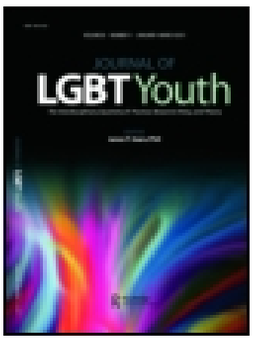

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Navigating identity development and community belonging when "there are only two boxes to check": An exploratory study of nonbinary trans college students

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ABSTRACT

Within the small research literature on transgender college students, little work has focused on nonbinary trans students. Findings from focus groups with seven nonbinary trans students revealed that participants explored and found support for their nonbinary trans identities online and offline, valuing in particular the support of other nonbinary people and the opportunities afforded in a college setting. Participants often felt compelled to be educators regarding gender and experienced tension between wanting recognition of their authentic gender and wishing to avoid the scrutiny that came with self-advocacy. Participant-generated recommendations for improving the campus experiences of nonbinary trans students are provided.

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Cisnormativity; college students; gender-nonconforming; nonbinary; transgender

A small body of research has addressed the experiences of transgender and gender-nonconforming (TGNC or trans) college students (Bilodeau, 2005, 2009; Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Pryor, 2015; Pusch, 2005; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Seelman, 2014). Existing work has largely addressed the experiences of trans students who hold binary trans identifications (i.e., trans woman; trans man; Cruz, 2014) and has assumed that such identities are static across time and place (Enke, 2012a). Yet it is becoming increasingly evident to scholars that a growing number of individuals under the trans umbrella hold nonbinary gender identities: for example, they may identify as both man and woman, or as an alternative gender that lies outside of the gender binary (Cruz, 2014). In essence, their gender diverse identities defy easy categorization and fundamentally challenge the gender binary (Nicolazzo, 2016a). Given that college is often a time of identity exploration, faculty and staff will benefit from knowing how to support nonbinary trans students during this process. And, since campuses tend to be based on and reinforce the gender binary (Bilodeau, 2005,

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2009; Nicolazzo, 2016a) via policy, physical environment, and interpersonal communication (Enke, 2012a; Nicolazzo, 2016b), faculty/staff may be unknowingly contributing to the alienation of students who do not have a binary gender identification.

The goal of this exploratory study was to gain insight into the experiences of nonbinary students in higher education, using data from two focus groups with seven undergraduates who held nonbinary gender identities. The conversations that unfolded reveal the diversity of TGNC students' experiences and identities, provide a glimpse into their daily struggles and personal victories, and hold implications for future research and for higher education practice and policy.

Key concepts and definitions

Cisnormativity refers to the perpetuation of the false belief that there are only two genders, that gender is immutable, and that bodies define gender, such that people assigned as female at birth will identify as girls/women, and people assigned as male at birth will identify as boys/men (Simmons & White, 2014). *Cisgender* (or *cis*) is used to refer to people with binary gender identities that align with cisnormative expectations for the gender they were assigned at birth (Simmons & White, 2014). Due to cisnormativity, being cisgender is often associated with normativity and naturalness; thus, cisgender identities are often "unmarked" and invoked only in contrast to trans identities—and, often, as a "performative ally-identity" (Enke, 2012b, p. 62). An authentic critique of cisnormativity not only considers gender but its intersection with social class and race, whereby cisgender identities are especially privileged when "accompanied by the appearance of normative race, class, ability, and nationality" (Enke, 2012b, p. 64).

In this paper, we use *TGNC* and *trans* interchangeably as inclusive terms. *Trans* refers to the spectrum of individuals whose gender identities do not align with cisnormative expectations for the gender assigned to them birth, or with the expectations associated with that gender (Enke, 2012a; Stryker, 2008). We use *binary trans* when referring to trans persons with binary (i.e., "man" or "woman") identities—that is, trans men who were born with female bodies and consider themselves to be men and live socially as men, and, trans women who were born with male bodies and consider themselves to be women and live socially as women (Stryker, 2008). We use *nonbinary trans* when referring to individuals who identify as both man and woman, as an alternative gender that lies outside of the gender binary, or who do not have or identify with any gender (Cruz, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2016a). Nonbinary trans identity labels include agender, gender fluid, and genderqueer (see Nicolazzo, 2016a; Stryker, 2008). We are cautious with this binary/nonbinary trans distinction and emphasize that even individuals who identify with so-called binary gender identities (e.g., trans man; trans woman) may not, for a variety of reasons, undergo biomedical transition, and they may actively resist compliance to certain

gendered norms (Catalano, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b). Furthermore, there is significant diversity within and across the binary/nonbinary dichotomy; and, the meaning of trans (and binary trans, and nonbinary trans) varies across time and place (Enke, 2012a).

Drawing from the work of Enke (2012a) and Nicolazzo (2016a), we urge readers to recognize these terms – cisgender, trans, binary, nonbinary – as conceptual tools. We encourage awareness, too, of how overreliance on categories and dichotomies (e.g., cis/trans; gender binary/nonbinary) is overly simplistic and ignores the fluidity within and across categories.

TGNC youth and college students

Trans students in high school often face victimization on the basis of gender identity and expression (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). A survey of over 7,000 LGBT middle and high school students in the U.S., which included more than 1,800 trans students, found that more than 59% of transgender students (which included students who identified as "female," "male," or "another transgender identity") had been required to use a bathroom or locker room that aligned with their sex assigned at birth, and more than 42% had been prevented from using their affirmed name (the name they used for themselves; Kosciw et al., 2014). Over 73% of trans students reported verbal harassment related to their gender expression, and over 32% reported physical harassment related to their gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2014).

TGNC students may experience a more trans-affirming climate in college than high school, in that they theoretically have some choice in where they attend college – although such choice is shaped by a range of factors (e.g., social class, financial, geographic; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Further, in that some TGNC students do not begin to question their gender identity until college, the degree to which their college campus's climate is trans-affirming may not be considered – and thus not revealed until they begin their gender exploration. As Beemyn (2003, 2016) notes, college is often the first opportunity that students have to question, explore, and actively resist their assigned gender, particularly if this is their first time living apart from family. Young adulthood is a time of identity exploration in general (e.g., sexual, ethnic, religious; Arnett & Tanner, 2006) and universities are often open to, and may provide resources for, such exploration – although students exploring their gender identity may encounter a more heightened level of ignorance, stigma, and discrimination as compared to other types of identity exploration (Beemyn, 2016). Further, even when campuses provide resources for gender identity exploration and support (e.g., LGBTQ resource centers), these are often primarily white spaces, thus limiting their utility and meaningfulness to trans people of color (Nicolazzo, 2016c).

