersectional anti-cissexist activism is marked by an array of individual, overt, and covert efforts to create trans affirming campus communities. The very act of existing, surviving, and succeeding as trans are on the spectrum of daily anti-cissexist resistance as are open demands for inclusion.

Student testimonies about their trans identities, experiences of oppression, activism, and the intersectionality of these domains provide answers to our overarching research questions: How

much are trans students included, considered, or consulted in the creation of college and university policies, task forces, and practices, and how much do these changes reflect trans students' activism and concerns? When institutional policies are changed, in what ways do the changes make trans people more vulnerable?

An intensive exploration of trans students' perspectives led us to argue that the dominant narrative about trans inclusivity on college campuses is not only cissexist, it erases trans students' agency and activism. The erasure of trans students as actors and agents of resistance is the result of what Spade (2011) identifies as the narrow focus on policy change with little consideration of trans students as catalysts or the embeddedness of cissexism and trans exclusion in institutional culture. Further, institutional inclusion narratives suggest there is no need for trans student activism on campus. However, this study foregrounds the necessity of continued activism that is grounded in a politics of intersectionality despite the erasure attempts that occur under the guise of trans inclusivity.

Our research reveals that NJSPI's attempts to make the campus community more inclusive have made trans people more vulnerable due to the limited reach and application of the college's "inclusion" practices. Student testimonios demonstrate that, without the broad consultation of trans people, policy shifts can function as a surrogate for substantive, ongoing, concrete institutional change and the necessary everyday labor that effects and produces trans centered inclusion.

The students in our study use intersectional transfeminist frameworks to analyze their lives, campus culture, and college policies. Their testimonies allow us to join scholars who have begun to expose a pivotal and under-examined dimension to anti-trans discrimination by interrogating the intersections of race and trans, cissexism and white supremacy (Beemyn, 2019; Brooks, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016b). We analyze the ways whiteness structures cissexist beliefs and practices, how white privilege changes trans students' experiences of cissexism, and the ways racist-cissexism operates at an ideological, structural, and interpersonal level.

Trans inclusion can only be achieved through daily resistance to cissexism as it intersects with other forms of oppression. Student testimonies show that an intersectional transfeminist politics is integral to their activism. Zara sums up the intersectional transfeminist activist ethos of each trans student respondent when she said,

> [I] incorporate intersectional concerns…[by] elevat[ing] the experiences of other marginalized people, especially non-white folks. To me, intersectional activism addresses both the other facets of my identity that are not related to gender and also considering who is and is not in the space with me.

For these students, intersectional transfeminism is a daily gender liberation practice infused with the enactment of an evolving global empathy, a broad, multidimensional social justice concern, and pursuit of freedom for oppressed groups.

Combatting cissexism on campus requires students to creatively navigate an institution that promotes a cosmetic and politically one-dimensional (i.e., non-intersectional) trans inclusivity from the limited perspective of legal reform. These students urge administrators to pursue cultural change and apply intersectional approaches to questions of fairness, discrimination, and structural inequality. At our institution, there exists a trans nondiscrimination policy, students are permitted to change their names and gender markers in some campus records and databases without a court order, they have access to gender neutral bathrooms (albeit less than 1% of campus restrooms are

trans inclusive), a few courses that centralize trans perspectives and experiences, an LGBTQ student-run resource center, and from 2015 to 2017, a Transgender Taskforce that sought to address trans students' rights on campus. Despite the existence of these crucial policies and policy-based resources, trans students at NJSPI continue to negotiate and confront cissexist microaggressions and structural anti-trans discrimination. V stated,

> I see [NJSPI] as more trans "tolerant" than inclusive…"Officially," the...administration expresses that *all* [NJSPI] students, including...trans students deserve [an] equal education...and should feel free to be themselves. Yet in terms of actual inclusivity, institutional reforms, and cultural engagements—the school can improve.

In spite of the institution's pro-trans policies, trans students still challenge and endure cis professors and administrators who refuse to use the correct pronoun and chosen name, they pay tuition to a college whose course offerings marginalize or render invisible their vantage points and lived experiences, there are virtually no visible trans faculty and staff, there are no institutional guidelines for campus employees on the appropriate treatment of students and coworkers who socially transition, and they are confronted by cis students who treat them with hostility and disdain.

Trans students' daily liberatory activism, then, is a trickle-up approach (Spade, 2011) to creating change that includes personally confronting unfair policies and practices, representing the trans community, educating others about cissexism. Trans students are gender rebels who, as Zara says, "push trans issues *forward*" by resisting cissexism in ways that go beyond court battles and organized public protests. Trans students' activism includes daily, self-protective, gender affirming actions that facilitate their safety and survival in cissexist campus communities. By sharing their stories, trans student activists forge allyships and coalitions with other students, faculty, and staff, and link their daily and personal struggles to other legacies of struggle.

Trans students' everyday activist work—their shared struggle against cissexist administrative violence—transforms campus institutions and culture. Where the space is created for those conversations and actions to occur, there are trans students who will teach cis staff, faculty and students how to change the campus community into one that accepts gender diversity. As V aptly stated, academic institutions that have "serious commitments to trans liberation and holistic equality" must reject the superficial statements on diversity and inclusion that are endemic to the neoliberal project and actively work to normalize gender nonconformity. V suggests that the college should recruit, hire, and provide institutional support to trans faculty, particularly trans faculty of color, whose scholarship *and* teaching is intersectional and trans-centered.

Andy "think[s] students on campus have the power to have conversations that are utopian—it is our job to...see all the possibilities in the world, especially when [the absence of] such possibilities...means we are in danger." While Andy believes that trans students have the right to "*ask* for what...the trans community needs," they also know that trans students should not have to fight so hard for an equitable education. As staff and faculty, we are not the stewards of students' dreams. However, we do have the opportunity to support students' work to create safer, equitable, and just campus communities. Those of us with privileged identities are especially well-positioned to support trans students' voices and everyday activism.

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Envisioning New Praxis for Gender and Sexuality Resource Center: Place-Consciousness in Post-Secondary Education

Alex C. Lange

Abstract

Since 1971, in response to demands from student activists and student organizations, over 200 college and universities dedicated resources to the creation of gender and sexuality resource centers (GSRCs). While the establishment of these units is critical to the success of queer and trans students, the establishment of these offices without intention and attention to overlapping forms of oppression may lead to more harm than good. In this article, I offer ways for GSRCs to understand the ways place can influence educators' work, challenging colonial paradigms of gender and sexuality in education. I first situate GSRCs in the broader history of higher education. I then review the dimensions of a place-conscious education framework. Finally, I discuss the ways GSRCs can take-up a place conscious framework, explicitly examining their definitional work on campus as well as safe space programs. Through this, I argue GSRCs can take up the responsibility of being answerable to the colonial forces that undergird postsecondary education through this approach.

Keywords: *LGBTQ Center, Place-Consciousness, Critical Geography, Decolonization*

Postsecondary institutions in the United States continue to wrestle with their commitments to students who are marginalized by their racial, gender, sexual, religious, and disability identities, amongst others (Stewart, 2011). As students who are not upper class, able-bodied, neuro-typical, White, cisgender men continue gaining access to postsecondary education, institutions make decisions about how to help these students thrive in these institutions (Levine, 1986; Patton, 2010; Stewart, 2011). Indeed, as these student populations gained greater visibility and presence on campus, questions continue to arise concerning their success: Who is responsible for meeting these groups' needs? Who is responsible for assuring these students succeed at the same levels as other students?

One response to these questions has been the creation and staffing of identity-based offices and centers (Marine, 2011; Patton, 2010; Stewart, 2011). Multicultural, women's, and LGBTQ centers came into existence because of student activists' demands (Marine, 2011; Shuford, 2011; Steele, 1995). For instance, in the presence of institutions that were hostile to their experiences, Black students in the South, and Latinx and Indigenous students in the Southwest, organized to demand organizational support for their particular needs (Shuford, 2011; Steele, 1995). Though lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students existed on historically White campuses since their founding, campus purges of queer students were frequent in the 20th century (Graves, 2018; Wright, 2005), in addition to practices and policies meant to control LGB students (Dilley, 2002). While the specific tactics of campus purges are almost nonexistent today, LGTBQ students still report inhospitable campus environments (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazier,

2010), though researchers note an improvement in campus climates over time (Garvey, Flint, & Sanders, 2017).

Reports of campus inhospitality vary by institutional type. For instance, students at pre-dominantly/historically White religiously-affiliated institutions, which emphasize individualist re-ligious traditions, most commonly Christian-based colleges and universities, still face several bar-riers (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Coley, 2018a). At the same time, LGBTQ students at these institu-tions continue to organize and agitate for change, often finding significant meaning in their activ-ism while enrolled (Coley, 2018b). Additionally, scholars note the (sexual) conservativism of his-torically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) despite their founding missions based on the inclusion of those excluded at predominantly/historically White institutions (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Like student and faculty cultures at Christian colleges, this nar-rative of HBCU conservatism may be less ironclad than once thought (Mobley, 2015; Nguyen, Castro Samayoa, Gasman, & Mobley, 2018).

Following the energy from the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the first known campus space dedicated to LGBTQ students opened at the University of Michigan in 1971 (Marine, 2011; Schlager, 1998). Since then, campus spaces dedicated to LGBTQ students ballooned, with over 200 currently in existence and another 100+ campuses having a staff member charged with sup-porting queer and trans students without a dedicated space (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Professionals, n.d.). Fine (2012) found that being a prestigious, public institution in a more liberal political context more often led to the establishment of formalized LGBT resource centers. In the absence of a formalized center, student affairs professionals play a role in supporting and advocating for these students (Martin, Broadhurst, Hoffshire, & Takewell, 2018). More recently, some women's and gender centers began undertaking gender-expansive practices, including cis-gender men and transgender people of all genders in their services (Marine, Helfrich, & Randhawa, 2017). While it is less clear whether particular configurations of these services matter more than others, researchers continually demonstrate that LGBTQ students greatly benefit from the exist-ence of centers and staff members dedicated to supporting their experiences (Pitcher, Camacho, Renn, & Woodford, 2018; Tillapaugh, 2015).

However, the establishment of a resource center alone is not an automatic positive devel-opment for a campus community. Rather, the development of campus services mirrored the broader gay rights movement: they prioritized homonormative whiteness, a rendering of gayness "which constitutes the dominant 'gay' body as white, middle-class, cisgender, and male complete with static and binary conceptions of whiteness and masculinity" (Self, 2015, pp. 11-12). This prioritization also led many gender and sexuality resource centers (GSRCs) to pay less attention to the needs of transgender students (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Spencer & Patterson, 2017). While centering homonormative whiteness, centers can also be complicit in the settler colonial project, with its roots in defining land and knowledge as property to be consumed. LGBTQ centers, in their effort to spread knowledge and awareness about gender and sexuality, can still treat these knowledges as a form of property (Patel, 2015) to be banked into one's mind (Freire, 1970). In addition to *what* knowledge is rendered as intelligible by centers, the pedagogies employed can also be grounded in Eurocentric banking notions of education (Freire, 1970) that serve to foreclose what gender and sexuality are and what they are not.

In this article, I offer ways for GSRCs to become more place-conscious, or understand the ways places influences our work as educators. At the same time, I challenge GSRCs to wrestle with their simultaneous role as normalizing agents of sexuality and gender, and disruptive nature as a counterspace for students minoritized by their sexuality and gender. Specifically, I want to

disrupt the potential complicity of GSRCs in relying on colonial logics in the name of greater inclusion and equity work (Shahjahan, 2014). To accomplish this aim, I split this article up into three parts. First, I situate GSRCs within the broader history of the development of campus centers based on identity and geography. Second, I discuss the dimensions of Gruenewald's (2003) place-conscious education framework. Inspired by components of phenomenology, critical geography studies, and ecofeminism, I connect the dimensions of the framework to higher education and calls for spatial justice (Soja, 1996). Third, I discuss the ways GSRCs, among other postsecondary student support structures, can take up this place-conscious framework. As examples, I discuss both the spreading of knowledge of gender and sexuality as well as safe space programs. As authorities on what constitutes gender and sexual diversity, GSRCs can take a wider lens on the conceptions of gender and sexuality they share with campus groups. Additionally, I interrogate safe space programs as a site to question GSRCs' role as both a normalizing and disruptive agent, questioning one of the practices many have taken to be standard parts of LGBTQ center work (Marine, 2011). Ultimately, I argue GSRCs can take up the responsibility of being answerable to colonial and neoliberal forces which undergird postsecondary education (Patel, 2016; Spencer & Patterson, 2017) by adopting a more place-conscious approach.

Situating GSRCs in Greater Campus Center Development

Like many other cultural centers and area studies programs developed in the 1960s, GSRCs arose from student activism and unrest (Marine, 2011; Reuben, 1998). Like their cultural center and area studies counterparts, GSRCs developed intending to elevate marginalized scholarship and students (Reuben, 1998; Szanton, 2004). However, after World War II, international studies centers began appearing on college campuses, primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Defense to study other cultures (Riddle, 1989). At the same time institutions begrudgingly compromised with student activists for greater representation in the curriculum and in area studies (D'Emilio, 1992; Horowitz, 1987; Reuben, 1998), the U.S. Department of Defense continued to establish centers to study the Other and further the U.S. imperial project (Said, 1994).

This simultaneous development of different types of campus centers is essential to understand. On the one hand, student activists demanded spaces that could be their own on campuses. Simultaneously, other centers developed because of the desire to study the Other. This concurrent tension exists in modern-day GSRCs. Though not set up or funded by the federal government, these centers exist to simultaneously support marginalized students while also spreading knowledge about what constitutes and defines sexuality and gender (Marine, 2011; Shuford, 2011; Woodford et al., 2014). In other words, while making room for LGBTQ students to exist on college campuses, GSRCs also define what constitutes and what does not constitute gender and sexuality. For example, many faculty and staff members ask GSRC staff to provide exhaustive terminology lists of different terms and identity labels. Given the expansive nature of gender and sexuality (see Jourian, 2015; Rankin, Garvey, & Duran, 2019), it becomes impossible for any terminology or definition list to be complete. And yet, given GSRCs' role as consultants and experts on LGBTQ experiences (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002), these lists often render certain genders and sexualities as valid and others as invalid. I elaborate more on this definitional duty, and how GSRCs can envision more expansive, place-conscious practices later in this article.

In a similar vein, GSRCs become a center of knowledge so that cisgender and heterosexual persons can better understand those with minoritized genders and sexualities. While appearing to be good on its face, conservative opportunists can use this knowledge against these very same

students (Jaschik, 2015). Efforts to educate cisgender and heterosexual persons have not always been met with goodwill or positive transformation. For instance, in 2015, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's Office for Diversity and Inclusion released a graphic guide to pronouns to help educate faculty and staff about ways different groups of people may refer to themselves. Conservative groups and commentators pounced on the graphic, falsely claiming the University of Tennessee at Knoxville made up these pronouns and required institutional agents to use this language (Jaschik, 2015). This simple graphic, combined with the backlash to the institution's Sex Week, prompted such outrage that the Tennessee legislature zero-funded the Office for Diversity and Inclusion in a unique bill targeting the unit's budget specifically (Culligan, 2016). In this way, Tennessee lawmakers and conservative bloggers turned an education effort against the communities for which that education was meant to assist. Centers must become more place-conscious from their position on the margins to model the possibilities for higher education (Gruenewald, 2003).

Place-Consciousness

Place-conscious education aims to both "work against the isolation of schooling's discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling" and "enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 620). In other words, becoming place-conscious is about understanding what places can teach us and how places shape us. Becoming place-conscious is to become cognizant of the ways humans experience place everywhere and yet also realize how because place is everywhere, humans become less aware of it in their daily routines. Gruenewald (2003) outlined five dimensions of place: the perceptual; the sociological; the ideological; the political, and; the ecological. I briefly summarize the perceptual and ecological dimensions first. Then, I discuss the sociological, ideological, and political dimensions more in-depth, given their more direct relation to postsecondary praxis.

First, drawing primarily from the work of phenomenologists like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Abram, the perceptual dimension locates place as "the ground of direct human experience" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 623). The perceptual dimension concerns one's sensory experiences with places. Said otherwise, this dimension concerns how humans understand "places that are alive in the human and more-than-human world" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 625). K-12 schooling practices often keep learners separated (via regulation of their geographic experience) from a unique sense of place and ecosystems, dulling one's sense to perceive a place. Postsecondary education provides an opportunity for learners to be more attuned to their surroundings. While dense campus layouts and designs can cut students off to the surrounding environment via buildings, artificial boundaries, and paved parking lots (Kenney, Dumont, & Kenney, 2005), college students can exercise their freedom to come and go from different parts of campus and the surrounding locale. However, due to many students' experiences in K-12 schooling, their ability to make sense and perceive their environments eroded over time (Gruenewald, 2003). To both honor the places in which institutions are located (Kenney, Dumont, & Kenney, 2005), as well as helping students find their way through campuses (Strange & Banning, 2015), institutional architects and designers' plans include intentional efforts to assist members of campus to connect with a place.

