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Warm or Chilly? An Assessment of the Relationships Between Campus Climate and Gender Identity Among Transgender and Nonbinary College Students

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WARM OR CHILLY: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAMPUS CLIMATE AND GENDER IDENTITY AMONG TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

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This research is a mixed-methods analysis of the relationship between campus climate and gender identity for transgender and nonbinary college students. Snowball and convenience sampling were used to obtain a sample of trans and nonbinary college students. Thirty surveys and six interviews were completed. I applied Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and Risman's gender structure theory to analyze how macrosystems, microsystems, and the chronosystem (time) affected trans students' gender identity, whether positively or negatively. Participants were ambivalent about the effects of college on their gender identity; on one hand, college gives trans students freedom from their previous environments. However, participants described a lack of structural supports and chilly microsystems, resulting in their feelings of alienation from their institutions. The chronosystem greatly impacted students' responses as interviews were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants' recommendations for college administrators are discussed, including being able to change one's name in colleges systems and the need for greater trans representation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College has been found to have a significant effect on students' identities, and campus climate has a significant impact on students' involvement in campus life and academic success (Rankin 2005). Several studies have found evidence that LGBTQ+ students tend to have negative experiences on campuses and rate campus climate as chillier than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Brown et al. 2004; Garvey et al. 2018; Tetreault et al. 2013). This chilly campus climate for LGBTQ+ students has persisted despite greater social and legal gains for LGBTQ+ individuals.

It is crucial to study trans and nonbinary students separately from their LGB peers not only to capture their unique experiences that might differ, but also to avoid heterogenderism. Heterogenderism is a term defined by trans* scholar Z. Nicolazzo to explain how (often non-trans) people understand trans people's gender identities through their sexuality (2017). This can lead to misconceptions informed by stereotypes based on people's idea of what sexuality looks like; for example, a female read-person presenting masculinely might be assumed a lesbian, when this could be a masculine-leaning nonbinary person or a trans man. Students who are trans and/or nonbinary also face extra challenges on campuses relative to their LGB cisgender peers. Trans students report more anxiety, thoughts of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Messman and Leslie 2018). Though transgender is generally used as an umbrella term for any non-normative gender identities, for the purposes of this project it is vital to make a distinction

between transgender and nonbinary, particularly because gender non-conforming people face more discrimination than trans people whose appearances fit better into the gender binary (Matsuno 2019; Miller and Grollman 2015). Higher rates of discrimination may result in gender nonconforming people engaging in behaviors that harm their physical, mental, and sexual health (DeVita and Wesner 2019; Matsuno 2019; Miller and Grollman 2015). Even when nonbinary individuals do "come out," they often are faced with the extra challenge of educating people who assume there are only two genders, man and woman (Darwin 2017). For the purpose of this project, I define transgender as any person assigned female at birth that is a man, or any person assigned male at birth that is a woman. Nonbinary will refer to people who are gender non-conforming and do not identify with being a man or woman.

The research question guiding this project is " how does campus climate facilitate or suppress expression of authentic gender identity in trans and nonbinary students?" I will also explore if there are meaningful differences between trans men and women and nonbinary students.

Table 1. Definitions of key terms

Term	Definition
Transgender	An umbrella term that describes a person whose gender does notmatch their gender assigned at birth
Nonbinary	A person underneath the trans umbrella that does not align themselveswith being a man or a woman. May include genderqueer, agender, genderfluid, or others
Gender dysphoria	Feelings of incongruence between one's assigned sex at birth and one's gender
Gender euphoria	A feeling of comfort and joy when thinking about one's gender
Cisgender	A term that describes a person whose gender is congruent with their gender assigned at birth
Deadname	A trans person's birth name that they no longer use
Assigned gender at birth (AGAB)	The gender marker male or female that gets marked when a baby is born based on genitals

In sum, trans and nonbinary college students face high rates of discrimination in college, including experiences of a chilly campus climate (Brown et al. 2004; Garvey et al. 2018; Tetreault et al. 2013), and college is a crucial part of students' adult life with a large effect on them (Rankin 2005); consequently, it is crucial to study the experiences of this population. Studying the experiences of trans and nonbinary college students can be applied to trans and nonbinary people in other organizations, and we can also use this knowledge to apply it to other marginalized populations on college campuses. Therefore, it is crucial to study how college campuses affect trans and nonbinary students' gender identity, the research problem that guided this project.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

CAMPUS CLIMATE AND TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCES

Within the last few decades, researchers have been increasingly evaluating campus climate for different marginalized groups such as women, people of color, and LBGTQ+ students to attempt to retain these students. Unwelcoming campus climates are defined as "chilly," while welcoming and supporting campus environments are defined as "warm." Trans and nonbinary students may be at unique risk for dropping out of college. Factors such as financial expenses, lack of family support, and interpersonal and institutional discrimination are often cited factors for why trans and nonbinary students choose to leave college (Goldberg, Kuvalanka, and Black 2019). Despite increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, LGBTQ+ students have generally still rated campus climates more negatively than their cisgender, heterosexual peers (Brown et al. 2004, Evans et al. 2017). In 2004, Rankin conducted a quantitative study of 14 institutions and found that 34% of the students felt they needed to hide their gender identity or sexual orientation on campus and 19% worried about their physical safety. Rankin (2004) also found that 28% of LGBTQ+ students had been harassed on campus, and this number was higher, at 41%, for transgender students. Tetreault et al. (2013) found that approximately ¼ of the LGBTQ+ students in their study of campus climate had considered leaving their college because of the environment. The students that considered leaving had the

highest rates of responding that they were not "out" with their sexual orientation or gender identity, those who had suffered unfair treatment by an instructor, and those who had their living situation impacted based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Tetreault et al. 2013). The college experience can be particularly challenging for nonbinary students. The dominant cultural narrative surrounding trans people describes experiences where someone transitions to the "opposite" gender- for example, male to female or female to male. This narrative symbolically erases nonbinary people (Beemyn 2019).

MICROAGRESSIONS

Large acts of discrimination are obviously important to examine to understand the impact of a negative social climate; however, research from Tetreault et. al (2013) suggests that more micro level interactions, such as microagressions, are an important factor in LGBTQ+ students' perceptions of their campus climate. Microagressions can include phrases such as "that's so gay," "no homo," or words such as "tranny" or "faggot" (Seelman, Woodford, and Nizolazzo 2017). Microaggressions are associated with lower self-esteem, and higher stress and anxiety (Seelman et al. 2017). This effect is exacerbated in trans students compared to their LGB peers (Seelman et al. 2017). Students that ask their professors to use their chosen name are often met with resistance or are not taken seriously (Wentling 2019), and this persists even with advisors and faculty that work more closely with graduate students (Goldberg 2019). 44% of nonbinary students in one study reported being misgendered often by faculty, while only 8% of binary trans students reported being misgendered often (Goldberg 2019). Constantly experience microaggressions can cause trans people to have heightened sensitivity to mistreatment; every time they are rejected for a grant or denied a career opportunity, they cannot help but wonder if discrimination against their trans status was the reason (Pitcher 2019).