Across a range of university settings and college campuses, trans students continue to report greater exposure to discrimination on campus, and a lower sense of

belonging, compared to cisgender students (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin, 2003). A study by Dugan et al. (2012), for example, compared 91 trans-identified students with matched samples of cisgender LGB and heterosexual students and found that trans students described more frequent encounters with harassment and a lower sense of belonging in the college community. Within the classroom specifically, interactions with faculty and peers have the potential to be uncomfortable and stressful, if not outright threatening. Pusch (2005), who studied five male-to-female (MtF)[1] and three female-to-male (FtM) trans college students, found that trans students often felt vulnerable in class, particularly when rosters did not reflect their affirmed names. Pusch observed that to minimize discomfort, trans students sometimes avoided coming out in class, thus masking their identities and rendering them invisible. Pryor (2015) studied five trans students (two MtF, two FtM, one genderqueer) and found that students struggled with coming out in the classroom, experiencing anxiety about revealing their affirmed name and pronouns. Classrooms may feel particularly inhospitable to trans students of color, who navigate unique considerations related to (heightened) visibility on mostly white campuses (Nicolazzo, 2016c).

Distinct challenges may be present for students who do not hold binary gender identities, whose physical presentation is not clearly gendered as stereotypically male or female, and/or who do not pursue biomedical transition (Catalano, 2015; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Catalano (2015) studied 25 trans men in college, who were of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, and found that participants "articulated messages they and/or others believed of who is trans enough, characterizing those who use testosterone and have surgeries as the most 'authentic'" (p. 417). Participants encountered such messages from within and outside of trans communities, and were left with the sense that to be taken seriously as a trans person, they could not be ambiguously gendered, disinterested in biomedical transition, or resist gender in multiple and diverse ways; they had to, at the very least, be "en route to being a man" (Catalano, 2015; p. 418). Similarly, in Nicolazzo's (2016b) ethnographic study of nine trans college students (including both binary and nonbinary identified individuals), a trans woman "who had not begun hormone replacement therapy" worried that she might not pass "as woman enough" on campus (p. 545). Also, in Pusch's (2005) study of trans college students, those who described themselves as "pre-transition" and living "part-time" as their self-identified gender faced more negative reactions, which reinforced their sense of not being "normal," whereas students who were freely presenting as their gender in all areas of their lives described a greater sense of normalcy in their lives.

These findings hint at the challenges and resulting distress that trans students may face when others on campus do not readily "read" them as unambiguously male or female. Nonbinary identified students may feel highly visible and vulnerable, but also invisible, in that their gender identities are often "foreign" or unrecognizable to others. The genderqueer participant in Pryor's (2015) study found that, "after coming out in [a] gender course…there were 'some people in there who

thought I was creepy or something, because I didn't identify as a normative gender'" (p. 449). Such confrontations with cisnormative assumptions may prompt some trans students to try to educate others—including staff, faculty, and fellow students—about gender and trans identities (Catalano, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016b), although at times, students may choose not to confront or correct such assumptions (e.g., if they feel the effort isn't worth it; Nicolazzo, 2016b). Educating about nonbinary identities may feel especially burdensome: An agender trans student in Nicolazzo's (2016b) study felt that it was easier to let others read and identify them as "lesbian," a "more knowable, or legible, identity marker" (p. 546).

Involvement in LGBTQ student groups has the potential to offset the stress, stigma, and loneliness that TGNC students may encounter on college campuses (Spagna, 2014). Student-run organizations can offer secure, comfortable environments where LGBTQ students can meet and connect with other individuals who share aspects of their sexual and/or gender identity, and to work towards shared goals (e.g., political advocacy; Spagna, 2014). Yet TGNC students, particularly students of color, are vulnerable to feelings of marginalization in such groups, in that LGBTQ resource centers and groups (and their resources and programming) are often more centered on sexual minorities than gender minorities (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). The needs and experiences of TGNC people in such groups tend to be "silenced and ignored in favor of those who are cisgender" (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014, p. 266) and also white (Nicolazzo, 2016c), reflecting broader tensions within the LGBTQ community (Beemyn, 2016; dickey, 2016).

At the same time, TGNC students may meet other TGNC students in such groups, and gain meaningful sources of identity affirmation and support (Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Pryor, 2015). However, there is the potential for intragroup tensions amongst trans students as well. In a study of TGNC adults, Rankin and Beemyn (2012) found that nonbinary trans individuals were more likely than binary trans individuals to describe isolation and lack of support from trans and LGBQ communities, and nonbinary trans individuals often felt that they had to create their own communities of support (i.e., communities specifically made up of other nonbinary trans people). Such communities could be in-person or virtual; indeed, some nonbinary trans college students have noted the importance of finding support on the Internet from other nonbinary trans individuals from whom they could garner advice and feelings of connection (Nicolazzo, 2016b).

Conceptual framework

In contrast to mainstream depictions of gender as a binary with clear boundaries, and conceptions of gender identity as falling along a continuum (with "woman" and "man" as the two endpoints), we favor an approach that allows for fluidity and variation in gender identity and gender roles (Dugan et al., 2012). This conceptualization of gender is arguably beneficial to trans students—especially those whose

gender identities do not comply with binary assumptions that assume there are only two gender options and that those options are "opposites" (e.g., people who identify as genderqueer; Beemyn, 2003, 2016).

In general, trans students face pressure to "mask" their identities on college campuses, which are fairly cisnormative settings (Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b) and which actively reflect and reinforce genderism (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014), or the rigid adherence to the gender binary in university practices, policies, and norms. At the same time, trans students who are seeking to express their gender identities also navigate pressures to conform to stereotypical, and socially constructed, gender norms (e.g., in terms of appearance, dress, and pronouns; Catalano, 2015; dickey, 2016). Such pressures affect all trans students—but may uniquely affect students who espouse nonbinary identities, who may face the ongoing challenge of presenting themselves (e.g., via the use of pronouns other than "she/her/hers" or "he/him/his") in a way that is consonant with their gender identity (which is neither female or male) but does not draw unwanted attention from others (Bilodeau, 2009). Nonbinary students may be vulnerable to scrutiny for not seeking to conform to or be seen as "either" gender and may thus be seen as more (gender) transgressive—and as more fundamentally challenging cisnormativity and people's gender binary default settings (McGuire, Kuvalanka, Catalpa, & Toomey, 2016).

Thus, we approach this project with an awareness that nonbinary trans college students may face unique challenges due to cisnormative assumptions and expectations (e.g., everyone uses binary pronouns; using the singular "they" is improper grammar) on the part of students, faculty, and staff, and the need to interface with cisnormative structures (e.g., bathrooms with binary labels). We are interested in how nonbinary students navigate such challenges.