The ecological dimension draws attention to the ways that "modern economies function to damage and destroy the ecological systems that support human and nonhuman communities" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 633) despite the widespread prevalence of environmental education. In this

way, the ecological dimension forefronts the connections between the exploitation of peoples and lands (Warren, 2000). It is within this dimension that global thinking about ecology becomes troubled. While activists emphasize the importance of global thinking (e.g., Davis, 2016), it can obscure ecological issues through abstract statistics (Berry, 1992). By paying more considerable attention to the ways humans dominate the land through manipulation, neglect, and domination, one can better understand the ways the powerful marginalize the powerless. In the context of postsecondary education, for instance, the ecological dimension brings to light the ways colleges promote their efforts to curb climate change through research and decades-long plans (Harvard University, n.d.), yet harm the environment actively through investments in economies which exacerbate the issues at hand (LeMoult, 2019). Additionally, through the ecological dimension, institutions' commitments to diversity would not be limited to identities and demographic characteristics; instead, this promise to honor and protect diversity expands to biological diversity.

The sociological dimension concerns how a place is a container of culture and identity (Casey, 1996). While one's experience of place is "mediated by culture, education, and personal experience" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 626), the places themselves have, in turn, been shaped by culture. Places become imbued with meaning by people and culture. In other words, the meaning one makes of and assigns to a given place is socially constructed and reinforced. For instance, the idea of what constitutes wilderness is itself social formed by laws and geographers (Gruenewald, 2003; Nash, 1982). One can think of campuses as cultural products, historically and contemporarily built for those most privileged in society (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006). It stands to reason that students who do not hold these privileged identities may experience campus places differently, as seen with students who are minoritized by their race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and religion. For GSRCs, this means being conscious of the ways the staff members of these offices both construct center space and how they seek to construct temporary and permanent spaces on other parts of campus.

The ideological dimension has its foundations in critical geography studies (Soja, 1996). In this dimension, a place is analyzed as "expressive of ideologies and relationships to power" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 628). Like other critical theories, the ideological dimension concerns itself with the ways spaces and places reproduce social relationships organized by power and dominance. For instance, private property is a function of this dimension. The purpose of private property is to either grant access or exclude others from one's property (Harris, 1993). The displacing and barring of others reflects ideologies embedded in the construction of property, private or public. Even in public spaces, historically and contemporarily, the desire to remove Black men from a coffee shop (Gathright & Sullivan, 2018), Native men from a campus tour (Chappell, 2018), or Black women from a golf course (Caron, 2018) reflect the ways power operates through places. It is essential to understand how meaning becomes built into a place and how one must contend with power embedded in those meanings in postsecondary education (Wilder, 2013). For GSRCs, practitioners must be conscious of the ways ideologies of safety operate in the name of inclusion (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). How do markers of inclusion, like safe zone stickers, signal a particular ideology while (potentially) not shifting the underlying ideology of a place?

The political dimension of place concerns "examining the many ways in which politics and place are entangled" that can "inform educators with ideas about how people, places, and cultures take shape" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 631). The political dimension differs from the ideological dimension in that the former takes up the ways place can inform resistance and struggle while the latter seeks to examine existing power relationships (hooks, 1990; Soja, 1996). Here, Gruenewald (2003) invoked hooks's (1990) discussion of the margin as "both a metaphorical and material

space from which relationships of oppression might be reimagined and reshaped" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 632). In this way, the political dimension of understanding place helps one to conceptualize possibilities for the ways space can be oriented that does not require moves for everyone to move to the political center. For postsecondary educators, this means thinking about the ways those on the margins organizationally on campus, like GSRCs and multicultural centers, can help conceptualize different ways of facilitating education on campuses. Those within those centers can use their unique lens of being on the margins to "think and act in ways that counter social domination" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 633). By attending to the sociological, ideological, and political dimensions of place on college campuses, GSRCs can begin to understand their role in being responsive to space and the ways forces like neoliberalism and colonization inform the operation of postsecondary education.

Towards a Place-Conscious Praxis

Patel (2016) challenged educational researchers and research to be answerable to dismantle the very structures which validated us and our forms of knowledge. In that vein, I offer two ways for GSRCs to be better stewards of ideas, learning, and education broadly through a place-conscious praxis. Rather than providing answers and definitive means of becoming answerable to the forces above, I challenge GSRCs to think more broadly about their practices and resist neoliberal, colonial logics, echoing Shahjahan's (2014) call for a transformative resistance that creates new ways of being in higher education. I also do not issue these challenges lightly, understanding the various levels of funding and staffing these functions receive currently. Indeed, the current work of GSRC staff members is fraught with politics and uneven staffing (e.g., Tillapaugh & Catalano, 2019). Below, I first discuss LGBTQ centers as authorities on gender and sexuality. Second, I consider the ways safe space discourse can reify the very structures of domination and oppression these education programs seek to disrupt.

Inscribing Definitions of Gender and Sexuality

Conceptions of gender and sexuality, like cultural identities (Hall, 1990; Subedi & Daza, 2008), are much less stable and straightforward than as presented through a Western lens. Lugones (2008) drew connections between colonization's need to both racialize and gender peoples based on Eurocentric notions of race and gender. The coloniality of gender imposes anatomic views of people based on ideas of dominance and submission, justifying men as a category of inherently stronger people and women as justifiably dominated given their supposed natural weakness. Traits of each of these sex/gender categories become automatically associated with masculinity and femininity to keep men and women respectively in their gendered boxes. Lugones (2008) presented several ways that non-Western and Indigenous peoples conceptualized gender beyond the binary categorization the U.S. and other Western cultures cling to today. These peoples did not necessarily buy into the idea of a man-dominated society as the automatic norm of their culture.

In contemporary contexts, one can look to conceptions of Two-Spirit identities by tribal nations in North America and the *hijras* in India to understand non-binary conceptualizationss of gender (Lorber, 1994; McCarthy, 2014). GSRCs, in their promotion of educational programs, become repositories of knowledge about gender and sexuality (Woodford et al., 2014). Campus centers make particular knowledge about sexuality and gender intelligible while rendering other conceptions unintelligible. In this process, many centers' curriculum forward Western formations that

see identities and oppression through non-interconnected lenses (Self, 2015; Subedi & Daza, 2008).

Often, these Western formations come from textually written or empirically proven studies of gender and sexuality, despite the ways those methods delegitimize Indigenous, marginal, and Third World epistemologies (hooks, 1984; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012). For instance, many GSRC staff members discuss gender and sexuality as socially constructed but still do not contextualize those constructions to societal organizing forces, like colonialism. Additionally, though these campus centers have moved away from describing both sexuality and gender as binaries, they again forward conceptions based on spectrums and continuums that are understood through a Western, Eurocentric frame of reference. Rather than providing single visions of gender and sexuality, GSRCs can help provide expansive notions of these identities and the consequences of different understandings of these markers of difference.

One of the opportunities GSRCs have towards thinking through anti-coloniality and place-consciousness is by conceptualizing gender and sexuality through multiple, marginal epistemologies. Often, as practitioners who get limited time with faculty and staff, the goal is to cram what many would consider *the most critical information* into a training program all at once. However, this reduction process often leaves out nuance and complexity. The ideals of global citizenship education offer centers the means to think expansively about gender and sexuality education (Pashby, 2012). By adopting a critical understanding of globalization and engaging with intercultural perspectives, centers can challenge their current curricular offerings to be more mobile and question stable ideas of identities. If U.S. institutions of higher education continue to attract students from across the globe and seek to cultivate global citizens (Pashby, 2012), how centers and institutions conceive of and teach about gender and sexuality remain critical.

Simultaneously, centers have the opportunity to challenge cisheteronormative conceptions of citizenship within global citizenship education paradigms (Manalansan, 2006; Subedi & Daza, 2008). Oftentimes, because of one's positioning in the U.S. or other Western societies, the West weaponizes its sexual modernization (e.g., exercising a base-level tolerance for gender and sexual Others) against supposed backward countries, particularly those in the Middle East, in an effort to further justify the war on terror (Puar, 2005). At the same time, queer people within sexually modern (Western) cultures must abide by normative forces. Through this configuration, citizenship becomes marked by "racialized, classed, sexualized, and gendered images of specific" (Subedi & Daza, 2008, p. 244) groups of people. These markings of citizenship allow some people to participate in the modernization of Western cultures, while those labeled as terrorist or culturally backward become excluded from these benefits (Puar, 2005). GSRCs can intervene in these binary understandings of Western/progressive-Middle Eastern/backward and help push against purely Western configurations of gender, sexuality, and citizenship. Through this reconceptualization and expansion of concepts, centers can also re-think their safe zone and other educational program offerings.

Safe Zone Programs

"Safe zone" or "safe space" programs are standard in GSRC educational program efforts (Marine, 2011; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002; Woodford et al., 2014). These programs train faculty and staff on how to be a safe, affirming place for students on campus—spaces where students can be assured they will not be targeted or harassed based on their identities (Evans, 2002). These are spaces conceived to be free of physical violence (Fox, 2007). These training programs

are often one-time, range from one to three hours, and implicitly confer approval to be a safe space indefinitely, no matter how much time has passed (Fox, 2007; Woodford et al., 2014). Completion of these programs often comes with a sticker or marker that one is now a safe space or zone for students on campus. One only needs to look through campus buildings to see worn safe zone stickers on faculty members' office doors and windows. A paucity of evidence shows these programs' effectiveness at improving campus climate at the macro-level and building ally coalitions in pockets of campus (Evans, 2002; Finkel, Storaasli, Bandele, & Schaefer, 2003; Gacita et al., 2017; Poynter & Tubbs, 2008).

However, safe space discourse narrowly benefits white lesbian, gay, bisexual, and, to a lesser extent, transgender students (Fox, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; McConnell, Todd, Odahl-Ruan, & Shattell, 2016). Safe Zone curriculum often reifies White, able-bodied, and middle-class formations of gender and sexuality by not paying attention to the ways racism, compulsory able-bodiedness, and social class are all linked to heterosexism and cisnormativity. Writing about this dynamic concerning the connections between racism and heterosexism, Kumashiro (2001) shared,

> Yet in our commitment to change oppression and embrace differences, we often fail to account for the intersections of racism and heterosexism, and of racial and sexual identities. Ironically, our efforts to challenge one form of oppression often unintentionally contribute to other forms of oppression, and our efforts to embrace one form of difference often exclude and silence others. (p. 1)

Here, Kumashiro draws attention to the ways Safe Zone curricula, among other education initiatives, does not locate itself within intersections of oppression. Said otherwise, much of the curriculum often focuses on only sexuality and gender without attention to other dimensions of identity and oppression. Rather than credentialing faculty and staff members with stickers that will be affirming of all identities, LGBTQ centers offer these individuals ways to signal their inclusion around gender and sexuality only. Consequently, those marginalized by their sexuality and gender but experiencing privilege/dominance through their other identities are the primary beneficiaries of places marked as safe for LGBTQ students (Fox, 2007; Fox & Ore, 2010). While the signifier of a safe zone may be a rainbow sticker, the signified, in reality, is more of a safe space for white LGB(T)Q students. By not requiring safe zone trainees to undergo initial or further training on the intersections of heterosexism and cisnormativity with other forms of oppression, safe zones become less safe for those marginalized by other aspects of their identity like race, social class, and ability. Said otherwise, so long as the primary goal of safe zone programs is the management and elimination of heterosexism and cisnormativity exclusively, *safety* becomes reduced and simplified to single positions of power and privilege (e.g., primarily White gay cisgender masculinity), ignoring the ways multiple identities relate to one another and position one differently in relation to multiple forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1991; Fox & Ore, 2010).

Additionally, as centers become more place-conscious, what does it mean to label a place as inclusive? What do safe zone stickers *do*? Who are these stickers and markers *for*? Do individuals perceive their posting a sticker in their office space as *doing* the work of inclusion rather than taking the necessary steps for equity work beyond displaying a sticker (Ahmed, 2012; Alvarez & Schneider, 2008)? Is the person who currently occupies the marked office or space the one who sat through the training to earn the inclusion marker? How does this practice further colonial logics of creating and marking property? Does having a sticker suggest one can advocate for all identities within the LGBTQ umbrella (Fox, 2007)? Some scholars (e.g., Ahmed, 2012; Fox, 2007; Patel,

2015) complicated the idea of signaling inclusion through non-performatives without accompanying action to change places to be more inclusive and equitable in ideological and political dimensions. These non-performatives allow individuals to point to something to appear inclusive and to evade claims of one working against equity efforts on campus. How can practitioners think through the margin to re-conceptualize this practice in a way that has more comprehensive benefits for all the students it intends to benefit (i.e., all queer and trans students)?

Conclusion

Over the past decade, a small number of institutions majorly shifted the functions of GSRCs or closed them altogether (Marine, 2011). Most recently, the Tennessee state legislature, reacting to an annual campus Sex Week and an e-mail sent to instructors regarding using students' gender pronouns and preferred names, defunded the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (Brown, 2016; Locker, 2016). Though student activists continued the work of the Pride Center (Urquhart, 2016), alumni rallied to fundraise for the unit (Compton, 2018), and administrators later re-funded the Pride Center (Ohm, 2017), these incidents make me anxious and worried as a former professional staff member of a GSRC. The critical and necessary work of these centers requires their continued existence into the 21st century, particularly given the inequitable college outcomes of queer and trans people when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Greathouse et al., 2018). GSRCs play a critical role in intervening in and advocating for change in the college processes, policies, and systems that help produce these inequitable outcomes (Marine, 2011; Pitcher et al., 2018; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002).

Simultaneously, there is a need to reflect on the ways the loss of our office spaces, the physical land on which they rest, make us believe the work of these centers cannot continue and re-think how we must be answerable to the colonial epistemology that allows us to take up such place. Rather than thinking of doing LGBTQ inclusion work absent a formalized office, the concerns for maintaining center space may reflect roots in the idea of preserving queer and trans property rights in postsecondary education (Harris, 1993; Patel, 2015). If rationales for the maintenance of campus LGBTQ centers rely on property rights, these centers are (further) complicit in the settler colonial project (Pashby, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, preserving the services these centers provide can be inherently transformational and be more answerable to the coloniality inherent in education (Patel, 2016; Shahjahan, 2014).

Student affairs educators continue to tout their commitment to the aims of diversity, inclusion, and equity in postsecondary education (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Reason & Broido, 2017; Young, 1993). Simultaneously, a greater number of educators challenge the field to shift from a diversity and inclusion paradigm to one of equity and justice (e.g., Poon, 2018; Stewart, 2017). More recently, ACPA—College Student Educators, International, one of the most significant professional associations for student affairs educators, announced a new Strategic Imperative for Racial Justice and Decolonization (SIRJD; ACPA, 2019). Through an "intersectional, intentional, and directed" lens, the SIRJD established six operational truths and continues to develop educational and practice-based resources for educators to use on their respective campuses. These calls for more explicit attention on equity and justice did not occur in a vacuum; they arose as responses to continued racial and colonial realities in which we all live and work as educators. In line with these calls, this article provides particular educators, those who work in GSRCs, with a place-conscious framework to conceptualize and actualize their work in postsecondary education. Just

as it will take a critical mass of connections to engage in transformational social change (brown, 2017), we as educators require a critical mass of frameworks and ways of thinking about justice and equity to move our work further toward those goals. My hope that this article offers educators time to pause and think about their practice in ways that are transformative and life-giving.

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(Trans)gressing Faculty Development: Empowering Faculty to Support Trans* College Students through a Conceptual Model for Emancipatory Education

Katy S. Jaekel & Molly B. Holmes

Abstract

Because transgender and gender non-conforming students experience chilly climates, both inside and outside of the higher education classroom (Pryor, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016), it is critical that faculty be educated about these topics (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). Previous research has shown that faculty often have little information on best practices that support and include transgender students in higher education. Faculty development, when planned and executed effectively, can provide educators with key information, insights, and pedagogical strategies to better support these students. This article discusses a practical model for faculty development to provide educators more information on how to support trans* identified students in their college classrooms.

Keywords: *faculty development, trans*, transgender, resistance, curricular inclusion*

> *I've had faculty say, you know, identity doesn't matter in Math.*
> *But I'm still here. Still queer. It's gonna always apply to me.*
> *It matters to me. It doesn't matter the classes you teach,*
> *it matters the world you are in. You think the people that you*
> *interact with on a daily basis, you think evryone's*
> *gonna be cis, white, straight. They aren't. We aren't.*
> *You need to learn about us to teach us.*
> -- Reese, (they/them/their) junior in History

Introduction

We begin this piece with a quotation from a student that I (Jaekel) interviewed for a research project exploring how queer and trans*[1] college students experienced their classroom environments within a higher education setting. Reese, a trans* identified student interviewed for the study, discussed their frustrations with faculty in the classroom, primarily with faculty who felt gender identity and sexual orientation had no place in the classroom, particularly within STEM courses. Nearly every day, students share with us comments such as these, and concerns of how

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1. We use the term "trans*" denoted with the asterisks, as a means of being inclusive of the variety of gender identities that fall within the transgender umbrella. While we recognize that this is a contested term, we use it as a means of being inclusive of identities that transgress the gender binary. We discuss how we use this term further in the section, "Terminology Use."

faculty misgender them, make hurtful remarks, as well as stories of being outed in the classroom as trans* and/or queer. As a faculty member who researches trans* and gender non-conforming students' experiences in the college classroom (Jaekel), and as the Director of the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center (Holmes), we work with queer and trans* students and hear these stories from students on a regular basis. Our students often share concerns of being misgendered, fear of having to navigate conversations around proper pronouns and names, and of not seeing their experiences reflected in course curriculum. We hear, first-hand, their frustrations of feeling invisible in and out of the classroom.