Factors that have been found to cause LGBTQ+ students to rate their campus climate as chilly include seeing homophobic or transphobic graffiti, being excluded from social events, name-calling, and physical abuse (Tetreault et al 2013). In Stevens' 2004 qualitative study of 11 gay men, he found that the college classroom was an especially important environment in that when instructors were more controlling of class discussion, gay men felt like they had less power in the classroom. Though some participants recognized that instructors could help empower them in their sexuality, they largely felt that classrooms were too large, chilly, and inhospitable (Stevens 2004). Garvey and colleagues (2018) analyzed the campus climate perceptions of 3,710 queer-spectrum undergraduates and found that a perceived warm campus climate was the most significant predictor of LGBTQ+ students' success in college.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES ON CAMPUS

Many campuses do not have adequate structures in place to support trans students; it is often difficult for trans students who have not legally changed their deadname (legal given name) to their chosen name, and students are often at the mercy of administrators that have varying levels of knowledge and support for trans issues (Wentling 2019). More often than not, states require trans people to get gender reassignment surgery in order to change their gender markers on legal documents, and as of 2020 only seventeen states allow nonbinary individuals to have their gender on their driver's licenses or state IDs, which can present a challenge, especially for lower-income college students (US Birth Certificates 2020). This is especially distressful for students who's gender must be officially changed on their legal documents for their gender to be recognized by their college. Another example of inadequate campus structures are single-sex bathrooms. Single sex bathrooms are common in universities, and many trans students are faced

with the challenge of either using the bathroom that they would like or the bathroom that aligns with their gender assigned at birth; for nonbinary students this may be exacerbated because they often do not feel comfortable using the men's nor women's restrooms. One study found that ¼ of trans and nonbinary students were not allowed to use bathrooms due to their gender; this denial of facilities was linked to higher suicidality in participants (Seelman 2016).

TRANSGENDER STUDENTS AT SINGLE SEX COLLEGES

Traditionally women's colleges may be even less structurally suited to cater to trans and nonbinary students. There is much controversy over who should be allowed in traditionally women's colleges—some believe it should only be cis women, while others believe anyone assigned female at birth should be able to attend no matter their gender identity (Nanney 2020). Many women's colleges do not even admit trans women, and some that do will not admit out trans men (Weber 2019). Trans women in traditionally women's colleges were largely ignored until 2012, when a high school senior Calliope Wong applied to Smith. Wong was told that Smith had a case by case policy for admitting trans students, as long as all her documents were marked "female." Though most of Wong's documents were labeled female, her father checked "male" on her FASFA application and Wong was rejected, resulting in much student activism and protests (Weber 2019). Some women's colleges have started to consider the applications of trans women, genderqueer people, and nonbinary people, although as of 2018 Smith college only admitted trans women, and not those with other marginalized gender identities (Drew 2018).

Currently there remains variation in the treatment of trans students in women's colleges in the Northeast U.S. Trans men often fluctuate between being invisible or being hyper visible. Invisibility may come in the form of traditionally women's colleges using specifically female

gendered language, and hypervisibility can also occur, like when one student was assured that his chosen name was going to be read at graduation but was not (Weber 2019). Traditionally women's colleges tend to use female only language, promotional materials, resources, and facilities, alienating transmasculine students (Nanney 2020). Though trans men, women, and nonbinary students experience similar marginalization, there appear to be some differences. In one exploratory study, trans women reported lower leadership self-efficacy and leadership roles (Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet 2012). Trans women and intersexed students also reported less mentoring than their trans male peers (Dugan et al. 2012). In Weber's 2019 study, one trans man reported varied experiences with gender on his traditionally women's campus. This student was often read as male, which was gender-affirming, but because he was read as male received dirty looks and told he does not belong on campus (Weber 2019). This student also encountered the same problems many trans students have at non-single sex schools: he was not able to change his name and ID picture because it cost money (Weber 2019). Fortunately, some colleges are attempting to improve trans students' experiences by arranging training about trans identities for employees, providing trans housing, and creating LGBTQ resources on campus (Nanney 2020).

RESILIENCY AND KINSHIP

Though much of the literature on trans and nonbinary college students paints a grim picture, these students often demonstrate resiliency and self-protecting practices. Resilience is often defined as one's ability to "bounce back" from challenging experiences, and is found to be an important factor in trans and nonbinary college students' persistence in college (Nizolazzo 2017). Trans kinship has been found to be crucial for trans and nonbinary students' resilience; these students often practice lots of emotional labor to explain their mere existence, and being in the presence of other trans people give trans and nonbinary students a welcome reprieve from all

this emotional labor (Nicolazzo 2017). In their qualitative study of 18 trans college students, Nicolazzo et al. (2017) found that there are three main domains for trans college students to gain a sense of trans kinship- material, affective, and virtual. These domains are not mutually exclusive, and often community found in the virtual domain will spill over into the material domain (Nizolazzo et al. 2017). The virtual domain, including social media, may be especially important for trans and nonbinary college students- some are only "out" in certain places, and may not be comfortable being especially involved on campus (Nizolazzo et. al 2017). All of the students in Singh's (2013) study of trans youth of color described wanting a community consisting of trans people of color, but if this was not possible they still felt it important to find their place in the greater LGBTQ+ community.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender as a Social Structure

In order to study the impacts of campus climate on trans and nonbinary students, I employed a theoretical framework that looks at gender as a social structure. Gender scholar Barbara Risman (2004) theorized gender as a social structure to bring gender to the same plane as politics and economics. Sociologists have not agreed upon a solid definition of the concept of a structure, but there are two generally accepted assumptions: structures operate outside of individual desire and motives and they partially explain human actions. Risman (2004) split the gender structure into three dimensions: the individual level, the interactional level, and the institutional domain. This thesis focused on how the individual level and interactional levels of the gender structure interact for transgender and nonbinary students in the institution of higher education.

Risman (2004) used her previous research on heterosexual parents to illustrate how gender works across all three domains, including individual. The individual level contained mechanisms such as socialization, internalization, identity work, and construction of the self. Risman (2004) studied heterosexual couples raising children in a mostly egalitarian household, and found that though structure is important, individual personalities also matter. All of the couples with a mostly egalitarian division of household labor were comprised of a strong, directive woman married to a relaxed man. Risman (2004) described the challenges of finding a sample of couples that worked similar hours in the labor force per week, shared the household tasks with no more than a 40/60 split, and with both partners describing the relationship as equitable. Despite a cultural shift toward holding men more accountable for household labor, the individual temperament, identity work, and self-concept of individual actors still matters. Socialization is also an aspect of the individual level; presumably, these households were socializing their children to be equitable partners.

The interactional level is also important for analyzing how these heterosexual parents created an equitable household. The interactional level contained status expectations, cognitive bias, othering, altercasting, and trading power for patronage. Cultural stereotypes and "doing gender" are pertinent examples of the interactional level. The parents in Risman's (2004) study held atypical gender ideologies, and many of them went to liberal churches to have interactions with people who had similar principles. Trading power for patronage was a tactic often used by women in heterosexual relationships to better the material status of her and her children; in Risman's (2004) study, many of the women earned equal to or more than their partners. This illustrated how the individual and interactional levels interact. It is not enough for a woman to earn more or to be married to a relaxed husband; these circumstances together make it possible

for equitable partnerships. The institutional domain contained legal regulations, ideology, distribution of resources, and organizational practices (Risman 2004). An example of the institutional gender structure is demonstrated in government documents such as birth certificates and driver's licenses that are almost always only marked male or female.