We also incorporate a developmental lens in this study, whereby we consider the reality that young adulthood is a time of intense identity exploration (e.g., sexual, ethnic, religious; Arnett & Tanner, 2006). Furthermore, we recognize that contextual factors shape opportunities and processes related to identity development. For example, universities are often relatively open to, and may provide resources for, identity exploration – although students exploring their gender identity specifically may encounter a more heightened level of ignorance, stigma, and discrimination as compared to other types of identity exploration (Beemyn, 2016).

Methodology and methods

Researcher positionality

The first author is a White cisgender woman who has been studying LGBTQ families for over 15 years and has extensive experience with qualitative analysis. Her experiences as an advocate for LGBTQ students as well as her experiences teaching a growing number of nonbinary trans students led her to initiate this project in collaboration with several TGNC students. The second author, also a White cisgender

woman, is the lead researcher on a study of TGNC children. She also has extensive experience with qualitative methods. As cisgender researchers studying trans students, we aimed to be cognizant of how our personal experiences in regard to gender may have influenced our interpretations of the data. Thus, we continuously challenged each other as co-researchers and authors to consider how cisnormative bias could shape our analysis and interpretations. In addition, we intentionally centered participants' perspectives and checked our interpretations with participants. Specifically, in an effort to ensure that participant meanings and experiences were accurately portrayed, the first author sought input from TGNC students during every stage of the research process (see *Data Collection* and *Data Analysis*). Gaining their input facilitated researcher reflexivity, and was instrumental in enabling us to identify underlying assumptions and potential biases.

Participants and sampling

Focus groups were used for this study. Focus groups are a useful method for collecting qualitative data on a particular topic in a semistructured group setting (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), and may be especially helpful when tackling complex or sensitive topics, as they create a safe atmosphere and allow opportunities for connection (Morrow, Burris-Kitchen, & Der-Karabetian, 2002). Group dialogue can achieve a synergistic effect, generating data not obtained in individual interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus groups capitalize on the power of human interaction, eliciting rich experiential data and generating insights (e.g., via discussion and brainstorming) that might not otherwise emerge (Ashbury, 1995). For this research focus (experiences as nonbinary trans students), group interaction proved a valuable tool in facilitating the sharing of stories and experiences and providing a means of support and validation.

Focus groups were used to gather text data from seven trans participants. Sample selection began with one key informant, and snowballing and networking methods were used until participation from a sufficient number of individuals had been secured for the desired number of focus groups (Morse, 1991). Participants ($n = 7$) were between 18–22 years and undergraduates at a liberal arts university located in a moderate sized city. Five were White and two were Of Color. All seven participants identified as nonbinary trans, but when asked, "Within the umbrella of trans/GNC, how do you identify?" they described a variety of identities: nonbinary (2), gender nonconforming (2), genderqueer, demigirl, and gender-resistant. Six participants were assigned female at birth and one participant was assigned male.

Data collection

In the first stage of the project, the first author drew inspiration from participatory action research models (e.g., Case, Kanenberg, Erich, & Tittswort, 2012), whereby she, a cisgender female faculty member, partnered with three TGNC students on

her campus to work to define the goals of the study and create the focus group questions. This process took two months. The first author also met several times with two of these students, who became the focus group leaders, to provide training on focus group facilitation and discuss logistics of the focus group interviews. The purpose of our collaborative research approach was to bring trans students into the research process not merely as subjects to be studied but as active agents in the construction of the research and, ultimately, the knowledge produced by the research (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2016).

The first author and trans student research partners decided that the goal would be to conduct two focus groups with 4–7 individuals; this goal was achieved. Five individuals participated in both group meetings: Taylor, Lee, Rory, Sawyer, and Avery. Taylor and Lee were also the facilitators: that is, they both posed the questions and participated in the discussion. One additional, unique individual was present in each focus group meeting: i.e., Emily participated in the first and Amari in the second. Thus, each group had six individuals present. Both groups lasted two hours. Groups were conducted in a quiet, secure location on campus in the evening.

The overarching purpose of the focus groups was to allow a space for undergraduate nonbinary trans students to talk about and respond to several general topics. Thus, a primary goal of the study was to gain insight into the experiences of nonbinary trans students in college, with the ultimate goal of improving services aimed at TGNC students. A second, related goal of the focus groups was to inform the development of a survey that could be disseminated to TGNC college students and which would be sensitive to the experiences of nonbinary identified students. A third and final goal was to provide an opportunity for networking and connection. (Although not the focus of this study, it is worth noting that both the secondary and tertiary goals of this study were accomplished: a survey was created and disseminated, and focus group participants reported enjoying the opportunity to come together and discuss their experiences.)

Focus groups began with introductions (e.g., names, pronouns). Each session then tackled a variety of topics. Participants responded to these prompts, which generated free-flowing conversation that was not constrained by facilitators: 1. Can you speak to the complexity of being asked to speak about (be a "spokesperson" for) TGNC issues?; 2. Have there been situations where you felt scrutinized for your gender identity (e.g., in a class)? How did you deal with this?; 3. Have you chosen to pursue advocacy around gender/trans issues? If so, why/how? If no, why?; 4. What are benefits or negatives of having cis people involved in trans advocacy?; 5. What types of services or supports (aimed at supporting TGNC students) should be available on campus? Is there anything your institution does particularly well/poorly in this arena?; 6. What are your experiences regarding faculty competence around trans issues?; 7. How have your ideas about gender, and your gender identity, changed over time?; 8. To what extent and how does your outward gender expression shift depending upon the setting? 9. What were your

experiences with the educational system from middle school onward? How did these intersect with your experience and exploration of your gender identity?; 10. What supports/resources (in person and online) have been the most useful/supportive and unsupportive? 11. What are your career/job goals? Do you have concerns related to applying for jobs as a TGNC person?

Data analysis

Each session was recorded and transcribed verbatim, except for names and potentially identifying information. The words and conversations of the participants were therefore the text data used in our analysis (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Drawing from tenets of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2007), we pursued an inductive analysis, whereby transcripts of the two focus groups were reviewed multiple times, and key statements that spoke to participant experiences and perspectives were identified and grouped in larger themed units (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Both authors initiated the coding process with line-by-line coding after reading through the focus group transcripts multiple times. Many related ideas were identified in this initial stage, such as: navigating pronouns and names, balancing visibility with privacy and ease, and fluidity in gender identity over time and across situation. Codes were further reduced such that similar experiences and ideas were grouped, and tensions between experiences/perspectives were captured thematically (e.g., the dilemma of having to educate others about one's transness while also desiring ease in one's daily interactions). Ultimately, the goal was to capture the diversity and nuances of experiences while also telling a coherent story (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). Thus, effort was made to not only identify coherent and rich themes but to place them logically and meaningfully in relation to one another. We revisited our emerging themes multiple times, examining them against the focus group transcripts as we refined the coding scheme.