Because of our roles on campus, departments and units across campus often ask us to provide trainings and workshops to deliver information and inclusive strategies to help support queer and trans* students on our campus. In addition to providing LGBQ and Trans Ally trainings to the larger campus community through the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, the two of us together annually provide workshops for incoming faculty at the start of each academic year. Our goals of these trainings are twofold: first, to ensure that new faculty better understand that trans* students exist on this campus and have specific needs. Second, because of our first-hand knowledge from the stories we hear and the barriers our students often face, our other goal is to share information with faculty to ensure their classrooms are spaces where students can safely participate and learn.

The larger objective, however, is to provide a space that encourages emancipatory educational praxis. Faculty must be empowered to recognize that their classroom spaces can provide possibilities for trans* students, serve as points of access and inclusion, and offer educational spaces that can transform not just their classrooms and campuses, but larger social contexts. As such, we designed a practical model for faculty workshops that serves to better support the academic success of these students. Importantly, both this piece, as well as the model, focus upon trans* students specifically. We center trans* students intentionally as these students' needs are not identical to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer (LGBQ) students. Moreover, literature discussing transgender and trans* students often conflate the experiences of trans* students with LGBQ students; this may serve to make trans* students' experiences invisible (Catalano, 2015; Marine, 2011). Trans* students often face different obstacles within higher education than their cisgender peers such as being misgendered, navigating proper name use in the classroom, and access to gender inclusive facilities. Thus, we intentionally center trans* students and their specific experiences here.

This model can be an opportunity for faculty not only to learn more about how to support trans* students, but also to work with students to transform institutional and social structures. Below, we discuss barriers we faced in offering faculty workshops followed by a conceptual model we believe provides opportunity towards a classroom that engages in gender liberation. The framework focuses on three interconnecting contexts: social context, institutional environment, and emancipatory pedagogical strategies. We conclude this article discussing further recommendations to enhance faculty development.

Terminology Use

We take up the term "trans*," marked with the asterisk, as an umbrella term meant to envelope a wide variety of individuals and as a way to acknowledge that "a wide amount of variance exists in how trans* people define their gender identity" (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 527). We use trans* here as a means to serve both as a visual disruption linguistically, as well as to represent

that gender identities, "while seemingly expressing a solid identity, are sites of fractious, contested, and varied meanings" (Nicolazzo, 2016, p. 8). In this way, we wish to be as inclusive as possible of individuals who identify as transgender, trans, gender non-conforming, agender, and for all those who transgress the gender binary. We recognize that not all communities identify with the asterisk, however to better represent the students with which we work, we use this specific term as a means of inclusion. Notably, when literature discusses those who transgress the binary, we use the author's term.

Trans* Students in the Classroom

While there is no longer a dearth of information about transgender, trans*, and gender non-binary college students in higher education (Stewart, 2016), trans* students continue to face chilly classroom climates (Pryor, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016). Mirroring their larger campus climates, classrooms continue to be spaces where trans* students experience varying forms of discrimination (Garvey & Rankin, 2015), instances of misgendering (Pryor, 2015), and a lack of curricular inclusion (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Pryor, 2015). Furthermore, scholars noted that faculty demonstrate limited competencies and knowledge about transgender topics, issues, and individuals (McKinney, 2005; Seelman et al., 2012; Seelman, 2014).

Literature recommends faculty should be both supportive and knowledgeable about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), and trans* identities and topics and work to educate themselves about these topics (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Green, 2010; Linley et al., 2016; Pryor, 2015), however faculty often have "little understanding of best practices working with transgender students" (Pryor, 2015, p. 452). Indeed, while literature has pointed out the importance of faculty's role in supporting queer and transgender students' success (Linley et al., 2016), trans* students' classroom experiences have only recently garnered limited attention and scholarship (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017).

In light of this recommendation, scholars suggest faculty engage in professional development and attend ally trainings to become better acquainted with strategies to help support and serve both LGBQ and trans* students (Linley et al., 2016). According to Linley et al (2016) professional development for faculty is a critical component of creating a more inclusive campus climate for students, as faculty support is key for academic success, as well as helping cultivate students' sense of belonging on campus. The authors note that faculty can partner with campus resources, such as an LGBTQ Resource Center, and work to learn more about inclusive classroom strategies, such as asking for proper names, working to avoid heterosexist and binary teaching strategies (e.g., dividing students by gender for group work), and not outing students' genders and/or sexualities.

While faculty development and ally trainings are an excellent start regarding how to begin to support trans* students, we found significant barriers in working to implement these workshops. Given the current models of many faculty development workshops and/or trainings, we contend that traditional models, or at least how some of these trainings often occur, are simply not enough and, in many ways, work to (re)inscribe a lack of inclusion in the classroom. Thus, here we propose a conceptual model for faculty development that goes beyond a "one and done" approach, but instead asks faculty to engage in dialogic learning, engagement, and critical thought about trans* students' experiences in and out of the classroom.

Jaekel & Holmes—(Trans)gressing Faculty

Barriers in Faculty Development

Well planned and effectively executed faculty development can positively impact student learning (Condon, Iverson, Manduca, Rutz, & Willett, 2016). While faculty development can lead to better student learning and outcomes, there continue to be several barriers to faculty development making it difficult to gain faculty participation. Faculty are often "not sufficiently concerned and are reluctant or even resistant to improving their teaching and employing innovative strategies in their teaching" (Sabagh & Saroyan, 2014, p. 19). Much of faculty reluctance to participate in professional development is often due to issues of time and lack of incentive. Implementing new material and information and engaging in new techniques in teaching can be a time consuming and daunting task. For new faculty especially, pressure to produce research and to acclimate to the institution may be more pressing (Sabagh & Saroyan, 2014). This is especially true for new faculty and faculty who are not yet tenured. The amount of time it takes to participate in faculty development, and then the time revamping course curriculum and teaching methods may seem overwhelming for many tenure track faculty.

Further barriers exist around a lack of incentive for faculty to participate in professional development related to teaching. Incentives, which can range from encouragement for participation in teaching excellence as well as recognition and reward in the promotion and tenure process is critical (Sabagh & Saroyan, 2014). Depending on institutional type, college and/or university culture, and research level, some faculty may be getting messages from their institution that research and scholarship is what is most rewarded for promotion and tenure (Young, 2006). Thus, for faculty, it may not seem worth their time and attention if teaching is deemed less important. This creates barriers for participation in a time-consuming process that may or may not be deemed important by the larger institution.

Background and Context

For the past three years, we jointly presented at the beginning of the academic year for two different groups of educators. Our faculty development office offered two different institutes for teaching effectiveness: one for new, full-time faculty and then, a week later, one for graduate teaching assistants (TAs). Each of these sessions were one-day long institutes meant to orient new educators to topics like institutional policies about teaching, places on campus for faculty to find further resources, as well as strategies for effective instruction, such as how to utilize the various functions of the learning management system our institution uses.

At the first presentation, new faculty members (both tenure track and non-tenure track instructors) could attend a day-long institute; this was not a mandatory professional development opportunity, as newly hired faculty can choose to opt out of the workshop. Typically, each year 10-15 faculty members attended our presentation. The second presentation was for new TAs who had been admitted into a graduate program at the university and who had varying amounts of teaching responsibilities (some will be instructors of record, others will be graders for a faculty member). All TAs must attend the workshop and there were typically 40-50 TAs. For both presentations, our session on supporting queer and trans* students occurred between other sessions on learning management systems, institutional policy related to instruction, as well information about students requiring accommodations for disability.

Throughout these workshops, however, we experienced barriers to providing opportunities for these educators to engage in further learning about inclusive teaching strategies to support

trans* college students. Each year, we were disappointed with our outcomes and noted the same patterns and issues: resistance to learning about trans* students, their needs, and strategies for inclusion of these students. Here, we define resistance as an act of dominance and power whereby individuals choose to disengage with the information and knowledges centering on minoritized identities. As Goodman (2015) stated:

> [There is an] unwillingness to engage in critical self-reflection and to reevaluate currently held views. It is not simply having a different opinion, questioning, or ignorance, especially if there is a willingness and intent to learn. Resistance is rooted in fear and anxiety. (p. 63)

We also recognize that resistance is something that educators can expect when discussing systemic oppression. While we understand resistance may be vital to some learning, overarchingly, it has largely affected our ability to engage with participants. Below, we outline the resistance we have encountered, first from individuals and then from the institutional structure. We then discuss how the individual resistance we encounter in our workshop is largely mediated and influenced by the institution's structuring of the day-long institute.

Individual Resistance

We note key patterns of participation on the part of both the full-time faculty as well as the TAs, although the patterns of resistance look different for each group. For the full-time faculty, they often only wanted the "right" answer, that is, specific actions they can take to "fix" an issue. While we have tried to explain that identities, contexts, and situations are complex and thus, we cannot give them a one-size-fits-all toolbox, they demonstrate a resistance to more nuanced approaches to supporting trans* students. We have had faculty actively disengage in the workshop because often our answers to questions was, "it depends." While there are some steadfast rules in supporting specific student groups, in many instances, how to support trans* and queer students can be contextual. For instance, does the student wish to be out? Does the student wish to be acknowledged by a particular name and pronouns? Might the student want to be stealth? The answers to these questions influence how a faculty member should support a particular student.

Faculty in these trainings were also incredibly concerned with terminology, what was the "correct" terminology, and often object to some of the terminology we do provide. For instance, in the fulltime faculty training, we have had individuals struggle with our uses of the word "queer," as they feel it was offensive. We have had faculty also ask why we were not using terminology such as "transsexual," and significant resistance around our introductions of the importance of using pronouns and the names students wish to be called. Often, time was taken up by faculty who wish to debate the uses of terminologies, questions around what, exactly, constitutes a specific identity, how will they "know" if a student is a specific identity, and how can they approach and/or ask students who they may suspect as being a particular identity. While we begin our workshops with some basic terminology so that we have a shared language, often that was the only place faculty wish to engage.

The patterns of resistance for TAs looked different, although they too want to know what was exactly "right" when they were teaching students, not with terminology, but instead with processes of interacting with the students. While TAs rarely contest our uses of terminology, or even pronoun recognition, their resistance seemed rooted more in fear of how to engage with students:

what if they make a mistake? What if they offend the dominant group? How will they handle these situations in regard to classroom management? Is this something that they should even do? Will the institution support them if they ask for students' pronouns? What will their supervising faculty think? Ultimately, TA resistance presented itself as not wanting to be wrong or make a mistake related to their employment, rather than care for the student.

In both groups, we also encounter resistance on the part of those who were uncertain as to why trans* students, in particular, needed "special" attention. Such resistance was illustrated when we are asked exactly how many and what the percentage of students on campus identify as trans*. We shared that currently, our institution does not track gender identity, nor does it track sexuality and thus, cannot give specific numbers. We would share that both of us work closely with a number of students who identify as queer and/or trans* and have first-hand knowledge on ways these students feel unsupported and/or invisible in the classroom. In many instances, those who want the specific numbers got frustrated with us because we could not give a specific percentage. While we communicated that we do not have specific percentages, faculty often struggle around the "anecdotal" nature of our data and, because it was not in an empirical journal article, were often skeptical of its accuracy.

We have also noted resistance not necessarily about learning about trans* students and strategies to support them in the classroom per se, but resistance around faculty status. That is, I (Holmes) actually sought Jaekel out to help with these workshops because I often felt faculty did not take me as seriously because I am a student affairs practitioner. While I have direct encounters with many queer and trans* students on campus, have knowledge of scenarios in which these students were either not supported and/or discriminated against, faculty seemed to take me less seriously. Because Jaekel is a faculty member, and a faculty member who researches queer and trans* students, we found we could mediate some of the resistance through Jaekel's role as faculty.

Both the full-time faculty and TAs' strategies for resistance mediate our ability to deliver information and engage in meaningful conversations around trans* students' needs in the classroom. Whether participants recognized it or not, their insistence that we tell them the "right" answers and tell them "truth" about these topics subverted our ability to further engage in information about trans* students' with them. Their disengagement and frustration when we could not give them the "right" answer prevents us from further engagement. Yet, we recognized that while these strategies of resistance have real implications for our trans* students in these faculty's classrooms, their resistance was of little surprise.

While the literature discusses that learning and supporting trans* students is important and leads to further classroom engagement, few faculty are given any teaching and/or pedagogical training during their graduate studies (Sabagh & Saroyan, 2014). Thus, serving the needs of diverse students was likely a new notion to these faculty. Much of their resistance, particularly from the TAs, was rooted in fear. These faculty do not want to make mistakes and/or to admit that they may not know how to serve key student groups. They may already be overwhelmed and given that they only have a short time with us, where we can only provide overviews and cannot delve much deeper into the material, did not provide them any comfort for when they are on their own in the classroom. The resistance that we encountered in these workshops illustrated the effects of the larger messaging (something we discuss later) of what was important and what should "count" as important practice within teaching from the university.

Institutional Resistance

In addition to individual participant resistance towards these trainings, we noted resistance from an institutional structure for how these trainings take place, and how that structure served to reinforce individuals' resistance. Institutional resistance came primarily from the frequency and the amount of time we were given to deliver this workshop. As previously mentioned, these day-long institutes on teaching occur only once an academic year. While both of us have contacted faculty development to request further workshops, to provide a more expansive training on inclusive pedagogical practices for trans* students, we have never been given the opportunity. To date, the faculty development office trainings center upon the learning management system and e-learning/distance learning sessions. In short, this workshop really was a "one-shot" model where participants got the information once with no follow up. Participants were told that they could enroll in the Ally Training program the institution offers, however there were no further campus trainings, workshops, or development offered around inclusive strategies for trans* students.

Additionally, we were only given 20 minutes for these trainings during the day long institute. While we both have met with administrators of both the faculty and the TA institutes, explain we simply need more time, our requests go unheeded. We have pointed out that sessions offered about the learning management system received far more time than we do. However, administrators continually contend there simply was not enough time for any session, let alone one on this topic.

Administrators have contended that the institution has come a long way in even offering this type of session. They have indicated that years ago, sessions only focused upon learning management systems, institutional policies, and day-to-day classroom operations such as taking attendance and grading. It has only been in the past three years that the institute has opened up workshop sessions for supporting specific student groups. Few individuals we have talked with recognize the message sent to faculty about how unimportant these sessions are because we are only given a short amount of time to present.

A final component of institutional resistance that we have encountered was that the institution does not require participation for the full-time faculty, nor do they incentivize it, or hold any accountability measures for attending it. While TAs were required to attend, full-time instructors and tenure track faculty could opt out. As such, the larger message sent from the institution was that for full-time faculty, inclusion was less important for them than it was for new TAs. The justification given was that full-time faculty typically have a terminal degree and have likely had exposure to teaching different types of students before. However, we continue to be concerned about the larger message that professional development regarding teaching and learning is optional.

As we reflected on these workshops each year, we understood why the individuals engage in these specific patterns of resistance; they are symptoms of the institution's resistance. To be sure, these workshops were not designed to be anything more than a short, transactional lecture where we delivered terminology and what is essentially "trans 101" (Green, 2010). Because the institution limits the time we got to engage with participants, because it only occurred once in an academic year, and because these educators recognized that there was a population of students who are underserved on campus, they want the information as quickly and as effectively as possible. In essence, there was not time for nuance, critical thought, or attention to specific things like teaching methods and/or pedagogy. Participants saw the schedule and how much time we were allotted to talk with them during the day. From this, they knew they had a very short amount of

time to get as much information as possible. Because the institution only provided us 20 minutes, the larger message of the topic, its importance, and how long it would take to learn and implement these strategies deemed this unimportant. The idea of including trans* students became an add-on, tertiary topic for these educators.

Moreover, we understand why the TAs in particular experience fear. These were graduate students who, more times than not, had little to no education on how to educate students. They were contingent faculty, with very little power, and would be evaluated by specific faculty and departments, not necessarily by the institution. As such, their fear of making mistakes, of not being supported by their faculty and departments, mediated their practices. They were looking to us to provide some sort of information, truth, and comfort in a space where we simply could not.

Towards an Emancipatory Praxis

While it would be easy for us to assume that simply having more time would lead to more success in these workshops, the solution is more than just time. Rather, there must be a comprehensive approach to faculty development that provides a more holistic view of trans* students' experiences. We hold here that it is critical faculty have the opportunity to examine the macro and microclimates trans* students traverse, as well as to provide opportunity to engage in a pedagogy that centers emancipatory practices. It is critical to move beyond terminology and transactional information about trans* students, and instead, empower both full-time faculty and TAs to transform their classrooms into spaces for gender liberation. Faculty relationships play an important role in student success, and while faculty may not recognize it, their classroom spaces can be powerful sites for transformation (Vaccaro, Dooley, & Adams, 2019).