In the past, generic structural theory has assumed that if women and men have the same structural expectations and roles, gender differences would disappear. Risman's acknowledgement of the individual and interactional levels advanced typical structural theory that has historically ignored internalized individual roles and cultural interaction expectations (Risman 2004). The advantages of Risman's theory over generic structural theory is why I chose to use this as a framework for this project.

Queer and Transgender Theory

This thesis was also informed by queer and trans theory. Queer theory came largely from feminist and social constructivist theories. Queer is a category that can encompass multiple gender and sexual identities and can be used as an umbrella term for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, nonbinary people, and everyone who is not cisgender and heterosexual. Queer theorists have attempted to disrupt essentialist views of gender by arguing that gender is a social construct and can therefore be questioned and disrupted (Connell 2010; Butler 1990). Judith Butler, one of the most influential queer theorists, argued that gender is performative and based on one's interactions with others (1990). West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender is based on a series of social interactions and something continuously achieved. As humans "do" gender, they create gendered expectations of what it means to be a man or a woman for others (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Butler argued that the naturalization of binary bodies creates a world in which binary gendered expectations are maintained as natural.

Queer theory has been critiqued for accepting these male and female categories even as it attempts to destabilize them. Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) critiqued queer theory by arguing that, "Although queer theory may accept feminine males and masculine females, as well as a plurality of gender categories, it nevertheless builds on the assumption of the male versus female gender categories" (p. 435). Transgender theory has evolved from these critiques of queer theory. Roen (2002) argued that there may be tensions between two viewpoints of transgender individuals - the "either/or" or "both/neither" trans people. Sexuality and gender scholar Roen (2002) posited that "either/or" trans individuals describe passing as being one of their most important performance goals, whereby successful gender performance is being perceived as the gender other than they were assigned at birth. Echoing many postmodern ideals, Roen (2002) claimed that "both/neither" trans people tend to believe that being out as trans helps destabilize the gender binary. Some "both/neither" trans individuals, such as a popular trans writer Kate Bornstein, believe that passing trans people are "gender defenders."

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) critique the widely used social constructivist reading of the body; they posit that the body is more actively involved in social processes than much theory often states. Conceptualizing embodiment is a crucial part of Nagoshi and Brzuzy's suggested transgender theory. Tauchert (2002) further critiques social constructivist theory, arguing that it furthers the Western binary thought that the mind is fully separate from, and superior to, the body. Tauchert suggests conceptualizing gender as "fuzzy," that has both mental and physical aspects. According to Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010: 436), this theory "still allows for the recognition of the variations in gender identity and gender-related behaviors and sexuality and acknowledgment of the range of experiences, from physical or essentialist to wholly socially

constructed, that are associated with gender." The arguments outlined in this paragraph help set up a foundation for Nagoshi and Brzuzy's specific transgender theory.

Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) suggest fleshing out Tauchert's theory to create an exclusive transgender theory in which one's identity in any category is thought of as an interaction among three sources: embodiment, self-construction, and social construction. Thinking about gender identity as a combination of these three things allows one to recognize that though gender is socially constructed and naturalized, it is also very personal and embodiment is crucial in the understanding of one's gender identity.

I have used both gender as a social structure and transgender theory to illustrate how campus climate affects gender identity in trans and nonbinary students. Gender embodiment, self-construction, and social construction can all be analyzed through the lenses of individual, interactional, and institutional gender structures. One can only construct their gender within the confines of their culture (institutional level) and their interactions with others. Each level of the structure of gender affects how gender is embodied. The theory of gender as a social structure is useful to bring the analysis of gender to a larger level but using queer and transgender theory is necessary to disrupt the gender binary.

Ecological Model of Higher Education

The ecological systems theory was pioneered by Urie Bronfenbrenner to explain how environment and temperament work together to influence how children develop. Bronfenbrenner (1992) posited that there are multiple systems of varying sizes that interact with individuals' personalities to help children grow. Ecological systems theory has been adapted by Renn and Arnold (2003: 263) to fill a gap in higher education literature, arguing that it is

important to " incorporate[e] the interactions of individuals with their environments over time in a Person-Process-Context-Time model." This ecology model incorporates microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems.

The macrosystem includes larger cultural expectations, historical events, and trends. Risman's (2004) concept of the gender structure can be illustrated in each of the systems. The exosystem is defined as settings the student is not in but still affects them, including different aspects such as federal financial aid policy, immigration policy, and curriculum. Risman's institutional level can be illustrated in both the exosystem and macrosytem. Things like binary bathrooms and housing assignments that were conceived of before many trans or nonbinary students were born illustrate the macrosystem. The mesosystem generally contains smaller interacting microsystems such as jobs, roommates, families, classes, or friendship groups. The mesosystem is where the interactional domain of gender lies. Status expectations, othering, and altercasting are social processes in which the binary gender structure is reinforced (Risman 2004). The level of support or disapproval from the roommates, peers, or coworkers towards a trans or nonbinary students' gender identity affects perceptions of campus climate (Tetreault et al. 2013). Different microsystems in the mesosystem may reinforce or hinder each other. For example, a trans or nonbinary student may feel supported in their gender identity at school, but not in the workplace. The concept of microsystems has been found to be relevant to trans college students' in particular; classrooms, departments, and clubs all have differing levels of friendliness to trans individuals (Siegel 2019). Renn and Arnold (2003) are apt in emphasizing that microsystems are unique to individuals, and that even in the same classroom, "individuals will interact differently with that microsystem depending on their backgrounds and developmental trajectories" (pg 270).

The chronosystem is an important part of the ecological model. The chronosystem represents time, which is important to think about in terms of both life course and the time in which students are attending college. Traditionally college-aged students may have differing microsystems from non-traditional students who may have childcare or community responsibilities. The time a student attends college is also critical to consider because of larger social movements and forces that may be prevalent on college campuses at any given time. Renn and Arnold present an example of how ecological theory can be applied to Renn's (1999) study of mixed-race college students. Renn (1999) found that mixed-race students share many similar experiences with their monoracial peers of color at predominantly white institutions, but that having people ask, "what are you?" questions for 17 years or more primes them for different interactions in college. Mixed-race students' previous interactions illustrate how the chronosystem affects multiracial students. Students' microsystems of family groups and how they passed on cultural traditions affected the kinds of microsystems students chose when they came to college. Mixed-race students whose parents did not pass on cultural traditions such as speaking their language felt less accepted by monoracial students of color (Renn and Arnold 2003). This ecology model has the advantage of taking into account a student's pre-college environment to understand differences in students' starting points.

Trans and nonbinary college students experience many negative experiences in colleges including micro experiences such as microaggressions (Seelman et al. 2017), as well as structural issues such as not being able to change their name or gender marker (Wentling 2019). Additionally, trans and nonbinary students at single-sex colleges tend to have ambivalent experiences; though some colleges can be friendly toward trans students, others use female-only language that can make transmasculine students feel either invisible or hyper visible, and some

do not even admit trans women (Weber 2019; Nanney 2020). However, trans and nonbinary students can utilize a range of tools to increase resiliency, particularly queer kinship networks in which trans students can find a higher sense of belonging and support (Nizolazzo 2017).