Consistent with Morgan and Krueger (1998), we not only pursued a transcript-based analysis but also incorporated an audio-taped based analysis (i.e., we listened to the audio recordings of the focus group discussions), and drew from memory-based analysis (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009), whereby we reached out to participants for their thoughts about the data based on their memory of the focus groups (see *Trustworthiness*). When combined with other more rigorous types of analysis (transcript based, audio-based), which are more rigorous modes of analyzing data, memory-based analysis can sometimes yield complementary or unique insights (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Trustworthiness

Various steps were taken to enhance trustworthiness. The two authors coded the data and collaborated on the analysis, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the emerging scheme and enhancing transferability. That is, we independently coded the data, and then came together to examine our coding collaboratively, facilitating

a deep individual and shared intimacy with the data (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Our careful, iterative process of assessing the fit between the data and the emerging analysis, and our efforts to render "thick descriptions" of phenomena, enhanced the credibility of the analysis (Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994).

In line with our collaborative research approach (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2016), we also solicited participant input to enhance trustworthiness (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). The first author contacted participants to determine whether they were interested in reading through transcripts of both focus groups, and a draft of this paper, to make certain that their views were accurately represented, to weigh in on data interpretation, and to contribute any additional thoughts about the focus groups and the conversations that unfolded. Three focus group participants responded affirmatively and were provided with these materials.[2] Their input indicated that the participant responses and group interaction were accurately depicted in the transcripts. Participants also provided general feedback on the paper. Upon incorporating this feedback, a revised version was given to the three participants, who provided another round of feedback prior to submission. During the revision process (i.e., after the initial manuscript submission), feedback was again solicited (including the opportunity to choose a pseudonym), and two of the original three participants, plus one additional participant, agreed to provide feedback, which was incorporated. Gaining participant input throughout the research process facilitated researcher reflexivity, and was instrumental in enabling us to identify underlying assumptions and areas of potential bias. For example, the first author realized, upon receiving feedback from a participant, that use of the term "claim" in relation to gender identities (as in, they claimed a genderqueer identity) was potentially invalidating and served to reinforce notions of trans identities as not "real."

Limitations

As cisgender researchers writing about trans students, we recognize that our own worldviews and experiences inevitably shaped our interpretations of the data. Although we went to great lengths to center our participants' voices, as with all qualitative analyses, we cannot wholly separate our perspectives from the process and acknowledge that other researchers would have approached the data with different lenses and may have reached different conclusions.

Participants were relatively homogenous in that all but one was assigned female at birth, and most were White. Thus, the conversations that unfolded are weighted towards the experiences of White, female-assigned-at-birth, nonbinary trans identities. Focus group questions did not address the intersection of gender identities with sexual orientation, social class, race, or other identities. In light of evidence that intersecting identities shape how trans students experience cisnormativity on campus (Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016c), future work should involve more diverse samples and explore such intersections. Also, participants' attendance at a small liberal

arts university inevitably shaped their experiences and the conversations that unfolded. Within this particular educational context, students may have felt more comfortable being out about their gender identity, and may have encountered greater acceptance, as compared to if they were attending a large public institution, for example. Additionally, our use of snowball sampling inevitably drew participants from particular social circles on campus—possibly those who were more comfortable having their gender identity be known and visible to others. Future work can employ a range of recruitment methods (e.g., classroom visits to share study information; student organization list serv announcements) to ensure greater diversity and variability among focus group participants (e.g., in terms of outness).

Having two students who were familiar with the project both facilitate and participate in the focus groups is arguably a strength insomuch as they possessed background knowledge related to the topic and were comfortable with and had time to ponder the various questions. Yet at the same time, it is important to acknowledge that these students' greater familiarity with the topic may have shaped the conversations that unfolded.

Findings

Below, we describe the major themes that emerged. Our first theme, **Exploring gender identity**, encompasses the experience of accessing online resources, engaging in offline social networking with peers, and moving toward deeper exploration of gender identity within the college context. Our second theme, **Complexities and challenges of being a nonbinary person**, addresses experiences of feeling compelled to be gender educators and advocates, responding to other people's perceptions of one's gender, the significance of names and pronouns, and bodily alterations. Our third theme is **Tensions and complexities within and across LGBTQ spaces**. Our fourth and final theme, **Recommendations for action**, includes recommendations pertaining to structural and social institutional supports, as well as education and training for students, faculty, and staff.

Theme 1: Exploring gender identity

Online resources

Participants named a variety of sources of information regarding gender identity/expression (i.e., how they learned about and what influenced their explorations surrounding gender). They described TGNC friends, classes on gender, LGBTQ campus groups, and the Internet – Tumblr, a microblogging and social networking website, in particular – as key information sources. The Internet (and Tumblr specifically) was a valued source of initial information about various gender identity labels, and non-medical and medical means of altering the presentation of their bodies, as well as a source of community and affirmation. Several participants relayed stories of the "sharing economy" that existed online by, and for the benefit of, trans individuals; for example, used binders (i.e., constrictive material used to

flatten breasts) were offered up to those who could not afford one. Rory[3] noted, "People will give away their old binders for free and will do swaps." However, the Internet, and Tumblr and online groups for TGNC people specifically, could be unpredictable; they were sources of support but also caused stress. Referring to Tumblr, Emily said, "It can be helpful [and] healthy, but it can also be an awful place." Emily, who noted that "most of my exploring came from the internet," also "fear[ed] for what kind of people I'll run into." Most participants shared this perspective; they sometimes encountered people online who, for example, appeared to be advocates and information bearers (e.g., they were trans) but were ignorant of or held negative views of nonbinary trans people.

Offline experiences with peers

Most participants shared that their gender identity exploration started out online, and then moved offline, whereby they became increasingly aware of other TGNC people and tried to establish connections with them – e.g., they sought to deepen relationships with TGNC acquaintances or talked extensively with TGNC friends. As Lee said:

> I started out online, where I probed, like, is this a thing, is it real? And then I saw someone at [university] who was ahead of me, and I was like "Oh, this is a thing!" I was like, "Oh wow, this isn't just on the Internet; it's valid, it's real, wow."

Friends in both high school and college were often powerful models of gender possibilities—particularly nonbinary identified friends, who inspired participants to realize what was possible regarding their gender expression. Emily noted that in high school, "I had a friend that identified as nonbinary and I would always toy with the idea of, 'You know, what if I did this instead…' but was always a little afraid to and never ended up doing it." Emily, who ultimately did not engage in any gender identity exploration until college, nevertheless recalled this friend as influential in that process. Likewise, Rory said,

> A lot of it came from my friends. I think I learned the self-empowerment of coming out… as trans through a friend. And they were the first person I had ever seen who was gender nonconforming and I was just amazed…and then I just have had numerous people throughout my life who have continued to push me in my own questions about gender and turmoil and lack of understanding and all that.