As such, we created a model (see Figure 1 below) that works to not merely educate faculty, but to invite them into the conversation of how to support trans* students. To achieve this, the model begins by first discussing the larger social context and climate for trans* individuals, followed by exploring specific institutional environments for trans* identified students. After exploring these contexts, this model moves to discussing how faculty's pedagogy, through a framework of emancipatory education, can support trans* students in the classroom. We envision that each component of this model informs the next, thus recognizing the ways in which social contexts directly inform our institutional environments and how institutional environments directly impact specific classrooms. Yet, for us, we share that through faculty members' pedagogy, transformation can occur and can thus inform the larger social context. In this way, our aim is to empower faculty to use their classrooms as spaces to fracture oppressive systems of inequities.

We do not see this model as being prescriptive. Rather, we see this model as a framework to engage in faculty development towards emancipatory praxis within their individual campuses. As such, we provide here key reflective questions, rather than prescriptive truths, to encourage critical thought.
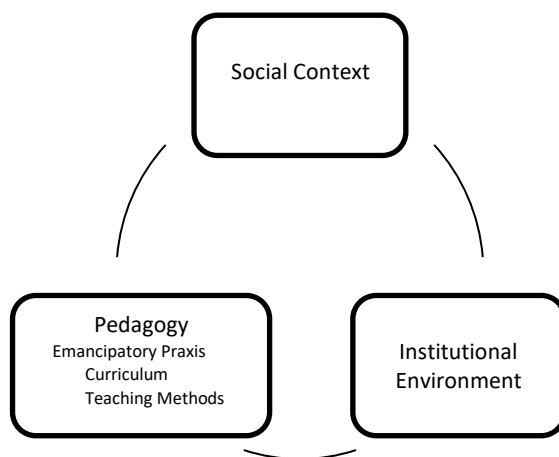
Figure 1: Emancipatory Model for Trans* Inclusion

The Social Context

It is first critical to explore with participants in faculty development workshops the larger social context in which we live. Certainly, the current national climate for trans* individuals mediates our students' lives. For instance, the recent legislation on banning transgender individuals from the U.S. military unless they serve as their sex assigned at birth (Philipps, 2019), various states' billings banning trans* identified individuals to use restrooms according to their gender identity, and seemingly endless threats that the current administration will undermine any rights afforded to trans* bodies (Levenson, 2018) affect many trans* individuals. There is a national epidemic with the violence and murders of trans* women of color, in particular (Martinez & Law, 2019). As such, it is likely that these larger social contexts influence and mediate students' experiences and individuals' knowledge around trans* individuals.

Simultaneously, there have also been gains for trans* rights and certainly an increase in trans* visibility. In 2017, nine transgender individuals were elected to political office (Sopelsa, 2017), there is a growing representation of transgender characters in the media, and the larger discourse around transgender rights is more present than ever before (Faye, 2018). It is critical to know about the larger social context in order to make sense of how these larger laws and discourses affect institutions and students.

The Institutional Environment

The next area discussed is the specific institutional environment. Because the larger social context influences institutional policies, and because so much of trans* students' experience is mediated by how institutions enact (or do not enact) policies to support them, it is key to discuss the institutional context and campus climate. In order for faculty to better understand how the institution values, supports, and provides resources, it is important to discuss institutional non-discrimination policies, access to healthcare, housing, and basic facilities, such as restrooms. Because each institutional context is different, we offer key questions to better inform discussions with faculty at their individual institutions:

- How does the institution recognize gender identity within their policies?
- How do learning management systems use (or not use) trans* students' proper names?

- What does on-and-off campus housing look like for trans* students?
- What offices exist that can help support trans* students and how can faculty contact these offices for further support?

Engaging with faculty about the institution's policies and resources provides them with opportunity to recognize how trans* students navigate campus. Additionally, this provides opportunities for faculty to become better acquainted with campus resources and offices that serve to support trans* students.

Pedagogy: Emancipatory Education

The final section of the model centers on the faculty member's pedagogy. Here, we use emancipatory education as a philosophical framework to guide how an educator designs their course curriculum, course policies, and teaching methods, as well as how they interact with students. Emancipatory education is an approach to teaching and learning that "involves a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationships in classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state" (Nouri & Mahdi Sajjadi, 2014, p. 78). Emancipatory education, which emerges from critical theory, posits that the institutions and the act of education is not neutral. Rather, the processes of education, textbooks, and curriculum material, and how those materials are delivered are power-laden (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

Materials in curriculum and how that curriculum is delivered sends messages to students regarding what constitutes knowledge, what counts as "facts," and what information is important enough to learn about (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). These decisions are made primarily by faculty, or individuals who are in a position of authority to assign grades and to choose what will and will not be discussed and covered in a class. As such, when trans* topics, identities, and/or experiences are not included within curriculum, either through formal curriculum or through inclusive teaching strategies, it sends the message to students that those topics are unimportant. For example, if a faculty member does not acknowledge a trans* students' proper name, or continually misgenders a student, it illustrates to students that they are unimportant in the classroom space.

Emancipatory education holds that knowledge production occurs when educators and learners engage in relationships that eschew traditional notions of information delivery, such as the "banking model" (Freire, 1970), where faculty are the primary sites of knowledge. Instead, educators and students should work together to co-construct knowledge, allow students to help guide curriculum and educational initiatives, and engage in dialogic inquiry with educators. Because social policy informs institutions, and institutional policy informs education, emancipatory education believes that classrooms and other educational spaces should engage in positive social and political reform and work to engage in problem-posing in educational systems (Nouri & Mahdi Sajjadi, 2014). Emancipatory education also works to uncover the hidden curriculum, or how educational systems and spaces center certain knowledges and values as "forces by which students are induced to comply with dominant ideologies and social practices" (McLaren, 2016, p. 51). While educators who choose curriculum materials may not recognize that their curriculum serves to privilege particular dominant identities, the covert nature of only including dominant identities, such as white and cisgender individuals, serves to provide messages that those identities and

knowledges are the "correct" ones. Thus, attention to what is included and what is excluded within curriculum provides opportunity to invite other perspectives into the class.

Emancipatory education can be actualized through how faculty engage with their students, design their curriculum, and engage in teaching methods. In the sections below, we provide an overview of how we understand each subsection and then offer key questions as a way to begin to empower faculty to design their curriculum and classrooms as sites for further participation with students.

Curriculum.

Here, curriculum refers to everything from readings and textbooks, to assignments, assessments, and discussions that occur in the classroom, as well as institutional and faculty policies. Essentially, what are the materials provided, and how are students asked to engage with them, and what are the policies in place that mediate student experiences? Key questions that can be asked around inclusion in curriculum can be:

- In what ways does the curriculum (readings, textbooks, discussions, assignments) include and/or exclude trans* bodies?
- What identities are included and excluded in the course materials?
- How can trans* bodies be included and represented in the curriculum in ways that go beyond a mere add-on, and instead further student learning?
- How do institutions' and faculty policies influence the curriculum?

While we recognize that some courses may not have opportunities for inclusion of trans* bodies in textbooks and/or class readings, these questions around curriculum are key ones to have. Paramount to emancipatory education is attention to both the overt curriculum, as well as the hidden curriculum.

Importantly, however, we have found that regardless of the course discipline, things like policy largely mediate the curriculum for trans* students. For instance, we have worked with several faculty who have a strict tardy policy that penalizes students for being five minutes late. We have had to explain, however, that because our campus does not have gender inclusive restrooms in all the buildings, our trans* students struggle to use the restroom and get to their class across campus in enough time. Thus, while this policy is meant to have students in class on time to maximize learning, it also unfairly punishes trans* students who do not have equitable access to restrooms.

Teaching Methods.

While curriculum inclusion may prove difficult for some disciplines, certainly inclusion in teaching methods transgresses disciplines. Regardless of the class, its content, and the material covered, key to inclusion are teaching methods, or how faculty engage with students in their classrooms. Teaching methods can be how information is delivered (i.e., lecturer, small group), how students are allowed and/or not allowed to participate, how and what information is covered, and how educators provide space for inclusion through classroom activities, discussions, and/or facilitation. Some questions around inclusive teaching methods may include:

- What are ways you can provide opportunity for students to indicate their names and/or pronouns they wish to use in a way that is safe and effective?
- How can you work to include voices of trans* students in the classroom?
- What are ideas for how to group students rather than basing it on gender?

From these questions, faculty can think through ideas for teaching methods that are more inclusive and provide opportunity for trans* student participation. In particular, we have worked with faculty who have used gender as a way to either group students and/or to split the class up for discussion. Rather than using gender as a way to group students, students can choose their own groups, be assigned groups based on their viewpoint of the material, or simply grouped randomly.

Classroom Management.

Classroom management can be daunting, especially because issues can happen quickly, and at times, the faculty member may not even be aware of what exactly occurred. To help alleviate anxiety, we recommend having clearly outlined expectations and policies of what classroom policies are and how issues will be handled in the event they arise. For example, faculty should include a section in their syllabus that outlines the institution's non-discrimination policy, and a statement that reiterates that the classroom is a space where discrimination will not be tolerated. It is important to note, however, that merely including a policy in a syllabus does not protect students against discrimination. It is key that faculty work to enact the policy statements they include. Other ideas may include brainstorming with students their expectations for behavior and participation through things like "ground rules," and/or discussions with students about how they would like to see instances handled.
Questions that may help facilitate thinking through classroom management are:

- What are the behavioral expectations for students in this class?
- What are effective ways students can critique and/or disagree in a productive manner?
- How will instances of discrimination be handled, both on the part of students and the faculty?
- If a mistake is made, how can we engage in recovery and transform it into a learning moment?

It is important for faculty to include themselves, their own actions, and their own behavior when issues of classroom management are discussed. These expectations and classroom management strategies should be for both faculty as well as students. Importantly, both students and faculty make mistakes and, more times than not, mistakes can be sites for further learning. Thus, it may be helpful when discussing classroom expectations that expectations around acknowledging mistakes and ways to move forward be addressed, as well. This may feel high stakes for TAs or other faculty who are new to teaching; thus, it is important that TAs, in particular, are given opportunities to develop strategies for mistake recovery that feel comfortable for them but also attends to owning their mistakes.

Recommendations

Importantly, this model can only work if institutions work to provide both the space, resources, and time for such a comprehensive workshop for faculty. As we reflect upon the resistance we have encountered in the workshops we have facilitated, we understand participants' frustrations, fears, and anxiety about being "right" and using "correct" terminology. In a single day, participants were exposed to so much information, tasked with learning about the institution, their new students, all while knowing they need to be preparing for their classes, writing syllabi, and selecting course materials. Thus, in order to actualize this conceptual model that serves to empower faculty to better support their trans* students in the classroom, we provide recommendations that must occur if true transformation and learning can occur regarding trans* college students.

Increased Time with Faculty for Engagement

For faculty to be able to really explore the larger social and institutional contexts for trans* bodies, there must be more time allotted for these workshops. Ideally, these workshops can take place over a number of days throughout the semester. This provides continued engagement, time for reflection, as well as allows for participants to do their own research and come with their specific questions. Our concern is that not even day-long institutes are enough; instead, these sessions should occur throughout the academic year.

Increased Partnerships with Campus Offices

While we are able to provide an excellent foundation for how to support trans* students, we also believe that there are other campus offices that faculty can benefit from. To be sure, we are often uncomfortable being deemed the sole "experts" of trans* students on our campus. There are a variety of other offices, and possibly even student groups, that faculty can engage and benefit. Importantly, if students participate in these workshops, workshop facilitators must pay careful attention to issues of emotional labor and to ensure that student voices are not merely used. As such, students should be appropriately compensated and be able to opt out of discussions if they choose.

Reward Structures

Our final recommendation centers on the reward structures of these professional development workshops. Primarily, institutions need to reward participants for the time and hard work that goes into teaching improvement and effectiveness. Not only should institutions provide the built-in time for faculty to engage in faculty development for teaching, these workshops should reward faculty's participation in the promotion and tenure process. While ideally teaching effectiveness and engaging in inclusion in the classroom should be a value all faculty have, as outlined by Sabagh and Saroyan (2014), faculty are given messages by institutions and other faculty members regarding what "counts" for promotion. Thus, to ensure that faculty know that inclusive, effective teaching is valued at an institution, it must be rewarded on a structural level.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to provide a practical conceptual model that can be used in faculty development so that classrooms can be sites for emancipatory praxis. For faculty to be empowered in their classrooms, it is critical that institutions design effective faculty development opportunities for faculty to better foster inclusive teaching practices. Faculty need more time to learn about topics, develop methods of instruction, and find curricula that include diverse student groups. Importantly, institutions need to send the message that effective teaching, which must include inclusive teaching practices, matters. This is particularly important for trans* students who experience chilly campus climates and classroom environments.

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Trans Liberation in Graduate Education: Reflections on a Project Centering Trans Collegians

Jeane Pauline De Guzman Robles, Benjamin C. Kennedy, Soren Dews, & Jason C. Garvey

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to reflect on our collective experiences as students and faculty in a higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate course that worked to center trans collegians and provide recommendations to promote opportunities for trans liberation in the classroom. Dr. Jason Garvey teaches The American College Student, a HESA course exploring the diversity of American college students and institutions. The course is framed around the concepts of Knowing (gaining knowledge and understanding), Being (clarifying values and beliefs), and Doing (developing skills). Each semester, he selects a specific population of students to contextualize college impact and success theories learned in class and supplement students' learning of broader bodies of theory and scholarship. In spring 2018, Dr. Jason Garvey and his students supplemented their learning about college impact with a focus on the experiences of trans collegians. As a part of the Doing component, Dr. Jason Garvey structured an assignment called the Doing Project with the goal of developing a self-sustaining initiative to serve trans collegians. In this manuscript, we will share our experiences as students and faculty throughout the Doing Project as we reflected upon the question, "How does the Doing Project lead to trans liberation in the classroom?"

Keywords: *trans liberation, graduate education, classroom, reflection, trans collegians, project*

Introduction

The American College Student (ACS) is a graduate-level course that explores the diversity of American college students and institutions. The course is organized around Astin's (1993) *Inputs-Environments-Outputs* framework. Specifically, for this course, inputs include student demographics, the college choice process, and enrollment. Transitions, college environments, and college student development create the focus for the study of environments. Finally, retention and persistence, student outcomes, and moving forward make up our examination of outputs. *ACS* is a required course for MEd students enrolled in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) graduate preparatory program. In addition, there are typically 5-10 graduate students in *ACS* who are enrolled in other graduate programs or registered as non-degree-seeking students.

ACS is framed around the concepts of *Knowing* (gaining knowledge and understanding), *Being* (clarifying values and beliefs), and *Doing* (developing skills). As such, there are three objectives for this course, each with accompanying outcomes. Regarding *Knowing*, students are expected to be able to describe the diversity of students attending two- and four-year institutions, identify characteristics of learning environments that support student success, and explain various

student outcomes that higher education institutions should demonstrate to various stakeholders. Regarding *Being*, students are expected to discuss current trends and assumptions about college students, environments, and outcomes, and examine individual contributions to higher education. Finally, *Doing* focuses on developing skills and requires that students examine local/regional/national contexts for a particular population of students, and create a self-sustaining initiative that will serve this student population.

Each semester that *ACS* is taught, the class focuses on a specific population of students to contextualize theories learned in class and supplement the learning of broader bodies of college impact theory and scholarship. The professor selects the population based on current contexts in higher education and student affairs, and also on newly released book publications that are highly regarded in the field. In spring 2018, *ACS* supplemented learning about college impact with a focus on the experiences of transgender[1] students and read Dr. Z Nicolazzo's (2016) book entitled *Trans* in College: Transgender students' strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional policies of inclusion.*

The purpose of the Doing Project in spring 2018 was the development a self-sustaining initiative to serve trans collegians. In order to progress in the Doing Project throughout the semester, there were several assignments for accountability.

- **Defining aspects:** Who is our base/community with whom we work? Who are the stakeholders and decision-makers? With which departments/affiliates should we connect? What are we trying to achieve? What is your intention for this initiative, and how does it relate to your own gender journey?
- **Planning and preparation:** Draft a timeline for the semester, including specific steps for the initiative and important semester dates. Suggest mechanisms for communication and accountability. What resources will we need for the initiative?
- **Implementation:** Determine deliverables for the initiative. Draft committee structures, including goals and tasks for each committee.
- **Finishing up:** Determine what must be completed for finishing the initiative. What obstacles are in our way? What is your individual role for finishing up the initiative? Has your relationship with gender evolved from participating in this initiative? Why or why not?

In order to frame the context of our experiences as students and faculty in *ACS* and the classroom broadly, we provide literature that overviews trans students in the classroom. In our review, we pay particular attention to uplifting the voices of transgender scholars and scholars who have fluid and complex understandings of gender and trans people.