Keeping previous literature on trans and nonbinary college students' experiences in mind, this project utilized Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, Risman's theory of gender as a social structure, and queer and transgender theory to explore how campus climate affects trans and nonbinary students' gender identity and expression.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

To discover how trans and nonbinary individuals view their campus climate and its effect on their identity, I designed and conducted a survey and led six qualitative interviews with trans and nonbinary students. Mixed-methods research allow researchers to choose certain design elements from both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain the greatest likelihood of answering their research question (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Every participant who participated in the survey and in the interview was required to read and electronically sign an Institutional Review Board informed consent page was provided with the phone number to an LGBTQ+ support hotline and several online resources to utilize if they experienced any emotional discomfort.

SAMPLING

Due to a lack of funding as well as studying a generally difficult to find, marginalized population, I used convenience and snowball sampling; snowball sampling is a popular method when attempting to study populations that are marginalized or difficult to reach. The study was advertised on the researcher's personal Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit pages, as well as posted in trans, nonbinary, or generally LGBTQ+ groups on these websites. I was also assisted in advertising from several friends, as well as my project advisor. Interview participants were obtained through the survey; at the end of the survey, participants were asked to provide an e-mail address if they were interested in being interviewed.

QUANTITATIVE

Surveys are used to gain responses from a large amount of participants, and are used for their versatility and efficiency (Schutt 2012). The survey allowed me to reach a greater number of students and contained some open-response questions for greater depth of data. The survey was conducted through Qualtrics and was open from October 7th -November 28th 2020. Due to a low number of only 30 survey respondents, I was not able to glean any statistically significant results. Therefore, I was only able to use the quantitative data in a descriptive manner to supplement the qualitative themes.

The part of the survey designed to assess sense of belonging was based on a dissertation measuring different dimensions of students' sense of belonging on college campuses (Ingram 2012). Building on existing survey instruments designed to research similar objectives is a common quantitative practice (Schutt 2012). Ingram's (2012) survey included questions asking what activities students were involved in, how many people had made them feel comfortable at college, if the student lives on or off campus and how comfortable they feel in their housing arrangement, and questions assessing the quality of their advisor. To assess campus climate for trans and nonbinary students, I used modified versions of Henry, Fowler, and West's Student Climate Survey (2011). This survey originally included questions that asked about one's gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender status altogether and I narrowed it to ask only about gender. These questions asked how often in the past year participants had certain experiences, including being left out due to their gender, being discriminated against due to gender, fearing for safety due to gender, avoiding disclosing gender due to fear of negative consequences, among others.

In addition to a low amount of survey responses, I wanted to respect survey respondents' genders and decided to not aggregate that data, which resulted in my inability to conduct

meaningful analyses. However, the quantitative data was still a valuable tool to supplement and strengthen many of the experiences discussed by interview participants. Respondents were allowed to pick from 17 gender categories, choosing more than one if they saw fit. These categories were trans masculine, trans feminine, trans male, trans female, nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, genderfuck, two spirit, agender, pangender, demi girl, demi boy, bigender, trans person, gender apathetic, and neutrois. Respondents were also given an open-ended box to specify a gender identity that was not listed above. Multiple participants selected more than one gender identity and in keeping with queer theory's postmodern roots, I felt uncomfortable collapsing those gender categories and presenting people's gender identities in a manner that may have been inauthentic. These considerations led me to use the quantitative data in a secondary, complementary manner to the qualitative data.

Table 2. Survey Participant Demographics

Gender	%
Trans masculine	16.7
Trans feminine	13.3
Trans male	13.3
Trans female	13.3
Nonbinary	56.7
Genderqueer	16.7
Genderfluid	16.7
Agender	10.0
Demi girl	13.3
Demi boy	3.3
Trans person	13.3
Gender apathetic	3.3
A gender not listed (please specify):	10.0
Butch	2.1
Woman	2.12.1
Woman. Technically transgender, but I would never list myself as just a trans woman.	

Race	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.0
Asian	6.7
Black or African American	6.7
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.0
White	86.7
Middle Eastern or North African	0.0
A race not listed here (Please specify):	20.5
Multiracial	6.7
Hispanic or Latino	13.8

Age	
18-21	56.7
22-25	26.7
26-31	16.7

QUALITATIVE

All interview participants were students who completed the survey and indicated their willingness to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted and recorded through Zoom and lasted 21 minutes to 55 minutes. The interviews were coded in the program Dedoose, where

codes and sub-codes make up the themes of the report. The data were coded twice to ensure accuracy of themes. Interview quotes have been lightly edited for clarity and filler words were removed for ease of reading. All interview participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

I analyzed the data inductively to find the themes relevant to my research question (Thomas 2006). Consistent with Corbin and Strauss (1990), processes are emphasized in my analysis; particularly the process by which participants come to know themselves as gendered beings within the college context. To analyze the interview data, I first made each interview question its own code so that I would more easily be able to compare participants' answers to each question. Certain questions had simple "yes," "no," or "I don't know" codes, such as for the question "Does your campus have a mechanism for you to tell them your name/pronouns?" Overall, I organized the data into three overarching themes: positive experiences, negative experiences, and recommendations. Positive experiences included supportive institutional processes, supportive organizations, groups, or departments, and how supportive experiences affected students. Negative themes included lack of institutional support, negative experiences in microsystems, being misgendered, and how negative experiences affected students. Recommendations included recommendations for administrators as well as recommendations to prospective trans students. Intertwined through all themes are analyses based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological model.

Table 3. Interview Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race and/or Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Gender	Lives In
Lily	22	White	Lesbian in theory, pansexual in effect	"Woman. Technically transgender, but I would never list myself as just a trans woman."	Colorado
Penn	31	Central American, Japanese, Filipino, Irish, English	Queer	Nonbinary	California
Rory	21	White	Bisexual	Nonbinary, trans person	Colorado
Andrew	22	Black	Bisexual	Trans male, trans masc, trans person	California
River	20	White	Pansexual	Nonbinary, demi girl	Kansas
Alex	22	Asian	Gay	Trans masc, nonbinary, genderqueer, trans person	California

STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY

Feminist scholarship has long emphasized the importance of situating one's self in their research as well as challenging the notion of "value-free" research (Collins 1990, Sprague 2016). I am approaching this research as a white, queer, cis-appearing researcher with close ties to many nonbinary individuals. My experiences as a queer person with a queer social network have allowed me to connect personally to many nonbinary people, I nonetheless am aware that my experiences being perceived as a cisgender woman and having class privilege inevitably cause blind spots. I have seen nonbinary and trans friends continually marginalized and erased even in places that are supposedly safe and accepting, and therefore I found this research important to undertake.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Positive and negative experiences emerged as the main themes in the interviews and survey data. Positive experiences subthemes include supportive institutional processes, supportive organizations, groups, or departments, and a discussion of how supportive experiences affected trans and nonbinary students. Negative experiences include lack of institutional support, negative experiences in microsystems, being misgendered or deadnamed, and a discussion of how negative experiences affected trans and nonbinary students. These themes indicate that the macrosystem of colleges combined with microsystems that students are in have a profound effect on how students view their own gender identity, as well as on how well they feel they fit in at their colleges. Consistent with previous studies, queer kinship was found as a major resilience strategy (Nicolazzo et al. 2017; Simpfenderfer et al. 2020). My analysis concludes with a discussion of recommendations that interview participants offered for both college administration and prospective trans students. These recommendations include the need for colleges to create institutional supports for trans and nonbinary students to help them know that they are supported despite negative experiences they may have in microsystem.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Supportive Institutional Processes

Both survey and interview respondents described a few positive experiences that they had with their institutions. These positive experiences were accessing resources and being able to

change their name in the school system without changing it legally. However, these supportive processes were often not enough to offset other negative experiences that trans and nonbinary participants had, detailed in the next section.