Thus, TGNC friends, especially friends who were nonbinary trans (e.g., genderfluid), were regarded as key sources of support and identity affirmation (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). These individuals were also important models for the expansiveness of trans identities and the legitimacy and authenticity of nonbinary identities specifically (Pusch, 2005; Stryker, 2008).

Select cisgender people were also described as important sources of support and affirmation as participants explored their gender identity. Both cisgender friends and partners were named as supports, serving as "sounding board[s]" who "let me

take things back, and say, like, 'no that's not right.'" Taylor stated, "Me and my girlfriend talk about gender all the time." Thus, in a space of nonjudgment, participants were able to engage in both personal and relational construction of their gender identity.

College/university

The college setting specifically was recognized as a place where participants could explore their gender more fully (e.g., compared to high school). Sawyer noted:

> I have had numerous different conversations since I have been at [college] specifically with people who, like, for long periods of their life identified as cis and are now not necessarily identifying that way. It has been a really eye opening experience to see how other individuals go through the process of not identifying as cis and how different that experience is and yet how relatable that is in many ways.

College offered a community of others who, despite their varying gender identities and journeys, shared in common the process of questioning their gender and gender socialization more broadly. It also offered a space where participants could try on different labels and pronouns with less judgment (in contrast to family, who seemed much more sensitive to such dynamics). Some students noted how some classes were experienced as profoundly meaningful on a personal level. As Lee stated, "Being in this environment and having gender-related classes, I was like, 'Oh! Gender is a thing. And I'm this, and I've always been this way. I just haven't had a name for it.'" Thus, college classes sometimes offered participants valuable knowledge and conceptual tools for understanding their gender identities and gender more broadly (Enke, 2012a).

Theme 2: Complexities and challenges of being a nonbinary person

Being a gender educator and advocate

The participants all identified as trans—and also nonbinary. Thus, they were uniquely influenced by—and also pushed back against—cisnormativity, in that they did not identify as "either" gender. They espoused complex, dynamic gender identities, which sometimes prompted them to indirectly or directly try to interrupt and complicate cisgender discourses (e.g., constant references to men and women). Amari explained, "If someone says 'both genders,' I'll say, 'Do you mean all genders?'" Lee shared: "People are like, 'Well, aren't sex and gender the same thing? Like, you're a boy or you're a girl.' And it's like, wait, now I feel like I have to go develop a course or a PowerPoint to educate you!"

Several participants noted that because they were "so out with their gender" (Rory), they felt "a lot of pressure pretty consistently to advocate for [themselves] as gender nonconforming people." This could become "really tiring" and even "nerve-wracking" (Avery) when they were burdened with always being the expert on gender. Avery said: "It's just difficult and awkward, and I try my best to inform them and not give them any bad impressions." Beyond being tiring, "putting

[themselves] out there" (i.e., educating others about trans identities and nonbinary genders specifically, even if not personally referencing themselves) brought a fair amount of visibility and attention to themselves, which sometimes had unwanted consequences. In speaking up about transness and gender, participants sometimes encountered negative pushback: They were, as nonbinary trans people, both too trans (in that their gender identities disrupted the gender binary) and not trans enough (in that they were not "en route" to becoming a man or woman, and therefore deemed less "legitimately" or authentically trans; Catalano, 2015). Avery said:

> I've had a number of cis people…very politely, ask me to stop bringing up my gender and to stop mentioning things like, you know, being nonbinary. And these are people that say they are very open, very progressive in these fronts, and then they get uncomfortable when I [am like], "Hi, I'm an actual living person who is not cis and also hasn't like, I'm not transgender. It's not necessarily fully socially accepted now, but most of the very visible transgender people, they tend to pass. They tend to be [binary presenting].

Thus, participants found that in expressing their authentic gender identities, which did not conform to binary gender norms, they encountered resistance, misrecognition, and invisibility (Catalano, 2015; Pryor, 2015), even from people who claimed to be progressive and to accept trans (binary) people. Participants interpreted such responses in the context of dominant metanarratives regarding trans identities: upon sharing their nonbinary gender identities, they were met with reactions that suggested that their identities were neither legible nor authentic.

Responding to others' perceptions of their gender

It often seemed to participants that others, including family, would more readily accept their trans identities as valid if they identified as binary trans rather than nonbinary trans, which was viewed as an "invalid" identity. In turn, they spoke to perceived pressure to express their gender in binary ways: that is, as either clearly cross-gender, or in adherence with their assigned gender—and to use binary pronouns as well. Rory, who was assigned female at birth, noted that they put on a dress one day before visiting family but ultimately took it off because they felt that this display of "femininity" would delegitimize their efforts to be seen as nonbinary and "confirm everything I've been trying to work against for the last year…they already can't get my pronouns right; there's no way in fuck that I can show up looking like this." Rory was fearful that family members would see them as "reverting" to their assigned gender, and therefore not truly gender nonbinary—and thus removed the dress to avoid further misgendering by family. And yet, to truly express their gender would mean not having to be beholden to concerns about conforming to the gender binary.

Indeed, some participants spoke to the internal struggle and psychological "work" that they engaged in prior to entering different social contexts. Lee said: "I mentally prepare myself when I'm entering an environment. I'll be like, 'I'm visiting with family, so I have to prepare myself for their reactions.'" Amari also

described this mental preparation, which involved shifting their mindset to more feminine or masculine to fit the context, as a coping mechanism:

> I…change [how] I present my gender based on the situation I'm going into…Visiting family, I know that none of my relatives are going to use they pronouns. It's too much of a hassle to get them to try to actually recognize it; for the most part, I'm not even going to bring it up. So I'll dress more feminine when I'm going to see family, or in certain situations, just because I don't want to deal with it. My…gender, it's pretty smack dab in the middle and can sometimes fluctuate one way or the other. So I guess sometimes if I know I'm going into a situation where I might need to be more feminine, or conversely…a situation where I can be more masculine, I'll try to get myself into that mindset, like, move myself to be in a more feminine or masculine mindset. And that seems to work. It's mostly just trying to find strategies to avoid feeling shitty about my gender in general.

The significance of pronouns and names

Beyond dress and appearance (e.g., clothing, hair), pronouns and names represented one way for participants to express and assert their gender more authentically and in nonbinary ways. Most used they/them pronouns. Sawyer, however, was uncomfortable with the pronoun options available for nonbinary people, and felt "limited in a very distinct way by the English language itself," because with 'they,' it was unclear "whether or not you are referring to one person who is gender-nonconforming or…to a group." Sawyer desired a word that "the general population can [easily] adopt into their everyday parlance." Emily stuck with pronouns that corresponded with her gender assigned at birth because it was "easier" for others to understand: "I use she/her pronouns…because I don't want to go through the issue of having to remind everybody…it's harder to make the pronoun adjustment for some people." Emily also described her nonbinary gender identity as relatively "private" whereby she did not "really talk about it much with everybody else."