Trans Students in the Classroom

In 2014, Laverne Cox graced the cover of Time magazine and boldly declared to the world that the transgender tipping point - the height of transgender representation and advocacy - had arrived (Steinmetz, 2014). Trans folks have been woven into the modern fabric of society; since the Coopers Do-Nuts Riot of 1959, Stonewall in 1969, and a recent series of landmark gender-affirming cases from county judges to the Supreme Court, transgender people have been fighting

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1. The authors use "transgender" and "trans" interchangeably and as inclusive umbrella terms as we embrace the queerness of language used to describe the multitude of gender identities and expressions.

for recognition and equality under the law. However, the Trump administration has taken several steps to dehumanize the trans community and strip away hard-earned rights, including attempting to ban trans soldiers from serving in the military, defining gender as a biological construct, and rescinding the Obama administration's Dear Colleague letter regarding schools' duty to protect and accommodate trans students (Benner & Pear, 2018; Kreighbaum, 2018).

Within higher education, trans oppression appears for many in the classroom. Since the rescinding of the "Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students," there are no federal protections for trans students. The landscape is dire: nearly one-quarter (24%) of college students who were out or perceived as transgender in college or vocational school experienced "some form of mistreatment, such as being verbally harassed, prohibited from dressing according to their gender identity, disciplined more harshly, or physically or sexually assaulted because people thought they were transgender" (Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet, & Anafi, 2016, p. 1). Trans students face unique barriers to inclusion compared with their lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers, and scholars continue to contest the conflation of the experiences of minoritized gender identities with minoritized sexual identities (Catalano, 2015). On college campuses, transgender students are often facing issues of misrecognition and invisibility (Pusch, 2005) in addition to more extreme mistreatment based on their identities. Micro- and macro-aggressions occur inside and outside of the classroom, with harm being inflicted by peers, professors, and professionals who misgender, invalidate, or harass students. How do we expect students to thrive in college when they are barely able to survive? Campus climate directly impacts academic experiences and outcomes (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2014).

Institutions of higher education, often viewed as bastions of radical inclusion, seem to be failing trans students. However, Catalano (2015) summarized that higher education, which has previously "been characterized by genderism," is at present in the process of being "transformed by the presence of trans students" (p. 411). Though Jourian (2017) argued that some current practices "distill complex data and people into simplistic models and understandings" (p. 415), there are still broad strokes colleges and universities can take to ensure the legal protection of trans students on campus in the face of lacking federal protections. The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals Trans Policy Working Group (2014) created *Suggested Best Practices for Supporting Trans Students*, offering recommendations to campuses related to housing, health centers, campus conduct offices, and more. In 2017, two Consortium co-chairs, Genny Beemyn and D. A. Dirks, authored an additional piece after the Dear Colleague letter was nullified, encouraging campuses to legally encode trans students' rights in their own policies.

Simply having transgender people represented in the public sphere or working in higher education does not signal their human rights or equal protection under the law. As Kai Cheng Thom (2018) wrote, "We must remember that representation and revolution are not at all the same thing" (para. 41). Clearly then, representation is not enough; liberation is what trans folks are actively working toward in this revolution. Liberation is both, "The action of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression" and "freedom from limits on thought or behavior" ("Liberation," n.d. para. 1 & para. 2). Daman Wandke (2018) believes that liberation is two-fold. One form of liberation comes "when a person or group who is stereotyped chooses to overcome the labels set upon them by individuals or society as a whole, and therefore finds liberation within them self," (Wandke, 2018, para. 1) while another comes "when an individual or society that places labels on others takes the time to look inside the labeled person or group rather than simply seeing the outside; and thus, become liberated in knowledge" (para. 1).

ACS attempted to enact liberation both for trans students, allowing them to self-define their educational goals and engage with theoretical content related to their lived experiences, and for cisgender students, challenging them to see trans students and colleagues through a frame of liberation. What then does liberation look like in a classroom through a trans epistemology?

Liberation Inside Classrooms through a Trans Epistemology

Nicolazzo (2017) proposed a trans epistemology as a way towards trans liberation in the classroom. Postsecondary institutions of education produce knowledge that others trans people, bodies, and experiences (Catalano, 2015) by attempting to understand trans people through a gazing cisgender eye. To counteract the cisgender lens, Nicolazzo (2017) proposes a trans epistemology, "an epistemology from which we come to know ourselves, each other, and, as a result, can transform the narratives that have been written about us by cisgender others" (p. 4) - an epistemology rooted in knowing about transness through the experiences of trans people. Nicolazzo (2017) proposed trans epistemology which includes six tenets rooted in community-based praxis and living towards trans liberation. The following are the descriptions of each tenant:

1. Trans people may be from oppression, but we ourselves are not of oppression;
2. We all experience our transness differently as a result of our varied, intersecting identities;
3. In and through community with each other, we have the power to heal and remake ourselves as trans people;
4. Our continued de/re/construction of our trans subjectivities spans material and virtual environments;
5. "Trickle up activism" and grassroots coalition-building are, and will remain to be, orientations for our community;
6. In/visibility and its varied meanings are central to our senses of self, community, and kinship. (Nicolazzo, 2017, pp. 7-8)

For our manuscript, we used Nicolazzo's (2017) trans epistemology to understand how the Doing Project tried to serve trans collegians. We acknowledge that there is not a single trans epistemology but many trans epistemologies because each individual and their intersecting identities experience being trans differently. As such, in our manuscript, we foreground individual narratives of all four co-authors reflecting on their experience to understand the manifestation and oppression of trans liberation in the Doing Project.

Our Trans Epistemologies

Each author's analysis of the manifestations and oppression of trans liberation in the Doing Project is informed by their varied, intersecting identities, thus each author provides a description of how they identify. Jeane (any pronoun) identifies as a Filipinx genderqueer transmasculine person who had not medically transitioned at the time. Ben (he/him) identifies as a white queer transgender man. Soren (he/him) identifies as a white queer butch transgender man. Jay (he/him) identifies as a white gay/queer cisgender man. There is no single trans epistemology, and each author embodies their own version of a trans epistemology based on their varied, intersecting identities, especially gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, and race. Though each author holds

their individual identities, whiteness and masculinity are enforced heavily by three of the four authors. By acknowledging the identities present, the authors acknowledge the privilege and oppression which informs how each answers the question, "How does the Doing Project lead to trans liberation in the classroom?"

Our Stories through a Collaborative Autoethnography

We used the Doing Project from the *ACS* to explore our learning experiences as queer and trans people in higher education. To reflect on our learning experience, the authors used a collaborative autoethnography to center community-interrogation in a shared learning environment - in this case, a graduate classroom. An autoethnography incorporates "emotion, action, introspection, self-consciousness, and the body itself" (Martinez & Andreatta, 2015, p. 228) to interrogate individual narratives within a larger context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In other words, an autoethnography allows authors to intentionally reflect on their identities within the context of their research (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Glesne, 2011). A collaborative autoethnography uses the same analysis but does so through a collective lens of a community. Using a collaborative autoethnography creates separate and complementary narratives for students in a shared learning space (Blalock & Akehi, 2018). Our collaborative autoethnography allowed us to bring both our individual experiences, shaped by each person's intersecting identities, and our shared experiences through the affinity we shared as queer and trans people.

This article is the result of individual and community reflection through reading, writing, and talking. To capture our experiences, we kept a shared journal during the semester and created questions to reflect on our overall experience and individually answered them. Below are the questions:

- Why did you take/teach this class?
- What happened during the class?
- How did your relationships evolve or change in the class?
- How did your relationship with gender evolve or change because of the class?
- How are you feeling since you took the class?

In the following subsections, each author provides context for the reason behind taking or teaching *ACS*. Then we give an overview of class dynamics through four themes which influenced the way we navigated the class: outness, tokenization, kinship, and processing gender identity. Individual reflections will be used to showcase each author's voice through the text. We used our collaborative autoethnography to understand how trans liberation manifested or not in our classroom, the *ACS*.

What it means to take *The American College Student*

Each author had their own expectations for the class based on their perceptions of how trans students were going to be centered in the classroom.

Jay—Each semester that I teach ACS, I select a specific population of students to contextualize theories learned in class and supplement our learning of broader bodies of college impact theory and scholarship. The population I select is based on current contexts

in higher education and student affairs, and also on newly released book publications that are highly regarded in the field. In spring 2018, we supplemented our learning about college impact with a focus on the experiences of trans collegians and will read Dr. Z Nicolazzo's book entitled Trans* in college: Transgender students' strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional policies of inclusion.

As the professor, Jay crafted a structure for his students to understand the impact of college on trans students through reading scholarship. He had hoped that by reading about trans students, his students would learn the ways they can support trans students in college as student affairs professionals. Before the Doing Project, Jay assigned students to read a *Trans* in College* and other supplemental articles to give context to what trans students face in college
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> *Ben—I took this course because I was excited to have the opportunity to engage with trans-specific higher education content. I had never had a course explicitly center transness, and this is exactly what I was looking for in a course description. I also wanted to develop kinship with Jay, challenge myself, and explore an elective. I hoped to have the chance to focus on centering my identity in my work and not needing to find an excuse to do so.*

> *Jeane—When Jay announced that the class would center trans students I grew excited and scared at the same time because I recently came out to my cohort as trans. I felt excited to center trans students in our readings, discussions, and class projects because I wanted to see myself represented and also feel supported by my cohort. What stirred my nervousness were peoples' expectations of me, a trans person, within a class centering trans students.*

> *Soren—I was excited to take it because Jay was the professor, but when I heard that the focus of the class was trans students, I felt apprehensive. I started thinking and accepting myself as trans during January 2018, and the course started at the end of that month. There was very little time for me to process my identity internally before I had to start processing it externally and critically.*

Jeane, Ben, and Soren were hyper-aware of their gender identities and gender expressions because of the way Jay structured the *ACS* to center their salient identity as trans students. Ben was excited to see himself represented in the class material, especially within higher education as a trans student affairs professional. Jeane and Soren also felt excited, but recently coming out as trans stirred anxiousness because they feared their trans identity would be interrogated as they were processing what being trans meant for them. Overall, each trans author felt a sense of excitement taking *ACS* because they felt they would be represented in the material and supported by Jay. Since the three trans authors had never had their trans identity at the center of their classroom experiences, mixed in with their excitement of representation was apprehension of how other students in the course would interrogate their identities. Before the Doing Project, Jeane, Ben, and Soren understood that Jay would magnify their trans identities through the lens of representation and their classmates would do the same through the lens of tokenization.

Outness

Each trans author's level of outness contributed to the ways in which they interacted with class material, people taking the class, and Jay. Before the start of the class, Jay invited anyone who identified as trans to connect with him in hopes to provide a structure of support.

> *Jay—When I began the class, I reached out to folks who I knew identified as trans/non-binary. I also sent a broad message to all members of the class inviting them to contact me if they identified as trans/non-binary, particularly because of the focus of class, and because I did not provide effective support in previous iterations of this class for students who identified with the student group of focus. I wanted to make sure trans/non-binary students were feeling supported from the beginning of class.*

Jay wanted to foster kinship with the trans students in class as a cisgender ally facilitating the classroom space. He invited Jeane and Ben because he knew they identified as trans, and they both came to process with Jay about how they felt about taking the class.

> *Jeane—Ben came to the meeting, and I felt seen and supported by both folks because they listened to my feelings and ideas for the class. After our meeting, I felt excited about the class because I felt like I was able to structure the class in a way I felt comfortable, and I also felt like I had folks to go to.*

Jeane came out as trans to their HESA program during the end of the first semester, and they decided to come to the meeting because of their positive relationship with Jay. They feared not being seen as a trans "enough" because they had not yet transitioned physically, and they did not know how to explain their gender identity through words. Jeane understood that being out as trans comes with the risk of having to prove one's transness to cisgender folks. During the meeting, Jeane felt affirmed by both Ben and Jay, which eased their nervousness.

> *Soren—I only recently started identifying as non-binary during the month of January. Holding this identity is really new and fragile for me, and I don't know what that means for me a lot of the time. This class comes at a strange time then. How do I exist in a class that centers trans students when that identity is so new to me? What is my place in this narrative?*

Both Jeane and Soren recently came out as trans, but their experiences varied from voluntarily coming out versus feeling forced to come out. Jay's invitation to meet with trans folks, though filled with positive intent, Soren felt pressured to come out. Soren did not come out because he feared the environment would question his trans identity when he was still questioning what it meant for him. For both Jeane and Soren, outness came with the risk of being interrogated as a trans person in a classroom intentionally focused on the concept of trans students.

Ben identifies as a trans man and holds "cis-passing" privilege, allowing him to choose if and when to come out to the class.

> *Ben—I intentionally did not come out during the first class, and took note of how folks interacted with me/listened to what I had to share/etc. Halfway through our next class*

I decided to come out, and I noticed the nuanced ways in which those interactions/attitudes/etc. shifted. Someone continuously challenged every single thing I shared about my story and the dynamics on campus for trans students, despite having been a trans person at this school for the past five years (it was their first semester). Don't get me wrong, I appreciate being challenged to think about problems in new ways, but every time this happens in this particular class it seems to be directly related to me sharing my experience as a trans person.

After Ben came out as a trans, folks began to challenge his input and perspectives when he talked about his trans identity. Like Jeane and Soren, Ben understood that coming out is risk in a classroom where trans students are invalidated based on cisgender students' perception of what trans students are supposed to be or need.

Outness was tied to Jeane, Ben, and Soren's perception of safety which in turn influenced the way they showed up as a trans person in class. Initially, Jeane and Ben saw the class as a way to engage with their trans identity, so visibility meant representation. On the other hand, Soren saw visibility as a threat towards his identity development because he did not want others to question his newly formed trans identity. Each trans author's sense of self was at risk of challenge by cisgender students' perception of transness based on their in/visibility.

Jeane and Ben's outness was used against them because cisgender students questioned their ability to speak for the trans community, as cisgender students tried to discern what initiatives to create for the Doing Project. Soren not being out was used as a defense mechanism against the tokenization Jeane and Ben were facing, in addition to silencing their input as a trans person towards trans initiatives. Outness was used to tokenize and silence Jeane, Ben, and Soren during the Doing Project.

Kinship

Jeane, Ben, and Soren formed a kinship, or a relationship built on shared identity, with one another to process their shared struggles because trans people in and through community with each other have the power to heal and remake themselves as trans people (Nicolazzo, 2017).

Soren—The person) I felt consistent kinship with, throughout the entire semester and Doing Project, was Jeane. During the first few weeks of the class in particular, I saw a lot of harm and tokenism (accidental I think) directed towards them. They were the only out trans person in the class for most of the semester, and watching their experience solidified my conviction to stay in the closet. At the same time, we talked at length about the class and our experiences of the class as trans folx in different stages of our identity development.

Soren could empathize with the harm Jeane was facing as another trans person regardless of being out. After each class, Jeane and Soren processed the ways they faced harm because they offered validation for each other. Unlike cisgender students who challenged both of their lived experiences, they understood the struggles of existing as a trans person holistically. Soren brought up feeling pressured to come into his own identity at a pace he was not comfortable with, and Jeane was challenged to prove themselves as a trans person.

Ben –I didn't seek out relationships with the other trans folks in the class initially, but always felt in my heart that we were all there for each other… The way that my peers act in this class, both in general and in relation to conversations regarding transness, has made me consider withdrawing…I have been feeling guilty that I dropped the class and worried that I burned bridges or strained relationships by doing so. I generally feel awkward and either frustrated or embarrassed when I happen to run into someone from the class. I feel bad that I "left" some of my friends behind or let down Jay.

Though Ben did not directly reach out to other trans folks in the classroom, he felt a sense of care for the other trans folk who he knew were also facing harm. Ben's frustration surrounding class dynamics built up to the point that he dropped the class for his own well-being. He understood that being there for each other is essential to healing, so he felt guilty for leaving.

Outside from their kinship with Ben and Soren, Jeane built relationships with cisgender folks who did not tokenize their trans identity.

Jeane—Person-centered cis allies were folks who got to know me as Jeane and not just as a trans person. These folks did not change the way they acted around me because I was a trans person, but they validated my identity as a part of the whole me.

Though they did not connect through their transness, person-centered cisgender allies validated the ways Jeane expressed their transness. In addition to validating their trans identity, person-centered allies understood that transness was a salient identity but not the only identity that Jeane holds.

Jay shared kinship with queer and trans students through their shared queer identity. He understood that his relationship with trans students was rooted in allyship as a cisgender gay/queer man.

Jay—I Still a strong kinship, particularly with QT folks from class (and even more still with trans/non-binary students). I am more readily accepting my cycle of shame and finding ways to escape this cycle to move towards more effective allyship…I recognize that dwelling on my feelings of "I wish I could be a better trans/non-binary ally" places a lot of unnecessary educating and supporting from trans/non-binary people to help me get through my dwelling (which is wholly unnecessary).

Compared to Jeane, Soren, and Ben's kinship, Jay's allyship as a cisgender ally and professor came with taking responsibility for the harm caused to the trans students as a result of participating in *ACS*.

For Soren, Ben, and Jeane, kinship with other trans folks was necessary to heal through their negative experiences in class. This kinship acted as a mode of survival because they were able to empathize and validate each other when their trans identities were interrogated or dehumanized. Outside of the trans kinship, queer kinship and person-centered allies became support systems for trans students, but these relationships also came with potential for unwanted processing of cisgender guilt. In and through community with one another and person-centered allies, trans students were able to find communities of support within the classroom.