Being able to access various institutional resources can be essential for improving students' overall college experiences. Survey participants seemed to have fairly easy times accessing various campus resources. Just over half of (56.7%) students felt it was easy or very easy to find tutoring, 50% felt it was easy or very easy to find career resources, 43.4% felt it was easy or very easy to find counseling, and 46.6% felt it was easy or very easy to find health or wellness services. The average percentage of students that responded that these resources were not applicable was 24.2%. However, none of these resources were specifically gender related; in the section detailing negative experiences, I show the data suggesting gender-based resources were more difficult for participants to find.

The most common resource that interview participants said they were able to utilize was changing their name in the school system without changing it legally. In one campus climate study, trans students rated being able to change their name in the campus system without a legal name change as one of the most important supports for trans students (Goldberg, Beemyn, and Smith 2019). This is a particularly important resource for trans students because trans people often struggle financially, and changing one's name legally can be expensive (James et al. 2016). Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer), Lily (white, 22, woman), Andrew (Black, 22, trans man), and Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) stated that their schools would let them change their names on campus without a legal name change, though Lily and Andrew both noted that on official documents their deadname was still visible. Only Penn stated that their campus allowed them to change both name and pronouns, including their pronouns on their school's

course management system. Penn was also the only interview participant who responded that their campus was extremely trans friendly. Penn was a first year graduate student who had only attended school virtually and only interacted with their department, and therefore the experiences they shared with me were more linked with their specific microsystem of their department, as Penn had not yet had the opportunity to become involved on campus. These institutional supports, whether they are general or gender-specific, helped students feel more comfortable at their institutions.

Though being able to access resource such as tutoring, career resources, and health resources is helpful for LGBTQ+ students, specific LGBTQ+-based resources are often more beneficial for queer students' mental health (Woodford et al. 2018). This may be even more prevalent for trans students, who are often outed when professors use their deadname if trans students cannot change it- therefore, colleges giving students the opportunity to change their name in campus systems is extremely beneficial (Goldberg, Beemyn, and Smith 2019).

Supportive Organizations, Groups, or Departments

These findings show that students use multiple kinds of support systems students, including those that they sought out and those they actively cultivated. Types of support include departments and classrooms, LGBTQ+ centers or other clubs, and queer kindship networks.

Certain departments or classrooms can be positive microsystems for students. Penn, (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary), Lily (white, 22, woman), and Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) all cited their respective home/major departments and the professors within them (biology, theater tech, and ocean science) as safe spaces. For Penn and Alex this is particularly heartening, due to STEM spaces in universities often having chilly climates for LGBTQ+ students (Jennings et al. 2020). Alex specifically had a nonbinary supervisor who

decided to come out after Alex put their pronouns in their email and started using they/them pronouns publicly. Along with Alex's nonbinary boss, their cisgender advisor and other faculty in the department were described as "super inclusive and nothing but supportive," allowing Alex to feel like they belonged in their department. Alex and Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) also cited other departments on campus as safe spaces, such as the humanities department in general, or the ethnic or gender studies department. Specifically, Rory experienced a supportive climate in one literature class in which the professor had the students all fill out face sheets at the beginning of the semester that specifically asked students' pronouns. Just this small act was enough for Rory to feel that if they were out in this specific classroom that they would be supported.

All but one of my interview participants' colleges had some sort of LGBTQ+ center, and half of the interview participants were involved. Alex's school however, did not have any LGBTQ+ center until after their freshman year. Even though Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) and Penn's (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) institutions had LGBTQ+ centers, they were not involved in them. Rory utilized their campus's disability resource center, and expressed that it was easier to utilize their services because of how integrated the center was into classes; the disability resource center would directly reach out to professors, while the LGBTQ+ center would just hold their own events. Though Rory did not mention any specifics about how they thought LGBTQ+ could become more integrated, this may take the form of reaching out to students' courses to make sure that professors know their name (not their deadname) and pronouns before class begins.

No interview participants defined themselves as being extremely involved in their campuses' LGBTQ+ centers, though Lily (white, 22, woman), Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary,

transmasc, genderqueer), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) described being slightly involved. Alex specifically mentioned,

> We didn't have an actual space for LGBTQ+ plus folks until only a couple of years ago, which was really awesome because we have a really large homophobic alumni group that likes to boycott everything LGBTQ plus related, including our annual drag show that we have on campus every year. So that was like a pretty big win in terms of what the administration, what we could and couldn't do. That space was actually really useful for gathering and finding community when we needed it such as like that trans hate crime, for example, that was like a place of connection for LGBTQ plus folks who needed support, stuff like that. And we have like a director who's dedicated to our center specifically who helps run the center.

This quote shows the importance of having an LGBTQ+ center in a cis normative world, even for students who do not utilize it consistently. It shows that the campus cares about this demographic of marginalized students and can use its resources to give LGBTQ+ students a place to connect, even if it is for temporary emotional support.

Most of my interview participants were very involved in their campuses. Participation on campus is often linked to sense of belonging (Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen 2007). Lily (white, 22, woman), Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) were all involved in more than five campus activities, ranging from academic committees, student associations, or storytelling events. Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) had been involved in two non-gender related clubs, such as the aquarium club, during college. Only Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) was not involved at all; they expressed a desire to be more involved in campus, but since they were in their first semester during COVID and all their classes were online, they had limited options.

More than any participant, Lily (white, 22, woman) explicitly discussed the importance of the microsystem of queer kinship. Having friendships with people who have similar marginalized identities can help students make sense of their identity in relation to their peers

(Renn and Arnold 2003). Lily described herself as a very compartmentalized person, having a group of friends from her major, a group of friends from her minor, and then others who "just kind of float around." Lily told me that she cultivated groups of queer and trans friends, especially because her theater major "is already so gay." As an out trans woman, many people questioning their gender flocked to Lily, who gave them online resources, and this helped her "accumulate queers," or create a queer kinship network. Lily, having had a supportive friend group to help her transition after high school, was then able to give "baby queers" the emotional support and guidance to help them feel more comfortable questioning their gender. Though Lily was not satisfied with the trans-friendliness of her institution, she was able to find other trans or queer people that gave her a sense of belonging in a smaller way. She explains:

> And the way that we talk to one another is having these strong, philosophical Plato discussions about gender and the way that I talk about gender with any cis person is 'Okay. So you put the square block in the square hole. I promise it works. You know, I have the same six conversations with every cis person about my gender.

Here Lily recognizes the different experience of talking about gender with her queer friends versus cisgender people; there can be lots of emotional labor in having to frequently explain trans identities to cis people. This quote affirms Nicolazzo's (2017) findings that trans kinship can allow trans people to speak with people that understand them and take the burden off of trans people to explain their gender whenever it is a topic of discussion.