Relatedly, Rory noted that as their understanding of – and their "relationship to" – their gender had had changed over time, so had the importance of correct pronoun use by others. Rory shared: "Previously, pronouns felt really important and really impactful for me – and that just doesn't feel as true for me right now." Currently, their gender was "not necessarily about other people… Now it's more – gender feels much more in my head than it does outside of my head right now." In turn, while Rory still worried "pretty consistently" about how they presented their gender when they "enter[ed] a new space," they described a complex relationship with their gender – the private and public meanings of which were dynamic and constantly evolving.

Participants balanced their desire to be correctly gendered by others – that is, to have others recognize and understand their nonbinary status and use their desired pronouns and names – with a desire for privacy. They grappled with the reality that inquiries by others, and efforts by others to comprehend their gender, often

came at a cost, whereby people felt free to inquire about and make commentary about their bodies and birth names. As Taylor explained:

> It's hard, because I want people to ask me [about my gender and pronouns]. I want people to get my pronouns right…On the other hand, it's like super uncomfortable, right, for like strangers to be going up to you and being like, "Huh, are there any boobs under there? What's your deal?" You know? I always feel a catch-22 about that.

Openness about their birth names were recognized by group members as potentially inviting insensitive comments from cisgender peers; in turn, some had chosen not to share their birth names with others. Rory did, but faced some negative reactions, including comments like, "'Your old name was better' or 'Your old first name and middle name went better together.'" Rory expressed frustration with such encounters: "Do you know how hard it is to name yourself? Can you shut up? It is so hard to be like, 'This name is now me and represents me.'"

Such experiences speak to the need for nuanced trans education for students, faculty, and staff that addresses the variation in perceptions and experiences among TGNC individuals – but also recognizes the universal need for sensitivity and respect (Beemyn, 2003, 2016; Pryor, 2015).

Navigating the university system

For nonbinary trans college students, the challenges of expressing their identities via names and pronouns was especially salient within the university system at large. Lack of clarity about how to change one's name in the computer system, and the reality that their legal name was still on certain documents such as their transcript, were salient challenges (and ones identified by trans students in prior research; e.g., Pryor, 2015). Rory voiced frustration with an apparent glitch in the system: "I changed my name in the system over a year ago. They still get it wrong. All my rosters still say my birth name." Some students described asking faculty to replace, on the roster, their legal names with their affirmed names, but encountered confusion or resistance, which was frustrating and invalidating. Taylor explained, "I did have one professor who made the roster before my name change went through. When I asked him to change it he just put [name] in parentheses next to my birth name. I'm like, 'You've got to be kidding me.' That's not changing it; that's just adding something."

In some cases, professors and staff were described as asking for pronouns – but their follow up (in terms of pronoun use) was inadequate and sometimes insensitive. Rory shared a story about how at college orientation, the group leader gathered all the students in a circle and

> then just stared at me and was like, "So, let's do pronouns," and I was like, "Great. Let's do pronouns." And then she pulled me aside later and was like, "Can you just like, tell me about yourself?" And I was like, "What do you want to know?" "So, you're trans?" And I was like, "Is there a question?" She was like, "No. Just, like, go."

Taylor chimed in to share a story about standing in a line on campus when a student they did not know said, "Can you tell me your preferred pronouns?" Taylor shared: "I'm like, 'hi, person-I-haven't-really-met-or-exchanged-words-with-until-now. My preferred pronouns are they/them.'" Taylor went on to share how disconcerting such experiences were, in that "you're just trying to go about doing your thing and you're not thinking about your gender all the time"—only to be confronted with demands to witness, explain, and defend their gender (and names and pronouns).

Sawyer summed up what most participants commented on in some way: the challenge or tension between being visible and advocating for themselves versus staying silent for ease:

> Entering any situation where the question of my gender comes up…a discussion, or ticking a box, or writing it – it's annoying that I have to think about how, in this moment, do I care more about being truthful and honest, or maneuvering myself through the world easily? And there isn't like a consistent answer. So it varies based on the situation.

Thus, participants spoke to weighing the tradeoffs of speaking up versus staying silent. Expressing their gender authentically meant potentially being hypervisible and vulnerable, which posed challenges to their well-being (Pusch, 2005). Yet speaking up meant that they could face negative reactions from others, possibly risking their safety in some contexts.

Body alterations

Deciding whether to pursue body alterations at college was another way in which some students weighed the benefits of freely expressing gender versus risking discomfort through visibility and public scrutiny. While most female-bodied participants described using binders, some voiced mixed feelings about using hormones (e.g., testosterone, or T) because of the attention it might invite from peers, faculty, staff, and family. Avery explained, "I see pictures online of people who have gone on T and…they just look happier, right? Part of me wants that…really bad. But it's also terrifying because I would have to go through that. And that would be a thing that people around me would see happening. It's…an outward thing." Rory chimed in, saying, "When I cut my hair and started dressing differently…everyone around me was very conscious of [that], and were like, 'You're doing this now, but what about this? Or, what you used to be doing…what does this mean?'" In turn, Rory felt that "if I could personally go on T and have it be a more private experience…that's an experience I would love. But I don't want to have that experience publically, and I can't live in the woods for a year and a half."

Notably, though, not all participants wanted to use hormones. One student expressed no interest, stating that they were happy with their body as is. One student had tried hormones, but concluded that as a genderqueer person, their "ideal body" was somewhere "in-between" and hormones would not help them to achieve that; it was not "medically possible" which was "sad." Thus, students spoke to both

the private and (very) public aspects of gender and how decisions about their own gender expressions might vary if they had other options available to them. Their narratives also speak to the diversity amongst trans people in general, and nonbinary trans people specifically, with respect to feelings about and use of biomedical interventions (Catalano, 2015).

Theme 3: Tensions and complexities within and across LGBTQ spaces

Participants sometimes experienced tensions related to their transgender identity and the reality that of the people in the LGBTQ community at large and on campus specifically were cisgender. That is, they spoke to broader cultural and historic tensions related to gender minorities and sexual minorities, such as the tendency for queer communities to largely reflect the needs, experiences, and interests of sexual minorities rather than gender minorities (dickey, 2016). They acknowledged that such tensions sometimes led to some trans people "[feeling] like, 'we don't want your help; we don't need your help…oh, you think we're neat, that's cool.'"