Though the Doing project tokenized and silenced Soren, Ben, and Jeane, they built kinship through shared trauma. They used their kinship as a form of collective resilience against the trans

oppression present in the classroom. Soren, Ben, and Jeane built kinship as a form of survival in *ACS* - kinship was not a choice.

Processing Gender Identity

As a result of the class, each author processed their gender identity, whether they wanted to or not, through the class material and interactions with people in class. Each person was able to sustain themselves through support systems or dropping the class because trans people may be from oppression, but they are not of oppression which means that though trans people face oppression they are able to exist and thrive (Nicolazzo, 2017). Soren, Ben, and Jeane share the ways in which they found ways to exist in a transphobic classroom space.

> *Soren—My relationship with my gender definitely evolved during class. I was forced to think about and pick apart my identity faster than I wanted. I was forced to face uncomfortable class situations and discussions before I felt 'ready'. I did a lot of unpacking and processing outside of class hours, I did a lot of processing and unpacking with Jeane on our way to and from class. My strong support network helped me work through my identity in a positive way even while I was having negative experiences in class.*

The focus on trans students in class felt like a constant interrogation of his gender identity which led him to seek refuge outside of class through his support systems. Soren understood that he needed to take this class for his graduate degree, so he had to find a way to survive the semester.

> *Jeane—The class magnified my relationship with gender through the class content and my interactions with folks about gender. The readings validated my experiences as a trans person by hearing stories and research about what trans students were going through within higher education. Based on my relationship with folks in the class, I would either feel affirmed or a "population" to study which made me think about my gender identity constantly.*

Jeane found the focus on trans students as an affirming experience through representation when they were not tokenized. The readings provided Jeane with the vocabulary to express their gender identity in a way that they had never experienced before. Jeane also formed support systems through their trans kinship with Soren and person-centered allies who made them feel more than a learning tool.

> *Ben—My relationship with my gender did not evolve or change as far as I have reflected, but the way I talk about it (or not) has shifted. I definitely don't feel as willing to out myself anymore after the negative experiences in this class.*

Ben, who has been out for several years, felt that the class did not impact his gender identity development, but the negative interactions led him to close off his trans identity within the classroom. He chose to prioritize his well-being and withdrew from the class to avoid the transphobic environment.

Jeane, Soren, and Ben found ways to heal through the trans oppression they faced in the classroom. When viewed through the lens of oppression, dismissal or tokenization dehumanize

trans people. The three trans authors faced various forms of trans oppression because the Doing Project failed to acknowledge the tenets of Nicolazzo's (2017) trans epistemology as cisgender students tried to complete an assignment.

The Doing Project as Liberatory Work

If trans liberation can be imagined through a trans epistemology (Nicolazzo, 2017), then liberatory work is possible through an embodiment of trans epistemology. Trans students embodied a trans epistemology, but the Doing Project did not provide cisgender students a framework to do liberatory work. In this case, the classroom space manifested the tokenization of the trans students in the room as seen through the individual narratives. Cisgender peers challenged the lived experiences of the trans people in the room but not the scholarship, which led to the erasure of the former. Trans people were dismissed in the place of scholarship as cisgender students worked to complete an assignment. The classroom was used as a place to complete an assignment about trans students, instead of making the classroom about trans students themselves. Table 1 below summarizes how the tenets of a trans epistemology manifested in the classroom between trans and cisgender students:

Nicolazzo's (2016) Tenets of a trans epistemology	How trans students embodied a trans epistemology	How the Doing Project did/did not embody a trans epistemology
Trans people may be from oppression, but we ourselves are not of oppression.	Jeane, Ben, and Soren found ways to survive and thrive inside and outside the classroom though they were facing hardships.	Cisgender students were tasked to create an initiative *for* trans students based on what they thought trans students needed instead of *with* trans students.
We all experience our transness differently as a result of our varied, intersecting identities.	Jeane, Ben, and Soren shared their lived experiences as trans individuals with intersecting identities.	Cisgender students were tasked to learn about transness through literature and challenged peers' lived experiences.
In and through community with each other, we have the power to heal and remake ourselves as trans people.	Jeane, Ben, and Soren used their kinship as a way to heal from the harm they faced as trans individuals.	Cisgender students were encouraged to consider their gender and privilege through class assignments and discussions, but their reflection was rooted in their own cisgender lens.

Our continued de/re/construction of our trans subjectivities spans material and virtual environments.	Jeane, Ben, and Soren used online journaling as a way to understand their experience in the classroom.	Cisgender students used online articles, websites, and social media as a way to understand trans students' experiences which they used to inform their initiatives.
"Trickle up activism" and grassroots coalition-building are, and will remain to be, orientations for our community.	Jeane, Ben, and Soren focused their projects on an initiative started by trans students years ago.	Cisgender students were given liberty to choose how to focus their time/attention. Some chose to partner with Jeane, Ben, and Soren, others chose to create their own initiative without trans people.
In/visibility and its varied meanings are central to our senses of self, community, and kinship.	Jeane, Ben, and Soren chose to come out or not based on their needs which influenced the ways in which they thought about themselves, community, and kinship.	Out trans students were asked to make decisions to facilitate learning in the class which led to added responsibility of teaching.

Table 1. Summary of the ways tenets of a trans epistemology showed up in the classroom for trans and cisgender students.

The Doing Project did not lead to trans liberation because the project did not have a lens that encompassed a trans epistemology. Cisgender students were tasked with creating an initiative based on what they learned from scholarly literature viewed through a cisgender lens. The focus on the Doing Project as an assignment led students to tokenize trans students as a source of validation for their grade. Cisgender students created initiatives based on what they thought trans students needed, instead of understanding what is necessary for trans liberation. A trans epistemology can be a framework for an assignment, but may lead to tokenization because of an assignment's ties to a grade. How do faculty and students shift from erasure and tokenization towards liberation? Classroom spaces can be a conduit to educate cisgender students about the tenets of a trans epistemology to work towards trans liberation in education. Trans liberation through the embodiment of a trans epistemology is possible through a classroom pedagogy rooted in a trans epistemology. In a liberatory classroom, trans students stories are validated not erased, initiatives against transphobia are led by trans and cisgender individuals, and cisgender privilege is acknowledged.

When we choose to do liberatory work through pedagogies instead of assignments we create an environment where trans students are not used as another "resource" to ensure a good grade. A classroom pedagogy rooted in a trans epistemology creates a structure where trans students are allowed to be their whole selves, and cisgender students share the responsibility of facilitating that space. When cisgender students understand the tenets of a trans epistemology they can engage with transness by interrogating their cisgender privilege and not challenge the narratives of trans students in the classroom.
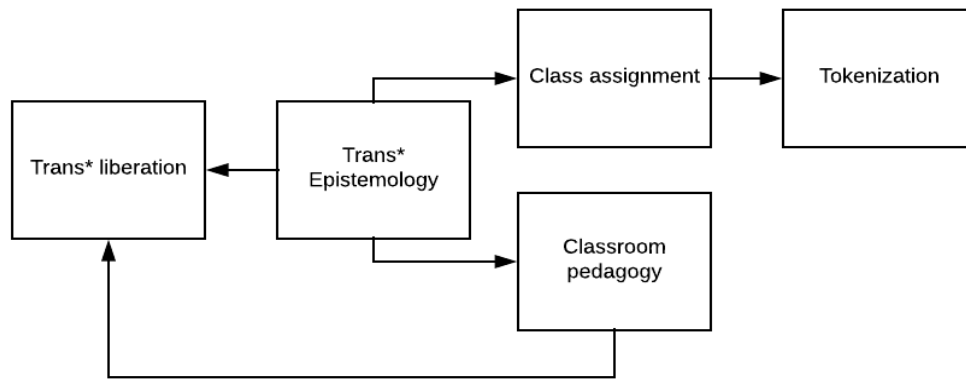
Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of how trans liberation can manifest through a classroom pedagogy rooted in a trans epistemology.

The Doing Project did not lead to trans liberation for the trans students in the classroom because of trans student tokenization by cisgender students who were driven by grades to do liberatory work. Trans liberation in a classroom space is possible through a classroom pedagogy rooted in a trans epistemology where trans students can exist as themselves and cisgender students share the responsibility of creating a safe space. Trans oppression continues to erase trans bodies within the binary education system, and we can use a trans epistemology as a way to resist. As educators, we must use our classroom space as a place to start a revolution towards liberation for trans students which starts with a pedagogy rooted in the epistemologies of trans students.

A Call for Trans Liberation in Higher Education

The following are recommendations for educators based on the tenets of trans epistemology. Recommendations draw on trans epistemology as a guide to try to create classroom spaces that center trans liberation.

1. Trans people may be from oppression, but we ourselves are not of oppression.

There is a fine line between doing "for" and doing "with." Tokenization occurred in the Doing Project when students sought to create initiatives *for* instead of *with* trans students. The lives and experiences of trans students may have been overlooked in favor of a grade. When centering a group of students, especially marginalized students, remove the incentive of a grade. Grades perpetuate a system of competition, white academia, and take the humanness out of people. In the case of the Doing Project, trans people became a group to be studied and understood for knowledge. Without the focus on a grade, lived experience, true understanding, and kinship can thrive. Some ways to facilitate this in a classroom would be to encourage self-reflection in low-stakes assignments such as journals (which allows for individual processing and ensures that harm is not done to others while the professor can give individual feedback), and to acknowledge that harm will occur in any space where there is discussion of marginalized identities, not just trans identities. Teach students the skills to understand, accept, own, and process guilt.

2. We all experience our transness differently as a result of our varied, intersecting identities.

In the classroom, the trans authors of this piece felt like their transness was under constant scrutiny. They felt like they needed to be a source of trans knowledge, to help other students define and understand what trans meant. The other source of information on trans students were academic articles, many of which were written by queer and trans authors about their experiences. These sources of knowledge provided only a few accounts of what it meant to be trans, but those cases were taken as the entire and sole definition for transness. Cisgender students took their understanding of that single definition of trans identity and created Doing Projects around that idea. This allowed them to feel like experts on trans identity, challenge trans students, like Ben described, and erase the varied trans identities of students in the classroom.

Because there is no single trans experience it is important to expand materials on trans students and people beyond the people in the classroom and academic texts. Facilitate this by presenting scholarship that does not just fall in the realm of academic studies and peer reviewed journals. Use personal accounts and multimedia (i.e. Youtube videos or blogs) to display the breadth of trans narratives. Affirm narratives of students who haven't figured everything out, highlight the intersectional nature of identity. Exploring a trans identity is a process, and for many people it continues to be a process even after they claim a trans identity. Educators must work to help their students interpret class materials through a trans epistemological lens.

3. In and through community with each other, we have the power to heal and remake ourselves as trans people.

Community is essential for trans people when in cisgender spaces. In *ACS*, Jeane, Ben, and Soren sought community with each other to process and heal throughout the semester, and Soren and Jeanne constructed their Doing Project around their shared community. However, community is not just beneficial for trans students to heal and be in kinship. Community for cisgender folks could serve as a venue for those folks to process privilege and exist in a space where they could understand and heal through guilt as a collective group. This might take the form of affinity groups, although affinity groups can isolate and out trans people who choose not to participate in the cisgender group. If those groups and opportunities to come together to process guilt are optional, then those who do not attend are not outed. There could be several affinity processing groups per semester with a requirement to attend at least one group. That way, folks would be in an affirming space but have the opportunity to choose when and with whom.

Beyond trans community amongst each other, Jeane, Ben, and Soren all expressed a connection to Jay, the instructor, as part of the reason they wanted or were excited to take this course. As students, Jeane, Ben, and Soren accessed Jay throughout the class, and he was seen as a supportive ally and in some cases a mentor, with whom they all feel kinship through a shared queer identity. Mentorship can be critical for students who come from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education settings (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017) For trans students, even just having a supportive professor who is open and affirming to their identities can make a big difference in their experience (Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Dickey, 2019; Pryor, 2015). Creating mentorship opportunities amongst trans faculty, professionals, and students would foster community beyond peer classroom kinship, allow for the sharing of history and experience spanning generations.

4. Our continued de/re/construction of our trans subjectivities spans material and virtual environments.

Researchers have pinpointed virtual environments as important spaces where transgender people can create and find community (Cipolletta, Votadoro, & Faccio, 2017; Nicolazzo, Pitcher, Renn, & Woodford, 2017). Educators could explore the creation of virtual spaces for students to process course information and their reactions to course content. Consider the possibility that these spaces remain anonymous for the safety and comfort of trans students. In *ACS* and the Doing Project, students with trans identities felt hyper visible and hyper aware of their identities. The majority of interactions were in person, and while there was a BlackBoard forum, participants in the class did not engage beyond writing their own post. More intentionality around the forum posts could have facilitated an environment where students could process together. Using in class text-in tools such as Poll Everywhere could give trans students an anonymous way to express their feelings in class through open ended questions and temperature checks.

5. "Trickle up activism" and grassroots coalition-building are, and will remain to be, ori-entations for our community.

In the classroom, emphasize person-centered allyship and opportunities for authentic kin-ship. Experiences such as the Doing Project can be improved by working on initiatives that trans people created for their community. Instead of starting new initiatives based on what students think trans people need, ask them to collaborate with student groups or trans organizations in the com-munity.

6. In/visibility and its varied meanings are central to our senses of self, community, and kinship (Nicolazzo, 2017).

In a course centering a social identity, there is sure to exist a sort of dichotomy between folks who are "out" versus "not out." Harm can be done on both sides as students who are out may be tokenized, and those who are not out may feel erased or unseen. As students explore their dy-namic identities, students' outness may change depending on the context of the course - for exam-ple, Jeanne and Soren discussed the events of the class through their shared trans identity outside of the classroom, but in class they experienced their transness very differently. Ben experienced the out/not out tension as well when he chose to disclose his trans identity further into the course after initially presenting as a cisgender man with his peers.

Students identities are not static; there is messiness, there is tension, and context matters. Educators must acknowledge the messiness and understand that a student's comfort with being out can vary in classroom spaces. For those who are out and tokenized, it is the responsibility of the instructor to control and create a classroom where they intervene in moments of tokenization and strive to create an affirming atmosphere for trans students. For students who are not out, acknowl-edging that they exist is important. Break down ideas of what it means to be trans enough by acknowledging that any trans identity is enough and invite all folk's narratives to the conversation.

Looking Back to Move Forward as Educators

To end our manuscript, we wanted to share what we learned throughout our reflection and commitments towards trans liberation in classroom spaces. Through our commitments as educators, we hope to create spaces where trans students are centered through a trans epistemology.

Jeane—I learned about the power of healing through community. Throughout the process of writing this manuscript, Ben, Soren, and I supported each other by validating our shared traumas and empowering one another to live out our truths. Thus, I commit to facilitating spaces where trans students, specifically trans people of color, can be in community with one another without having to choose between the intersections of their identities.

Ben—This class taught me the burden of tokenization, the consequences of in/visibility, and the power of embracing your authentic self. I learned how to create and hold boundaries that prioritized my own well-being and ability to be there for others, the differences in working "for" and working "with" communities, and the unintentional harm that even the best of intentions can cause. As an educator and aspiring professor-to-be, I commit to moving towards trans liberation by creating classroom spaces in which transgender students of all identities feel seen, heard, and validated; I commit to continue educating my cisgender students and peers on trans identities, issues, and inclusion. I am inspired to continue sharing my story and shifting the narratives around what is possible for trans folks to achieve - that we are healthy, happy, whole humans with so much to offer.

Soren—Reflecting on ACS and the Doing Project after a year and a half makes me realize how much my gender developed since the start of spring semester 2018. Change, process, and continual identity development are at the forefront of my mind. During ACS I felt pressure to know what being trans meant, and I learned that I still don't know what that fully means for myself. I think feeling comfortable with liminal spaces is a large part of transness, and perhaps a large part of allyship. It took me a long time to be comfortable with that part of myself. If folks become comfortable with that liminal quality of transness, they can focus on person-centered allyship, like Jeane proposes. Because of Jeane and Ben, I also learned to appreciate how healing trans kinship can be, and I hope to share that kinship with students in the future because I needed that space in a class where I felt unsafe and tokenized.

Jay—Through teaching ACS and co-authoring this manuscript with Jeane, Ben, and Soren, I have reflected quite a lot on humility, good intentions, solidarity, and kinship. On a smaller scale, I've been revising and reenvisioning ACS and focusing on new pedagogical approaches to embrace a liberatory classroom experience. On a broader scale, I have continued to reflect on and question the role of higher education and college classrooms on working towards equity and justice for trans liberation.

Our manuscript serves as a call to action for educators to implement a trans epistemology within classrooms as a way to resist trans tokenism and make way for trans liberation in education.

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In Search of Her: An Autoethnographic Search
For Self in Virtual Landscapes

Z Nicolazzo

Abstract

In this manuscript, I write about my ongoing exploration of my possible gendered future, using the avatar creation site Bitmoji as a virtual landscape through which to do so. To do so, I use an autoethnographic methodological process, allowing me to think about my own individual experience and how it is influenced by/influences broader macro-discourses of gender. As a result, I use my self-explorations to inform how others—in particular, college educators—think about gender as a mediating discourse throughout postsecondary educational contexts. In other words, my own searching for her, my feminine gendered self, exposes possibilities for gender-based praxis on college campuses.