The students in this project drew on several types of support systems: departments and classrooms, LGBTQ+ centers or other clubs, and queer kindship networks, each of which allowed the students to navigate the difficult terrain of an environment that was inconsistent in their support and acceptance of their identities. These findings affirm previous studies that find microsystems' trans-friendliness can conflict with each other or affirm each other (Nicolazzo et al. 2017; Siegel 2019).

How Supportive Environments Affect Transgender and Nonbinary Students

Supportive college experiences affected students in several ways: by helping students gain access to trans and nonbinary peers, by benefiting their gender formation, allowing freer gender presentation, and affecting students' academics, ultimately resulting in students' sense of belonging.

Several survey participants responded that college was where they were first met trans people, which helped them feel that they could experiment with gender. Eight survey participants specifically mentioned some form of community as a way that college affected them, showing the importance of knowing other trans people, as well as LGBTQ+ kinship that has been found in literature (Nicolazzo et al. 2017; Simpfenderfer et al. 2020). College is a place that many people are exploring different facets of themselves, and for "traditionally aged" college students, this can be one of the first places that people gain independence from their parents and feel freedom to explore their gender.

Interview participants explained various ways that their experiences on campus affected how they perceive their gender. Two participants, Lily (white, 22, woman) and Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary), felt that college had not affected how they perceive their gender. Both Lily and Penn were certain of their gender identity before they came to their current institutions. Penn, (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) a graduate student, had gone through a legal name change before they went to school to obtain their bachelor's. Lily (white, 22, woman) said that though she was in the process of transitioning during college, she had a solid sense of what she wanted her transition to look like. Penn and Lily illustrate the importance of chronosystem; both of them had been exploring their gender and had come to solid understandings of themselves, which may have made it easier for them to navigate college and feel that it did not affect the formation of

their gender identity as much. Being further along in one's gender journey also had a beneficial effect on how participants dealt with microaggressions and chilly environments; both Lily and Penn had developed coping skills. Lily's understanding of her gender was particularly beneficial for her; she reported cultivating supportive queer kinship networks due to her confident understanding of her gender.

The following quotes from two different survey participants describe how students recognized that though college had a net good effect on students' gender formation, there may also be mixed effects due to certain unfriendly environments.

> I think it's mostly been positive in one way or another. I think college really forced me to reckon with my gender in a way that I hadn't had space or freedom to before. Even though I spent most of college trying to hide my gender and conform to norms and stereotypes, the discomfort I felt around that and feeling like I wasn't able to be myself taught me so much about who I am. It's almost like I had to prove to myself that I really truly could not live as anything other than a man as hard as I tried. College gave me space and freedom to explore that. So even though I usually feel isolated and unsafe and unvalued because I'm a trans man, I also acknowledge that it probably would've taken me a lot longer to come out as a trans man without college (ironically).

> I felt simultaneously more in my skin but also more confused and isolated because of the freedom to explore my gender.

These students recognize the complex ways that college can affect identity development; in recognizing the isolation and feeling unsafe they reinforce the importance of sense of belonging. Though students may have more freedom to experiment with gender identity and gender presentation, they may not have a fulfilling experience if they are not able to feel safe and welcomed in their environment. This effect may be particularly aggravated for nonbinary students; one study found that nonbinary students were less confident in their gender identity compared to their binary trans peers (Beemyn 2019). This is one reason why resilience strategies such as queer kinship networks can be so powerful for trans and nonbinary students.

Positive microsystems had an impact on how trans and nonbinary students perceive their own gender identity. For example, Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) started identifying as nonbinary in high school, but by their freshman year of college felt that "actually that sounds really harsh" and stopped using the nonbinary label. During Rory's sophomore year, they met nonbinary people who were assigned male at birth, versus the nonbinary people they had known in the past who were all assigned female at birth. Getting to know nonbinary people with more similar experiences to Rory helped them feel supported and more comfortable in their nonbinary gender. Similarly, Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) had positive experiences with a roommate who was taking a gender studies course, which gave them both a safe environment and new terminology to explore their gender.

Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) and Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) felt that their campus experiences had a positive effect on their gender presentation. Alex described dressing fairly masculine, and after cutting their hair short people perceived them differently in gendered spaces, but they also felt that college was a place where they would be able to be independent and explore their presentation with minimal judgement. Penn experienced the same; because they were able to accept their gender identity and felt that others accepted them, they were able to play with their gender presentation more. Before coming out, Penn said that they would "ignore my body and my presentation and pretend it doesn't exist to function in the world, you know, and get through the day." Here Penn discussed embodiment in Nagoshi and Brzuzy's (2010) trans theory; because Penn felt they could now outwardly embody their true gender, they were more interested in experimenting with gender presentation. Being in a college where they had generally positive experiences with their presentation gave Penn and Alex the freedom to embody their gender how they would like.

Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) was the one participant who did not feel like his college experiences affected his gender presentation much. Much of Andrew's anxiety around gender presentation had to do with him originally identifying as a butch lesbian and conflating his masculine presentation with his sexuality rather than his gender.

Rory, (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), a zoology major, told me that their gender affected what elective classes they chose as well as increased their passion for their major. Rory described feeling like trans people have to justify their gender, and when Rory took their first genetics course it confirmed a lot of trans theory, making up much of their passion for the subject of genetics. In turn, Rory felt more comfortable in their identity because they could justify it scientifically to themself. They also took other humanities and literature classes because they were interested in exploring the subject of gender through a non-genetics lens. Having microsystems that treated trans people with respect allowed Rory to feel more comfortable in these courses, and also feel more comfortable in their own gender identity, because they were not in an environment where their identity was presented as a debate topic.

When interview participants were asked if they feel they belong at their institution, only one participant, Penn, (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) answered yes. Penn experienced their graduate school as much more supportive of their nonbinary identity; they did say that "the bar was pretty low, but still everyone's been really wonderful about it. It's really cool." Though Penn did not elaborate on "the bar being low," this quote shows that even with students who feel the most supported, trans students may feel that even without utilizing institutional support, someone merely accepting their identity and using the correct pronouns most of the time is perceived as extremely supportive, something that cisgender people often taken for granted. Though Penn is discussing a sense of belonging in the macrosystem of the institution, the

experiences we discussed were only within the microsystem of their major department in the graduate school, because Penn had not had experiences with the physical campus, as they were doing school online. However, just Penn's supportive experiences with their department led them to feel that the institution was nonbinary and trans friendly, showing how influential microsystems can be in helping trans and nonbinary students feel comfortable.

Though most participants did not feel a sense of belonging to the larger institutions, Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) both mentioned feeling like they belonged with smaller microsystems within their universities; Alex mentioned their department as the place that was supportive and tight-knit, and Andrew felt that he belonged with the people who did not feel like they belong, or the people who feel marginalized on campus. Andrew specifically was conflicted about his dislike of his college, because he attended a top-ten U.S. university and knew that a lot of people would "kill to be here and then you get here and you're like, actually this kinda sucks." Andrew's quote shows how widespread this problem is; a school that has more than enough funding could be doing more to make trans students feel safe and supported.