Noting the reality that LGBTQ groups and spaces, such as those on campus, were mostly made up of sexual minorities rather than gender minorities (and, thus, the former group tended to get more "airtime" in such spaces), participants pondered whether the existence of separate TGNC groups campuses could be helpful or important. Lee shared their view that "it's good to have spaces or groups that are just closed to trans and GNC people. Because…it's safe, and you have people that…can really understand your perspective." Rory expanded upon this sentiment:

> As someone who self identifies as both gender nonconforming/gender neutral and as sexuality-wise queer, it feels very different to be in a space that is sexuality oriented. It feels problematic to me personally that the two are paired together, in general. Spaces that are very genuinely attempting to be supportive are also clumping groups together that don't necessarily identify along similar lines. And therefore some stories become heard and catered to more than others, even though that often is not intentional.

Avery agreed and also pointed out the problem of people conflating sexuality and gender:

> While it is really good to have the big banner of both gender and sexuality, my concerns and feelings about my sexuality, which is not straight, and my feelings about my gender, which is not cis [are different]. I have different concerns as the bisexual person than I do as a nonbinary person. One example of this is… straight cis people [have said to me], "Gay people can get married now. What else do you want?" Quite a few things actually.

Thus, trans-only spaces might allow trans students to feel more comfortable discussing gender-related issues with others who may be more likely to empathize. Avery, for example, went on to note that people who are "cisgender but…lesbian, bisexual – they might not be able to relate as well to…gender concerns," and acknowledged that "there are some concerns that I might not feel as comfortable

voicing in a general space that I might feel more comfortable voicing in a space of people who may also deal with some of the same gender related problems."

Yet, several participants suggested that while a separate group would be helpful in that it would create a unique space for TGNC students to talk about issues related to their gender identity, it could create arbitrary or counterproductive distinctions between sexual and gender minorities. Participants generally agreed that advocacy on behalf of trans people by cisgender LGBQ people should not be rejected but welcomed, in that sexual minorities were often helpful allies for trans people and that there was "strength in numbers." Further, some participants worried that lumping all TGNC people into a trans-only space could cause erasure of the diversity among TGNC people. Sawyer summed up the complexity of this issue for them: "I don't think there should be like a mandate that everything should be grouped… together as this massive block of not-cisness. I think that it's potentially useful at times…but I think it can also be a disadvantage." Emily expressed the concern, too, that a separate TGNC group could possibly "open itself up to unhealthy targeting…or bullying" on some campuses.

In addition to addressing tensions within LGBTQ communities, some students articulated tensions within TGNC subcommunities, whereby they perceived pressure to "do" trans "appropriately". Some struggled with feeling as though, as nonbinary trans people, they had to work hard to prove their transness, particularly when around other binary trans people, echoing the sentiments of some of Catalano's (2015) participants, who spoke to the privileging of gender normativity within some university trans communities. Rory said: "I think sometimes there's this concept that if you're not always actively performing the gender you see yourself to be, you're somehow not trans enough." Several participants experienced this pressure as extending to queer spaces in general. As Taylor articulated, within "queer spaces…when I am going to hang out with people who also identify as any sort of queer: lesbian, bisexual, gay, genderqueer, or trans, I almost feel like I have to prove myself and dress more masculinely, [which] feels ridiculous [but also] more comfortable, I guess." Thus, socializing with other queer people invited the possibility of authentic gender expression, but seemed to carry the expectation of a more exaggerated or transgressive gender performance than might be natural or preferred.

Theme 4: Recommendations for action

Students had many suggestions and ideas for how campuses could improve their support and understanding of trans and nonbinary trans students specifically. We present the student-generated suggestions that were met with the most resounding and collective support and enthusiasm, alongside our own commentary regarding their practical implementation. Students' suggestions can be grouped under several key themes: structural institutional supports; social institutional supports; and education/training.

Institutional supports (structural)

Participants recommended enabling students to change their first name in the university system, a change that would then populate throughout all relevant systems (e.g., registrar, course rosters). Encountering bureaucratic inefficiencies when trying to change one's name creates unnecessary and significant stress for trans students (Seelman, 2014). Given that ineffective advertisement of trans related resources is a problem identified by students in prior research (Seelman, 2014), it is important to clearly inform students about name change options, and to provide guidance about who to talk to if students encounter problems in changing their name. Many organizations (e.g., Campus Pride: www.campuspride.org) provide guidance to students and universities in regards to enacting system-wide name and gender marker changes.

Participants also recommended that universities provide gender inclusive restrooms throughout campus, while still retaining some female-only and male-only restrooms, as some people feel more comfortable (e.g., safe) going into single gender designated bathrooms. There is ample evidence that sex-segregated bathrooms – which represent one institutional feature of universities that excludes trans people or exposes them to discrimination and harassment – are stress-inducing for trans people; and, likewise, the ability to access gender inclusive bathrooms can alleviate anxiety (Seelman, 2014).

Institutional supports (social)

Participants recommended that universities designate a person on campus to whom TGNC students could speak to if they encountered repeated trans-insensitive language or practices by a faculty or staff member. Such an action sends a strong message that members of the campus community will be held responsible for incompetent and discriminatory treatment of trans people. As Seelman (2014) points out, this type of accountability "reflects the [university's awareness] that policy alone cannot stand as evidence of the institutionalization of diversity" (p. 630).

In addition, participants recommended the recruitment, hiring, and retention of openly nonbinary trans faculty, administrators, and staff, who could serve as important models and supports. Such behavioral efforts on the part of a university reflects a commitment to a trans inclusive community (Beemyn, 2016) and effectively acknowledges the existence and legitimacy of trans people as part of the campus community (Seelman, 2014).

Education/training

Participants recommended that faculty, administrators, and staff, including health and counseling services, be required to take a class or workshop on TGNC identities that addresses (a) nonbinary identities and (b) etiquette for inquiring about and using people's pronouns (Pryor, 2015). Such trainings are increasingly available

from skilled professionals, and can be obtained at national conferences and via independently arranged campus visits (Case & Meier, 2014).

Participants also recommended that universities require that all students take a class on gender studies (i.e., a class that is explicitly inclusive of TGNC identities, including nonbinary identities). They also suggested that universities incorporate gender and the expectation for respect for all genders during college orientation. An expanding body of research has documented the educational utility of diversity courses (Parker, Barnhardt, Pascarella, & McCowin, 2016). Thus, faculty/administrators who wish to advocate for the inclusion of a gender studies course as a requirement for graduation can use this work to justify their request.