Keywords: *Trans, femininity, autoethnography, online, bitmoji*

> *"We [trans women] want to want. We desire to desire"*
> *(Hayward, personal communication).*

> *"Maybe the internet raised us" (Lorde, 2013).*

What does it mean to be(come) a trans woman in a digital age? Who is she, and how do I search for her in a world rife with proclamations that trans women should not exist? Hailing the words of the Black trans actress and activist Laverne Cox, Hayward (2017) wrote, "Trans women are dying because they don't exist—for black trans women, this equation reveals a matrix of 'gratuitous violence' forged in relation to 'don't exist'" (p. 192). That is, non-existence is made as both a social mandate and an ontological futurity; despite their literal existence, trans women, and particularly trans women of color, are caught in a necropolitical web in which they come into social existence as a result of their being erased from existence. The public then counts how many have died this year, which is always the bloodiest year on record for trans women. Names are attached to hashtags, and our collective hearts break while our sisters are misgendered, misnamed, and further erased, even in death. So, I ask again, what does it mean to be(come) a trans woman in a digital age?

I start with the death of my sisters, and primarily my sisters of color, not to further tropes of the tragic trans woman (Serano, 2007), or to suggest a simplistic success/failure binary. I start here because I must; because in a field of education marked by an overt niceness that belies the ongoing presence of white supremacy and trans oppression (Ahmed, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Nicolazzo, 2017b; Patton, 2016), I must point out how coming into ourselves as trans women, especially those amongst us who are trans women of color, is not all that easy. Because even in a college environment that is continually marked as a time of self-exploration—so much so that this has become an oft-lauded trope in itself—some of us are told, tacitly and otherwise, that to explore

is to not exist. I start here because educators need to reckon with the ways they have continued to cut trans women, and trans women of color, out of the frame. In a world in which trans women are deemed non-human, where Blackness is made synonymous with being animalistic, where is the space to find and hold onto who we can be(come) as trans women? In a world dedicated to binaries—gay/straight, cis/trans, accepted/denied, in/out—who is responsible for changing the structures that deny humanity, worth, and existence to those most on the margins? And what role must educators play in this social transformation? I start with the death of my sisters because calling them back to existence, having them on these pages with me, is a refusal to the ongoing claims of our inhumanity. By calling them (back) into existence here—even through the binary code of a computer screen—I can begin to search for my self, and my place amongst our community.

Welcoming You into My Bodily Becoming

Before exploring the above questions, I ought to tell you my why. As I share with students working on manuscripts, the ending should never be a surprise, in that the reader should know how we will all get there together. So while I intend for this manuscript to prick your consciousness, and to stay with you well beyond your reading the words displayed here (Mazzei, 2013), I want to be clear about my intentions, because in some ways, they have both nothing and everything to do with you. What I mean by this is that while I wish to use my search for her, my trans feminine self, as a vehicle to push the boundaries of educational praxis—which is for you as a reader—the process of my searching is just that: mine. Again, calling on the work of Hayward (2008), she wrote:

> From the first, a transsexual woman embodiment does not necessarily foreground a wish to "look like" or "look more like a woman" (i.e. passing)—though for some transwomen this may indeed be a wish (fulfilled or not). The point of view of the looker (those who might "read" her) is not the most important feature of transsubjectivity—the trans-woman wishes to be of her body, to "speak" from her body. (p. 72)

That is, although I will slide between the false binary of public/private through my searching, I seek to be "of [my] body, to 'speak' from [my] body."

In what follows, I will discuss my ongoing search for my self as a trans woman, a label I admittedly hold rather loosely and will explore as well. Recognizing that we as trans people are always already in transition (Cooper, 2012; Hayward, 2010; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015), I use digital media to find who I may be(come), as a way to explore future iterations of self as a trans woman. To frame my discussion, I use one specific digital platform, the avatar creation site Bitmoji, as the site of my explorations. Using an autoethnographic approach, I connect my self-explorations to broader educational and social discourses about trans femininity, as well as the ongoing contestations regarding womanhood. My search for her, then, mirrors the *trickle up education* approach I have discussed in previous work (Nicolazzo, 2016, 2017b) in that I am seeking to unearth, center, and spend time with those who are on the margins of the margins (e.g., trans women) as a way to reimagine how we as educators do our work. In essence, I use my autoethnographic wanderings through the virtual landscape of Bitmoji as a way to imagine liberatory educational praxis—that which does not currently exist—into existence. Furthermore, doing so will not only serve as an important intervention for and alongside trans women, but will also encourage

Nicolazzo—In Search of Her

the creation of a praxis that aids—or at the very least does not negatively harm—those with more access and privilege (e.g., nontrans people).

In a move that may perturb some readers, and may well confuse and constrict my readership, I make a firm stand to *not define gender terminology*. My goal here is not to further obfuscate, but to make a firm stand in support of trans humanity. That is, should readers need to learn terms contained in this piece, I would encourage them (and perhaps you) to make use of the variety of trans-based glossaries in existence (see Catalano & Griffin, 2016; Jourian, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2017b; Stryker, 2017; Nicolazzo, n.d.). In funneling readers to these resources, I am urging that we all—myself as an author and the readers who are alongside me—put time and energy toward focusing on trans people. This move is both performative in not penning a widely profuse community within the confines of definitions, and also a reminder of how putting effort into learning is an act of solidarity. While some may find this tedious, I hope refusal to write palatable and simple in-text definitions helps readers confront a simple question: if our existence matters as trans people, is it much of an imposition at all to look up a couple of definitions?

A Note on Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a rich methodology through which to understand cultural sites, such as educational institutions. Using the metaphor of a camera lens, Chang (2008) described how autoethnography allows for the researcher to zoom in on personal experiences as a way of making meaning of broader cultural discourses, and vice-versa. By moving back-and-forth between self and culture, autoethnography allows not only for deeper understandings of the cultural milieu, but of who we are as individuals, and how we may interact with each other across spaces and times. Situating the practice of autoethnography alongside trans selves, Hayward (2010) used the metaphor of neighborhoods in her autoethnographic explorations of transsexuality, pointing out that our bodies are not just of our own making, but are un/re/done by our spatial locations. As she wrote,

> If we set aside debates (without losing focus on their political import) about what sex/gender transsexuals have been or become, we might begin to recognize transsexuality as about more than gender/sex, conceivably about the *profusive* potential of bodily change, the ways bodies intensify (and are intensified by) habitats, environments, neighborhoods. (p. 227, italics in original)

Thus, autoethnography not only provides a lens through which to zoom out/in between culture and self, but also marks an essential tethering of the two, signaling how one both produces and is produced by habitats, environments, and neighborhoods.

Autoethnography is an ideal methodology for this manuscript, as it extends the self-exploration, confession, and revelation of the memoir genre trans people have used to discuss our trans identities (e.g., Grace, 2016) via the cultural investigation of ethnography. Through my own searching for her, my feminine gendered self, I will expose the coded meanings of gendered futures that bleed across virtual and physical domains. As a result, I will be able to use my self-explorations to inform how others—in particular, college educators—think about gender as a mediating discourse throughout postsecondary educational contexts, especially in a cultural context in which much of student life is mediated by the Internet. Indeed, the primordial stuff of the digital world,

binary code, the 1s and 0s that serve as building blocks for our digital selves, are laced with gendered meanings. Described as *transreality* by trans scholar and artist micha cárdenas (2016), the exploration of gendered futurities through digital spaces "is a 'post-post-modern' medium to explore the 'mysteries and complexities of the flesh, the poetry of the flesh'" (Juliano, 2010, p. 25). The current autoethnographic investigation, then, is a meditation on how my unfolding awareness of the mysteries and complexities of my own trans flesh, addressed through virtual platforms, can pry open future possibilities and further broader gender-based praxis in educational settings.

For this particular autoethnography, I spent time creating an image of myself on the avatar creation platform Bitmoji. Once I did this, I decided upon several Bitmoji images to journal about. I chose images that induced reflections on three particular aspects of my gender that my Bitmoji—which I refer to as her—confronted me with: questions of naming my identity, exploring the monstrosity of my gender, and the affective dimensions of my (searching for) gender. I then did some journaling about these images, letting my mind wander between personal and academic connections, as well as across time (i.e., my reflections discuss past and current experiences, as well as future possibilities).

Between journaling about each of the three Bitmoji images I selected—and that are reproduced below—I then connected these personal reflections with broader cultural discourses. Replicating Chang's (2008) commentary about autoethnography as a way to zoom in and out between self and culture, I went back-and-forth between my own personal reflections and cultural explorations of gender. Also, as a way to honor the power of autoethnography, I attempted to write in those places that scare me (Chödrön, 2001). That is, I attempted to not write a kind, easy, or polite narrative, but took seriously Waheed's (2013) maxim: "the thing you are most afraid to write. write that" (p. 233). I also shared my work with multiple people with whom I remain in close relationship as a way to ensure I was being as honest as possible with my journaling reflections and, as a result, increasing the face validity (Lather, 1991) of my autoethnographic explorations.

As is true with any (auto)ethnography, there are more nuances and contours than one can adequately address within the word limitations of academic writing. Thus, what I outline in this piece may feel to some like a "teaser," making readers wonder what was left on the cutting room floor as I wrote and revised this manuscript. This manuscript is indeed part of a broader project related to exploring digital landscapes and affect through educational praxis. As such, it serves as one of multiple steps to theorize differently, to push beyond that which is already present in educational discourse. Because scholars often develop ideas over time, I hope readers will be patient with me when reading this manuscript. My goal is not to disappoint, but to spark interest, and to lay groundwork for various new ideas for how educators can think about bodies, environments, and affect in/beyond sites of education.

Binaries, Bits, and Bytes: The Emergence of Virtual Environments in Education Literature

"Oh come my love and swim with me
Out in this vast Binary Sea
Zeros and ones patterns appear
They'll prove to all that we were here."
(Death Cab For Cutie, 2015)

While some warn of negative effects regarding the proliferation of trans youth using the Internet as a tool for community, connection, and exploration (e.g., Halberstam, 2018), some educational scholars are finding the opposite to be true. For example, I (Nicolazzo, 2016, 2017) and Miller (2017) found online communities to be vibrant spaces for trans and queer students to come into their own senses of self, as well as to connect with others with shared/similar identities. Our work echoes that of Cultural Studies scholars who recognize the potency of virtual spaces, especially in their ability to allow various marginalized populations—be they queer or not—access to world-making practices (e.g., Chen, 2017; Horak, 2014; Pham, 2015). Indeed, entire social movements—some of which have touched college campuses, such as the Movement for Black Lives—have toppled governments and administrations largely due to the use of virtual platforms (Castells, 2015). Thus, the way people with diverse sexualities and genders are accessing, using, and crafting the Internet as a site for deep connection is nothing short of revolutionary and worth further serious consideration in educational settings.

Described as *virtual kinship networks* (Nicolazzo, 2016, 2017b) and *virtual domains* (Nicolazzo, Pitcher, Renn, & Woodford, 2015), trans and queer students found online communities important spaces to learn about themselves and connect with others. Rupturing the binaristic notions of public/private and visible/invisible, trans college students are using online (seemingly private and invisible) spaces to come into (public and visible) communities. As Jackson, a participant from my 18-month ethnographic study of trans college students who I often cite in regard to virtual platforms stated, "The Internet is basically my hometown." Harkening back to Hayward's neighborhood metaphor, Jackson uses the notion of a hometown to mark a congealing of disparate parts (e.g., coffee shops, parks, roads, newspapers, galleries, apartment complexes) into a coherent spatial and temporal location where Jackson feels they fit, where they literally *feel at home*. It does not matter that such a place does not exist "in real life;" what matters is the affective investments Jackson makes in the Internet that then make it so intimate, and so close, to be their home. In the remainder of this manuscript, I follow Jackson's lead and fall headlong into the Internet, seeing how I can envision it as my hometown, and what it may mean for educational praxis.

In Search of Her

Journal Entry #1: But Who is She?

Here she is. I am. We are? It's strange to stare at yourself on a screen, especially as I think she is a much better representation of me than many photographs. But that said, I don't really know what to call her. Does she have a name? Is she a trans woman? A trans girl? A trans femme? Does it even matter at this—or any—point? And are we the same person? Or two different people? Are there moments where we converge, and others where we are on our own? The more I look at her, the less I feel like I know about us both, and the more I feel the sedimented history of who I am stripped away. Looking at/for her has me thinking about possible futures for her/me/us. Who may she/I/we be tomorrow? Next week? What possibilities exist? My mind wanders to Dean Spade's (2002) statement,

> *So a part of this fashioning we're doing needs to be about diversifying the set of aesthetic practices we're open to seeing, and promoting a possibility of us all look-ing very very different from one another while we fight together for a new world. I want to be disturbed by what you're wearing, I want to be shocked and undone and delighted by what you're doing and how you're living. And I don't want anyone to be afraid to put on their look, their body, their clothes anymore. (p. 15)*

Names cease to matter with her, in some senses. I mean, I get they are important, and I want to name and be named as I am…but what if I don't know how I want to be named? And what about the compulsion to name and be named may occlude or over-shadow the "possibility of us all looking very very different from one another," from dis-turbing, shocking, undoing, and delighting ourselves and others by what we are all doing and wearing? Maybe my concern and fear and worry about naming is itself a reification of the binary; I am this, not that. But how I name my gender need not stay the same. Or perhaps it will…but it could *shift, and likely will as a result of the ongoing, negotiated relational nature of gender, mediated by the interactions I have with other people and the surrounding worlds in which we live (Meadow, 2018). Looking at her, there with her cool pose as she leans against the margins, shows me a vision of possibility…or possibilities, really. If I follow her gaze, I think we can imagine them together.*

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

In the above journaling exercise, I come face-to-face (or face-to-screen?) with her. As with other avatar creation platforms, she is a self-curated and fashioned version of me. She exists in multiplicity, representing who I may have always been, who I may currently be, and who I could possibly become. And when I look at her, when I really begin to explore who she/I am through my careful curation and ongoing attention to fashioning her/my self,[1] I begin to realize I don't even know how to name her/my self…or even if that is an important task. She is a mirror of my desires, a virtual manifestation of my sublimated dreams of self. Going back to Spade's (2002) writing, she disturbs, shocks, undoes, and delights me by what she is doing and how she is living. She is not afraid to put on her look, her body, and her clothes anymore. As a result, she is a reminder

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1. Bitmoji allows users to change physique, appearance, and fashion accessories whenever they wish, all while maintaining various gendered norms. For example, Bitmoji disallows me from both being a woman and having a beard in their platform.

that perhaps, instead of thinking about how to name her/my self—an internal/individualistic process—she/I/we may do well to think more about the ways in which the gendering process operates as discourse that mediates how we even can come to know ourselves.

I am not suggesting here that names are unimportant, or that they do not carry a specific weight with them. I am also not suggesting that it "doesn't matter" if I am a trans woman or trans femme. Instead, what I am saying is that the process by which she/I/we search for selfhood is itself a technology of the gendering process, of the way that gender discourses mediate the choices we had/have/may have available to us at any given time. In this sense, what becomes important is not just who we ourselves are, but *how we come to know ourselves*. That is, we do not just have genders, but genders are foreclosed, proliferated, and imagined in various permutations due to our cultural milieu. And, as my previous journaling elucidates, my virtual self unlocks new possibilities for gendered selfhood that previously felt off limits to me.

<p align="center">*　　*　　*　　*　　*</p>

Journal Entry #2: Monstrous Bodies

> *She is a monster. She destroys structures, stomps out antiquated and limited modes of existence, and is the embodiment of futurity. Like other monsters who defy human-centric notions of gender by their simply being monsters, she gestures to a new terrain, one in which gender can mean more, where she/I/we can fall into our desires, and where she/I/we are the destroyers, not the destroyed. What seems beautiful about her monstrosity, too, is that she wears it so dang well. She is not ashamed of being deviant, of the mess she makes of gender. Much to the contrary, she revels in it. She is intentionally making a mess and moving through the rubble. She will not clean up after herself because what is there really to clean up? Modernity? Racialized capitalism? Settler colonialism? These systems were never built with us in mind, and are traps into which our life chances are increasingly surveilled, restricted, codified, and made abject (Gossett, Stanley, & Burton, 2017; Spade, 2015). In fact, these systems mark her/me/us as weapons set to destroy the state, and therefore, targets that must be destroyed, eradicated, wiped out, especially those of us who are Black, Brown, and Indigenous (Puar, 2005, 2007; Beauchamp, 2013, 2019).*

When I see her knocking over a skyscraper, I imagine it to be a building emblazoned with a health insurance name across the top, maybe on one of the sides that is hidden from view. Maybe it is a governmental building, one that holds administrative records that categorize her/me/us as people who we are not, and therefore, which negatively influences the livability of our lives.[2] In some ways, the exact type of building it is does not matter; it is metonymic of the barriers of everyday life and the choices we must make simply by waking up and living public lives. Knowing this, she has decided to not even seek admittance, to find a seat at one of the various tables in any of the assorted "room[s] where it happens" (Manuel, 2015), because whatever is happening is closely associated with the furthering of trans necropolitics. In those rooms, we do not exist, and are again (and again) called upon to not do so. Their panic about our desiring more, of wanting more from gender, is palpable, and so they bang on the table and kick their feet, and find ways to administratively erase us—a reality we know cannot actually happen (Spade, 2018), and yet, has "crushingly real consequences" for the livability of our lives (Patel, 2015, para. 9). And through this all, she knows the score. She cares not to be in the room where our demise is planned. Instead, she delights in the destruction of these spaces, crunching glass, steel, and limiting ideologies under her monstrous claws. She is a monster. And maybe so am I. And maybe so are we all.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

The metaphor of trans-as-monster is not a new one for scholars writing in transgender studies, especially as it relates to our heralding our monstrosity as a form of bodily reclamation (Jaekel & Nicolazzo, 2017; Stryker, 1994). Deemed monstrous by others, our bodies and ways of being in the world are an affront not only to other people, as countless trans personal narratives and memoirs expose, but also to the very societies in which we live. Said another way, we create institutional havoc through our being deemed impossible people, and composing an impossible population (Marine, 2017; Nicolazzo, forthcoming; Spade, 2015). Moreover, the bodies of trans people of color have been deemed weapons, bringing to the fore notions of gender transgression as a form of terrorism (Puar, 2005, 2007) in need of hyper-surveillance and containment (Beauchamp, 2013, 2019). The institutional response to our gendered and raced monstrosity, then, is one of violent erasure and containment. Our monstrosity is reflected back to us and the broader public as a detriment, as something about which to fear and blot out. These cultural discourses seep into our skin and frame our existence. Again, we hear the (sometimes not so quiet) maxim: don't exist (Hayward, 2017).

But what is the counternarrative to our monstrosity? What happens when we claim our positions as monsters set to destroy that which is trying so very hard to destroy us? How can we think about our transgression as a form of destroying the modernist trappings of racialized capitalism—such as institutions of higher education—and playing in the rubble? What would it mean to

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2. As Spade (2015) noted, administrative systems such as federal, state, and local records act as a means of population control, often erasing who trans people are and/or can become in lieu of reifying binary gender regimes. Even recent attempts by some state governments to allow nonbinary people to replace the M or F on certain documents with an X is a way to further normalize the immutability of the M and F, from which the X—and only the X—deviates. There are still only two genders (i.e., M and F), and the aberrant X, which will not be widely recognized, may only invite further precarity, threat, and risk, especially for those nonbinary people with multiple marginalized identities.

destroy these metonyms of normalized ideologies congealed over time and delight in their destruction? How can we pause and resist the urge to build back up (again) and just desire the latent possibility that comes with dissolution? For if there is nothing there, then anything could grow in its place…or not. In other words, perhaps higher education could use a little more destruction. Perhaps our monstrosity could help batter, bash, and annihilate the ways gender is baked into our buildings, systems, and ways of operating, laying the scene for new possibilities…or just allowing for there to be no mention of gender where it need not be.

Educational institutions are prominent beacons of modernity. Despite the ongoing creation of queer and transgender theory occurring from these spaces, they have yet to radically alter them (Renn, 2010). Moreover, the programs, initiatives, offices, funding and staffing models, and how faculty and educational administrators go about their work largely used throughout education are replications of this modernity. Harkening back to Tuchman's (2009) discussion of audit culture, and Magolda's (2016) articulation of corporate managerialism, the boundary lines are clear and the stakes are high; cultural reproduction as an outgrowth of neoliberal ideologies continues to serve as a form of containment where subaltern people, modes of being, and ways of thinking are routinely kept out of the frame of higher education.

In response to the trap of neoliberalism, Stewart (2017) advocated resisting the urge to pull up a seat to the proverbial table. In response to the desire to "be in the room where it happens" (Manuel, 2015), he suggested educators ask, "Who is trying to get in the room but can't? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure" (Stewart, 2017, para. 18)? I extend this thinking by suggesting that as gender monsters, perhaps we destroy the rooms and delight in the rubble. I wonder out loud what it may mean to start over, to tear down that which we have built, because it continues to enact forms of erasure, violence, and normalization that are nothing but a clear and visible threat to multiple marginalized populations, including trans people. I am not advocating literally destroying buildings; instead, I am advocating a strong rebuke of those ways of being, programming, researching, and organizing our institutional lives that reify gender binary discourses (Nicolazzo, 2017b). In the rubble, then, is where we can dream and imagine differently; where we can create that which has yet to be, that which I have even yet to imagine as an educator, theorist, and trans girl. It is in this rubble where best practices are cast aside in favor of localized and historically rooted responses to the gender binary. What can we do together to envision these possibilities together, rather than wait for someone to tell us what to do?

This is what I am learning from her. This is what she is teaching me. This is how she and I are inextricably linked across the material and virtual worlds in which we inhabit. Both monsters, and both set on embracing our destructive appetites as best we can.

*   *   *   *   *

Journal Entry #3: Feeling Through my Transness

Searching for her means digging through my past. Before I met her, I kept looking other places for…someone. I didn't have the language then of capaciousness and capacity, of the multitudes gender could hold. I remember times after I would get out of the bath or shower as a youth when I would pull my hair back away from my forehead—I had that ubiquitous bowl cut, and my hair was stick straight—lean in over the vanity, and stare at my blue eyes in the mirror. I remember staying like that for minutes that seemed like hours, and wondering, "Was I meant to be a girl?" I was searching for her even before I knew she could be a possibility for me/us. Thinking back to these private bathroom moments makes me think about Laura Jane Grace's (2016) memoir, in which she wrote,

> *When I grew bored, I would lock myself in the bathroom and try on my mother's dresses that were in the hamper. I'd stand there as long as I could, looking at myself in the mirror, wishing I was someone else, wishing I was her. (p. 11)*

My eyes scanned every inch of my face, wondering where, how, or when this label of "boy" got placed onto me. I didn't feel like I was in the "wrong body," but I felt like there was more to my story, to my life, to my gendered narrative. I desired to find her, wished at times to be her, thought how my life would be different were I to meet her.

And all the while, I did my seeking privately, sneaking moments in the bathroom mirror, making sure not to make these moments too long, lest someone ask what I was doing. I never really was a good fibber. So, I never expressed my wonderings to my mother, and definitely did not say anything to my brother or father. Looking back on these experiences, I realize the reason I didn't say anything was likely associated with patriarchy-induced shame. If I embraced, moved toward, recognized, or uttered my femininity, then I was somehow abject, wrong, deviant, bad. Shame is a powerful emotion. It stigmatizes, and as a result, moved me further away from her for years. Although I always considered myself a feminist as a young adult, and came out as queer in high school (after years of sublimating my queer desires), I made sure to find ways to distance myself from femininity. Patriarchy-induced shame led to the ingestion of sexist attitudes. I cared for

women, as long as I was not. I never engaged in active and vocal sexist rhetoric, but how many times did I sit idly by while other boys did, gritting my teeth and biting my tongue so as to show I, too, was down with the patriarchy? Sitting here typing this makes me queasy. The shame is building again, like bile in my throat. I want to throw it all up, but I know it won't change my past, and I am not seeking absolution anyway. Instead, I am tracing the ways that shame, femme-phobia, and sexism snuck into my very being, when at the very same time I began to see glimpses of her in the mirror.

And in many ways, it hasn't gotten all the easier for me now. I still struggle with the years of internalized shame I was surrounded by as a youth. My mind wanders to Tourmaline (Grace, 2015), who talked about the implications of being a woman in an age of virulent racism and sexism. She, too, talked about her experience with mirrors. Quoted at length—because she said it so much better than I ever could—she recalled:

> *Mirrors have held so much power for me, and not in ways that have always helped me feel good about myself. There was a time in Boston maybe 20 years ago when I looked in a mirror and I started crying. I was so consistently navigating a racist and transphobic gaze that I couldn't help but reflect that back at myself. I was overwhelmed by the me that existed through that lens.*

> *What I connected to at the club with the mirrors was a different gaze that reminded me of the powerful moments of becoming I've had in front of mirrors, seeing and imagining myself for who I want to be, or who I already might be. The becoming gaze happening that night helped me feel confident enough that I wanted to risk feeling humiliated, risk feeling beautiful and powerful. So often, it's the same risk. Something I've learned is that it's harder to accept that I might be beautiful, powerful, maybe even hot, than it is to organize against the institutions I hate.*

> *So the next day, the Sunday we went to Jewel's Catch One, I put on a dress. And I was hit with an incredible wave of embarrassment. I was overwhelmed by embarrassment. I wasn't surprised—this feeling is why I hadn't worn a dress in years. The history of laws and punishment and shame washed over me and through me. After so long, and so much work, it's still so fucking hard to be a public woman.*

> *Even in social movements, capitalism gets reproduced and tells me that I'm not supposed to be in a place of becoming, that I'm supposed to have arrived on the scene already with a sense of my own internal power and a brilliant political analysis to articulate it. We're told that if we have emotions that say otherwise, they're our own fault. I felt embarrassed of my embarrassment. I am deeply embarrassed by my own embarrassment.*

> *What I needed in that moment was for my friend to tell me I looked okay, or even that I looked hot as hell. So many of us depend on other people to reflect back who we are, how we want to be seen. I'm trying to understand those moments not just through a framework of trans liberation, but also through dependency. I believe dependency is one of our greatest sources of power. (Grace, 2015, para. 23-27)*

Maybe my experiences searching for her as a youth aren't so different from my experiences now. Both are riddled by the ways that sexism, transphobia, and femme-phobia continue to influence the gatekeeping of femininity. In both moments, I am still trying to navigate these discourses, trying to resist them, however unsuccessful I maybe was/is. In both moments, the reality that it is still so fucking hard to be a public woman were/are staring back at my from the mirror.

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Ahmed (2004) stated, "Feelings are not about the inside getting out or the outside getting in, but that they 'affect' the very distinction of inside and outside in the first place" (p. 29). Thinking about the camera lens effect of autoethnography, then, it would make sense that affect would be an important feature of thinking through how self and culture are mutually co-constitutive. Furthermore, Gilbert (2016) stated, "Affectively, public knowledge is as much a matter of expression as it is a collection of facts. Truth is not facticity. It is feeling" (p. 98). In this sense, emotion and fact are sutured together in the creation of public knowledge. Similar to medical suturing, facts and expression merge to become one: a body of knowledge.

As my journaling elucidated, the shame I experienced was as much mine as it was given to me by the culture in which I was socialized as a youth. Patriarchy gave me my shame, and I then aided its growth in my own self as well as culturally. Even in the brief moments where I courted her, those private bathroom moments, shame was present in that I could not even think to name this with others, including my mother, with whom I have always had a deeply loving and affirming relationship. While some readers—perhaps you?—will tell me to be more generous to younger me, that I cannot blame my younger self for not naming my desires publicly, I am not convinced that is the point. It is less about chastising my younger self, and more about understanding how cultural discourses of patriarchy lead to individual experiences of shame that then, over time, congeal to reinforce patriarchy and sexism, however tacit it may seem. Every time I did not speak up when people joked about women, or when I laughed along, or when, a year before coming out as trans—which I did in my late 20s—I went to the gym to change my body to be more masculine, I was motivated by patriarchy-induced shame. There are patterns I am tracing, and they started in a back-and-forth, mutually reinforcing dialectic between me and the culture in which I grew up when I was young. I am not castigating my younger self, but I cannot let that youth off the hook, either. We all have varying degrees of agency, even in our youth, and although it is painful to expose, it feels—there is that word again—important to excavate.

Peering through the Trap Door: But What Does this Mean for Educators?

Gossett, Stanley, and Burton (2017) discussed the metaphor of trap doors as holding future potentialities, as well as imposing limits on how we understand ourselves as trans people. That is, the notion of visibility as a construct of racialized capitalism has been a limiting trap by which many of the most vulnerable trans people are continually erased from view; however, there are also ways that one can think of trap doors as thresholds through which we can arrive at new understandings of self, as well as possibilities for who we can become as individuals and societies. Many scholars, activists, and artists have pointed out the trap of visibility, me included. What I am more interested in for this piece, however, is how educators can look through the trap door of

virtual visibility—as explored through the avatar creation platform Bitmoji—to think about possible gendered futures in and beyond higher education. In other words, I seek to answer the question, "But what does this autoethnographic exploration of self through digital space mean for educators?"

As Cavalcante (2016), Cannon et al. (2017), and Rawson (2014) discussed, there are distinct possibilities for trans people to recognize current and future iterations of self, as well as practice worldmaking through online spaces. There are clearly pitfalls of engaging with online spaces, especially given that homonormative discourses (Duggan, 2003) do not begin and end in material spaces (e.g., Bartone, 2018); however, the Internet is also a robust site for the development of "virtual counterpublics" where trans people may be more likely to find community (Cavalcante, 2016). As a result of coming into virtual community with other trans people, trans individuals may also be able to find various modes of gendered self-expression that make sense for who they are currently, as well as who they desire to become (Cavalcante, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2017b).

Higher education administrators have been relatively slow to embrace how digital platforms could be sites of self-exploration and understanding alongside trans youth. As my autoethnography elucidates, the ways avatar creation platforms could be leveraged to explore who we desire to be as trans people as well as the affective dimensions of our transness are full of possibility. For example, virtual platforms like Bitmoji could be used with students who are exploring their genders, creating private, safer spaces for them to do so. Educators could work individually with students, or encourage students to work with each other (e.g., in queer student organizations) to discuss how, why, and to what extent their virtual self-representations align with their public lives. If there are disconnections, educators and students could discuss what spaces—material and virtual—may exist that feel safe for students to begin shifting closer to their virtual self (if they want to do so).

Educators may also want to use virtual platforms as a way to engage in feeling work. By this, I mean it may be important for educators not to distance themselves from the feelings associated with identity exploration for trans students. Although most educational administrators are not trained counseling professionals, it would be disingenuous at best to pretend as though feelings are not a part of everyday life, especially for trans students who are navigating oppressive college contexts (Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2017b). Helping trans students at least name the feelings they are having, validating those feelings are real and important to explore, and then connecting trans students to affirmative resources where they can go deeper in their affective explorations are vital steps educators can take. Moreover, nontrans educators would be well advised to do their own feeling work, particularly as it relates to conceptualizations of gender. Oftentimes, conversations of gender are theorized, but not felt. For example, Catalano (2015) found trans students were often cast as gender theorists by others. Some of this positioning by nontrans people may be related to their own discomfort exploring their own gender, and thus, recognizing the lived realities inscribed therein (e.g., Nicolazzo, Marine, & Wagner, 2018; Wagner, Marine, & Nicolazzo, 2018). Nontrans educators thinking about how gender mediates their lives, and how their own conceptualizations of gender may have shifted across time and space would help improve their understandings of gender as an ontological reality. For example, a group guided reading and discussion of Catalano and Griffin's (2016) curriculum design could be helpful in raising one's consciousness through reflective practice.

Embracing Spade's (2015) notion of trickle up activism as a way to focus our attention and work alongside those who are most vulnerable, Stewart and I (2018) suggested we may need to "destroy" the current conceptualization of high impact practices, and instead think about how we

can play in the rubble to build something new. Educators may also want to (re)consider how initiatives, frameworks, and theories—including those often deemed "foundational" to their profession—simply do not work for trans students and, as alluded to in the above journaling, may need to be "destroyed." For example, Stewart and I (2018) proposed a new iteration of high impact practices that centers trans people of color and, as a result, resist the ideology of whiteness in which the original high impact practices framework was developed. This current manuscript furthers this call, and invites readers to be attentive to what else may benefit from creative destruction.

Finally, it is important to note that the use of digital spaces for self-exploration is not just about increasing representation. While virtual spaces certainly have increased exponentially the ways of thinking and being trans (Cavalcante, 2018), educators must also engage in how virtual platforms both reify and resist discourses of power, as well as how they can serve as archival projects through which gender-based histories are able to survive and be shared across generations. As Chang (2016) noted,

> Artists and activists have long demanded better representation for people of color, women, poor people, and rural people. They have asked: Who is represented in and through cultural production? How does this representation, underrepresentation, or misrepresentation undo or reproduce various forms of inequality? But cultural equity is not just about representation. It is also about access and power. How can important cultural knowledge survive? Who has access to the means of production of culture? Who has the power to shape culture? (pp. 56-57)

Thus, as the previous autoethnographic exploration details, virtual spaces and platforms are not just about finding/increasing representations of self, but of trans cultural production, as well as striving for new ways to leverage power in trans oppressive cultural climates.

Conclusion

As cárdenas (2016) stated, "The way we experience the virtual bodies we inhabit in games is through our experience and memory of our own body" (para. 11). Thus, by inhabiting our virtual bodies, and exploring new future gendered possibilities for our digital selves, we may be able to recreate notions of our own material bodies. Moreover, we can create new memories of various different bodies, such as the ethereal notion of the "student body," which I have described elsewhere as currently being—but not having to be—an artifact of gender binary discourse (Nicolazzo, 2017b). Said another way, if we take seriously the inherent possibilities of gendered self-exploration in virtual spaces, we may be able to unyoke our understandings of who people are, can become, or need to be in material spaces, as well. In so doing, we can create new possibilities for not just individual student bodies, but the student body as a broader public moving in, through, and beyond college campuses.

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