Finally, participants recognized the utility of educating non-TGNC student allies about the role they can take in helping to reduce the hypervisibility and emotion work that TGNC students encounter on a daily basis, thus disrupting cisnormativity more broadly. At the same time, they cautioned, TGNC people should remain the experts of their own experience, and cisgender allies should advocate on behalf of but not speak for TGNC people, who should be the ones to "tell their stories…and their truths." Trainings that support students in understanding cisnormative privilege, and effectively working for and on behalf of trans communities, are increasingly accessible and available (see Case & Meier, 2014). It is important, however, that the pursuit of programming aimed at helping cisgender people to "understand" trans people and trans issues does not eclipse university emphasis on serving trans students themselves; as Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) observed, most college campus programming that is designated as trans specific is about, rather than for, trans people.

Conclusions

This is one of the first studies to explicitly explore the experiences of nonbinary trans individuals (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012), particularly within the college setting (Bilodeau, 2005, 2009). Most prior research has focused on binary trans students exclusively (e.g., Pusch, 2005) or had samples consisting of both nonbinary and binary trans students (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Pryor, 2015). Our study extends upon the findings of previous research by providing insights into the multisystemic ways in which cisnormativity is produced and enacted within higher education, as well as the remarkable ways in which nonbinary trans students resist cisnormativity within and beyond the college context.

The nonbinary trans students in this study relied on and valued online and in person supports, describing them as significant in their personal gender journeys, similar to the kinship networks described by the trans students in Nicolazzo's (2016a) study. College in particular had enabled our participants to actively explore their gender identities (e.g., via exposure to an atmosphere that encouraged an inquisitive attitude more broadly and via contact with other TGNC people specifically), thus illustrating the dynamic relationship between identity and context/

environment (Jones & Abes, 2013). Further, these students found courses that addressed gender in expansive ways to be supportive and eye-opening, providing them with opportunities to think more deeply about their personal gender identities while exploring gender more broadly.

Participants vocalized a tension between wanting to be recognized and understood as their authentic gender, but as also desiring ease and privacy. When participants confronted cisnormativity, they sometimes encountered confusion and resistance, and thus weighed the potential negative and positive consequences of visibility and advocacy. Aware of the potential for hostility, as well as the exhaustion that came with constantly asserting and defending their nonbinary gender identities (Nicolazzo, 2016a), some selectively silenced these identities in certain settings, such as with family. Such decisions—about whether to speak up or stay silent –were negotiated often, in a variety of settings, and were made amidst considerations of personal salience (e.g., how important was it to be open and out to this person or group at this time?), comfort, and safety. These findings extend prior work suggesting that nonbinary trans people may face challenges unique from binary trans people in that their gender identities are not easily "read" by others (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). In particular, they highlight the critical role that faculty/staff can play in facilitating greater awareness of gender diverse students – for example, by not assuming students' pronouns.

Names and pronouns represented important ways of communicating participants' gender identity to others. But, upon sharing their affirmed names and pronouns, participants navigated the possibility that people would respond with confusion or would intrude upon their privacy (e.g., with inappropriate curiosity about their bodies or birth names). Difficulties surrounding names/pronouns were enhanced at the institutional level, whereby some participants' narratives revealed the need for name change procedures to be publically articulated.

Variable experiences with and perspectives on body alterations such as hormones were described by participants. Participants described concerns about the public nature of one's body transforming at college, as they again balanced the desire to explore various means through which to express their gender with the desire for privacy and the wish to "simply exist." These findings suggest the importance of having competent health care professionals and counselors on campus, who can help trans students navigate and weigh various body alteration options—but who should do so whilst remaining vigilant not to privilege biomedical transition or re(enforce) notions of a singular trans identity narrative (Catalano, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Stryker, 2008).

Participants articulated a range of complex feelings related to on-campus LGBTQ community relationships and spaces. They acknowledged the need for TGNC-specific spaces and communities (Spagna, 2014) but also recognized that bifurcation of gender and sexual minority groups could be counterproductive. On the "plus" side, TGNC specific groups would offer a comfortable space to talk about gender-related issues (Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b); but, such groups could

mean a loss of community and collective voice. Others worried that the creation of a group for TGNC students could make those students a target for harassment. Negotiation of their nonbinary identities within trans and larger queer spaces was experienced as complex, as individuals sometimes felt pressured to perform transness in a particular way (Catalano, 2015). College personnel working with trans students should be aware of the potential for such diverse opinions, concerns, and needs when creating or providing support to such groups on campus.

Participants provided a range of useful, concrete suggestions for universities seeking to provide support for TGNC students, which echo experts' and advocates' suggestions (e.g., Beemyn, Dominque, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005) but are unique in placing emphasis on nonbinary trans identities as a consideration in trans inclusiveness efforts.

Implications and recommendations

Building upon participants' suggestions, we assert that universities hold a key role in critiquing and dismantling cisnormative structures on campus (Nicolazzo, 2016b), from name management to bathrooms to admissions materials. For example, at the university level, name change procedures need to be instituted and widely publicized. All-gender or single stall bathrooms should be present in all university buildings and a map showing the location of these bathrooms should be accessible via the university website.

Additionally, universities should implement workshops and learning spaces led by qualified individuals to educate administrators, faculty, and staff about TGNC issues. We recommend that universities provide additional resources to LGBTQ groups on campus, such that they can (a) pursue programming for TGNC students and nonbinary students specifically, and (b) provide training and education to allies about how to support TGNC students meaningfully, sensitively, and authentically. In sum, we encourage universities to move away from implementing superficial or ineffective strategies such as seeking to create pockets of safety for trans students on campus or slapping a "T" on the name of the LGBQ campus center (see Nicolazzo, 2016b). Rather, universities must begin the hard work of systematically and thoroughly disrupting cisnormative structures, policies, and practices on campus.

Beyond university administrators, faculty have a critical role to play in terms of educating themselves and students about TGNC identities and nonbinary identities specifically. Faculty members should demonstrate to students their awareness of TGNC issues (e.g., by emphasizing that assumptions should not be made about any student's pronouns), while also being aware that not all TGNC students will feel comfortable sharing their gender identities/pronouns in every situation and should not be put on the spot to do so.

As universities pursue ways to be more inclusive of trans students, it will be important that they seek suggestions and feedback from trans students in general

and nonbinary identified students specifically. Through thoughtful engagement with students, university personnel and educators can help to ensure that college is a place that offers opportunities for safety, growth, and support for all students. Collaborative engagement with students can enable universities to be sites of progressive leadership with regard to breaking down cisnormative barriers and expanding awareness and enactment of gender possibilities for all.

Notes

1. We use the language that authors use to characterize the gender identities of their participants (e.g., MtF, FtM).
2. It is possible that the other participants did not respond because they were simply overburdened with classwork and employment responsibilities. Yet it is also possible that the length of time that passed between originally participating in the focus groups and being asked to comment on the manuscript (approximately 10 months) rendered the request for input less personally salient and meaningful than if it had been initiated earlier.
3. All names are pseudonyms.

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