Positive experiences allow students to gain a stronger sense of belonging by helping students gain access to trans and nonbinary peers and by benefiting their gender formation and freedom of presentation. This allowed trans and nonbinary students to gain some sense of belonging, whether that was belonging to the institution or just microsystems within it.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Though participants expressed positive experiences within their college experiences, there were more negative experiences that participants shared in interviews. This involved negative experiences with the institution overall, negative experiences in smaller microsystems

such as classrooms and residence halls, and being misgendered, the first three subheadings for this section. The section concludes with a discussion of how these negative experiences affected trans and nonbinary students, including feelings of danger, feeling like they cannot present authentically, feeling like they cannot be out, and feeling like they do not belong.

Lack of Institutional Support

Most students experienced a lack of institutional support for their trans identities. Having a lack of LGBTQ+ specified resources, not being able to change one's names or pronouns, experiencing gendered interactions between their campus and town, and negative experiences in gendered spaces (particularly restrooms) were all experiences that participants reported. These experiences combined to create a chilly climate where most participants felt they did not belong.

Though it is heartening that survey participants reported being able to access institutional supports and had positive experiences, more often than not students reported not being able to easily find gender-based resources. Survey respondents generally found it easy to access tutoring, career resources, health and wellness resources, and counseling, but the situation was grimmer when attempting to find gender or sexuality-based resources. A bit more than one-fourth (26.7%) of survey respondents said that they did not know or was not applicable to them, but the same number of students (26.7%) said they found it easy or very easy to access these resources. This means that the remaining 46.7% of students found it difficult or very difficult to find useful gender- or sexuality-based resources. This is not surprising, considering the wealth of literature showing that colleges often fail to provide specific necessary resources for trans students (Rankin 2004; Seelman 2016; Wentling 2019).

River's (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) college did not have any way to change names or pronouns. River's college was generally not very queer friendly and did not have an

LGBTQ+ center. River started their own queer group during their freshman year but did not have institutional support from the school to make it a center. Rory's (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) school only allowed students to change their name if a student had completed a legal name change. Rory also noted that some professors would ask students if they had preferred names during attendance, but this would come only after a professor had said the students' deadname aloud so the entire class could hear; though professors may attempt to create supportive microsystems, this can still cause alienation in trans students that could be avoided if the institution would allow trans or nonbinary students to change their names.

Lily (white, 22, woman), Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) all replied that their respective campuses were trans friendly in a limited capacity. Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) specifically both stated that their campus gave off the appearance that they accepted everyone and did have LGBTQ+ centers, but that they did not provide other services for trans students. Andrew specifically mentioned that his university's health insurance did not cover gender-affirming care, so he had to be on his parents' health insurance. A quote from Lily (white, 22, woman) illustrated her dissatisfaction not only with the university, but also the surrounding town:

> You know, [my college] is trans friendly, but if trans friendly was written by a cis person, which is to say that the amount of trans people who actually created the systems that exist at this university to make it trans friendly is abysmal. So it's there, I've been able to get access to a therapist through the university who is very knowledgeable on issues pertaining to my queer identities. And you know, there are a lot of ways of, 'Oh, hey, my legal name wasn't changed for my first three years here,' but I could get my preferred name on everything, stuff like that. So it's, the systems are in place on a macro educational level, but on the very, you know, day to day, I live in [Lily's city] you know, I live in the reddest part of the state with not a lot of other trans people.

Here Lily brings up that though she felt satisfied with some structural aspects, such as her therapist and campus name change, she felt that these systems in place on her campus were

created by cis people, which did not make her feel as if it was truly trans peoples' voices that were heard. The structural supports that her campus did have did not change the day-to-day negative experiences of a trans woman in the macrosystem of a conservative town with few out trans people.

To contrast, Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) felt unsatisfied with how trans friendly his campus was despite the fact that he attends school in California, where he said "it's that kind of liberal type of vibe that's on the surface, we accept everybody." Andrew recognizes that though more liberal towns have a friendlier surface for trans students, the gender structure is still so strong that people outside of it continue to be marginalized. The other participant who lived in California, Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer), felt that the individual people at their college were fairly trans friendly, but there were not enough institutional supports for trans people.

Lily, Andrew, and Alex all show how different macrosystems (the college and the town the college is in) interact to shape people's experiences. On one hand, all three of these participants recognized that their campuses were fairly trans-friendly on the surface. On the other hand, Lily, Andrew, and Alex all recognized that their colleges could be doing more to support them, and felt that the interaction between their college and the larger town affected their experiences. The larger macrosystems of the towns the students were living in differed; Alex and Andrew were in more trans-friendly towns, while Lily lived in a conservative town that was less trans-friendly. However, Alex and Andrew's towns are still affected by the larger gender structure that constrains popular conceptions of gender and created a culture that only sees cis women and men as legitimate. Therefore, even though some towns were more outwardly trans

friendly, Lily, Alex, and Andrew all recognized that their towns and campuses strengthened the binary gender structure.

Similar to Andrew and Alex, Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) felt that their college had made minimal steps towards making binary trans students feel comfortable. However, Rory had never perceived any supports specifically for nonbinary students. Rory described one individual professor asking about pronouns confidentially ahead of class and saw queer or trans courses that were listed on their college's website, but was disappointed to note that those courses were no longer active, making them feel that their college was not utilizing many resources to make nonbinary students feel comfortable. In Rory's situation, the microsystem and macrosystem conflicted, resulting in an environment that was gender-affirming in small ways, while still being fairly unfriendly overall.

Previous studies have illustrated that a chilly campus climate can affect the likelihood of coming out for LGBTQ+ students (Garvey and Rankin 2015; Gortmaker and Brown 2006). The effect of chilly campus on coming out was illustrated by survey participants, who were asked "How often during the past year have you avoided disclosing your gender identity due to fear of negative consequences?" Half of participants (51.7%) responded they often or very often avoided disclosing their identity, 20.7% sometimes did, and 27.6 rarely or never avoided disclosing their identity. River's (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) experiences mirror the half of interview participants who often avoid disclosing their identities. River, who was not out on campus, felt that whenever the topic of trans or nonbinary identities came up in class the professors would quickly change the subject to avoid having to talk about trans identities and there were no structural supports or even acknowledgments of trans people. River also felt that if their campus was more trans friendly they might have felt more comfortable being out:

> Knowing that there was just sort of a safety net in place where it's like, Hey, that's not okay. You need to respect these people because they're fellow human beings and it's not that difficult for you to simply switch the name or the pronouns that you're using or the terminology you're using, whether it's saying woman or man or person.

River (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) acknowledges that if the macrosystem at their college was more supportive for trans students, they would feel safer revealing their gender, even if certain microsystems remained slightly chilly. River perceives their surroundings as unfriendly toward trans people; these chilly surroundings, in addition to River's lack of gender dysphoria, resulted in their decision to stay closeted on campus and with their family. River discussed feeling like their gender identity was a burden, because the macrosystem of their campus held conservative values and there were not institutional supports for trans or nonbinary students. River's feeling that their identity would not be respected if they were to come out as nonbinary illustrate the importance of interactions between microsystem and macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological model. River felt that individual cis professors or students would feel uncomfortable having to think about trans people. These two spheres, the microsystem and macrosystem, were both chilly toward trans and nonbinary people, and therefore reinforced each other. These reinforcing chilly systems resulted in River's decision to not disclose their gender.

Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) and Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) also described negative experiences in gendered spaces, particularly bathrooms. Alex, who presents masculine has had people think that they are in the "wrong" bathroom and the only gender neutral bathrooms on Rory's campus are far away and they do not often have time to go to the bathroom between their classes. The lack of gender-neutral bathrooms at their colleges caused Rory and Alex to feel that their institutions did not recognize or value nonbinary students. Additionally, the macrosystem of the college setting up only gendered bathrooms

caused stressful microsystems for Alex; a campus that only has gendered bathrooms emboldened people to police the bathroom when they believe the "wrong" person was using it.

Experiencing life in a strict gender structure often creates hardship for trans students, particularly nonbinary students, who experience their gender outside of the traditional binary. These institutional hardships that participants described included not being able to access gender-related resources, not being able to change one's name, not feeling comfortable enough to be out, and not having access to gender-neutral bathrooms. These experiences, combined with negative experiences students had in microsystems, made students feel unsafe, made them feel that they could not present authentically, made them like they could not be out, and feeling like did not belong on their campuses.

Negative Experiences in Microsystems

Participants reported several negative experiences in different microsystems, such as individual classrooms, their dorms, or their major cohort. These experiences include being told to "pass" as cisgender and heterosexual, being bullied, having the existence of their gender be a debate topic, and being the only trans person in one's major cohort. The negative experiences that these students had resulted in them feeling lonely and uncomfortable.

Individual chilly classroom microsystems such as classrooms and residence halls can cause nonbinary students to feel uncomfortable. Consider this experience that River (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) had with their well-meaning Spanish professor. River was intending to study abroad in Mexico and mentioned a city that seemed friendly to LGBTQ+ people. River's professor, knowing that River was in GSF (Gay/Straight Friends), mentioned that they should grow their hair out and not interact with anyone outwardly non-heterosexual or non-cisgender.

> I guess to answer your question of how I view my gender identity as a result, I guess I would say that sometimes in my head, I think of it as making myself sort of a burden

> because it seems like I'm for unreasonable accommodations. If I were to ask, 'Hey, could you use these pronouns or use this name?' I would know that they would all probably feel uncomfortable and then continue to feel uncomfortable every time they were required to use it.

Here, River's quote supports research that shows the importance of classroom environments in LGBTQ+ students' comfort level as a microsystem (Stevens 2004; Wentling 2019). This incident caused River to feel like asking others to respect their name and pronouns would make them a burden. Though this quote is specifically referring to an incident with a single professor, River acknowledged that if they felt their conservative campus was overall more trans friendly on the macrolevel, they would feel more comfortable being open about their gender, showing the intertwined nature between all levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) described a negative experience in their dorm. They were not able to afford the LGBTQ+ residence hall so they were placed in a dorm that matched with their AGAB. Rory had one roommate who refused to use Rory's correct pronouns, even after numerous confrontations. Rory also attempted to decorate their dorm door with Halloween decorations and trans-themed decorations, which were either urinated on or ripped down. Rory reported the event to their resident assistant but felt that this incident of bullying was brushed off. In this case, the macrosystem of gendered residence halls interacted with Rory's specific dorm experience to affirm the unfriendliness of their campus toward nonbinary students. Rory also described trans existence being a debate topic.

> I take a lot of biology courses, and at least three times we've gotten onto the topic of gender versus sex. Teachers have decided to talk about that during class and while I think it can be an educating moment, it also feels pretty shitty to have your existence be a debate topic while you're trying to learn about genetics- it's not an ideal learning scenario, cause I feel a lot more uncomfortable now that I know all these people have those opinions. At least before I got to be ignorant and believe everyone was cool.

When individual professors allow trans people to become a topic of debate in the classroom, it can cause intense discomfort and signal to trans or nonbinary students that this particular classroom is not a safe microsystem for them to be in. Unsafe microsystems can affect trans students' learning; now, Rory has to spend more mental energy regulating themselves to fit in with the gender binary rather than engaging fully with course content.

Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) and River (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) both responded that they experienced some anxiety around gender due to college experiences. Andrew's anxiety was the result of being a trans man in a cohort of otherwise cis men.

> And so it makes me feel weird to be like, I'm also one of you, but we don't look the same or we haven't had the same experiences. So, I think there can be kind of a thing where it's like, sometimes I'll like measure myself in comparison to them and that can cause its own form of like anxiety and stress.

Though Andrew experienced his campus as a "safe" place on the surface, the particular microsystem of his major cohort was extremely gendered, causing Andrew anxiety and stress. Andrew's experiences show that even in an environment where cis people are friendly, being the only trans person can still cause discomfort. River's (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) negative experiences might have been more expected, given their attendance at a conservative Christian college that was not institutionally supportive of trans people or even their LGB peers. As discussed earlier, River's college did not have an LGBTQ+ center, and the campus's only group was the student-led Gay/Straight Friends group that River created as a freshman. This lack of institutional support, combined with smaller unfriendly microsystems, resulted in River feeling anxiety about their gender.

Lily (white, 22, woman) described a myriad of negative experiences, from being cat-called, being called "faggot," having professors who should have had no way of knowing her previous name deadname her in class, and getting unmatched and called slurs on dating sites.

After listing these experiences, Lily told me, "I would argue that all of them combined amount to individually small experiences, but overarchingly a group of experiences that indicate a greater problem. Maybe not just on campus, but culturally." She also felt that many of these things happened because she was adamant about being a visible trans woman and refusing to do things that would make her "pass" as a cis woman better, like changing the pitch of her voice. By refusing to attempt to live up to cis standards of womanhood, Lily positioned herself as a "both/neither" trans person, or a trans person who destabilized, and therefore threatened, the gender binary (Roen 2002). Lily's quote explicitly makes the connection between negative micro interactions and the macrosystem of not only her college, but also the conservative town her campus was located in, as well as the larger binary gender structure.

Though these students were describing negative experiences within microsystems, it still made a difference in their overall comfort level at their colleges. Being told to look cisgender and heterosexual, being bullied, having one's existence be a debate topic, and being the only trans person in one's cohort resulted in these students feeling greater sense of isolation and discomfort in their environments.

Being Misgendered or Deadnamed

Trans and nonbinary students who are out often deal with being misgendered, which can cause distress and feelings of "otherness" (Goldberg 2019; Wentling 2019). However, participants varied in the intensity of their emotional reaction at being misgendered or deadnamed based on context, including who was doing the misgendering and how long the trans or nonbinary student had been out. Students getting misgendered or deadnamed by someone in a position of power over them felt extra trepidation at the prospect of correcting them, and interestingly, this feeling of trepidation was also present if the participant was in a position of

power over the person misgendering them. Queer kinship networks emerged as a strategy to deal with being misgendered or deadnamed.

The interview participants in my sample reaffirmed previous findings of negative emotional reactions to being misgendered or deadnamed (Goldberg 2019; Wentling 2019). Although not all trans people change their name, changing one's name is a common practice and it can be upsetting for trans people to be referred to by a name that they no longer go by, even if they have not changed their legal name (Healthline 2017). River (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl), who was not out on campus, said they were not bothered when they were referred to by their AGAB, which is why they felt it would be easier to not be out. Andrew (Black, 22, trans man), Lily (white, 22, woman), Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer), Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), and Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) were all frequently misgendered and had negative emotional reactions, but these seemed to differ in intensity. Lily was a college senior and had been out since she was a freshman; she described being frustrated when getting misgendered or deadnamed, saying

> I have learned coping skills to work through it on my own and get past it. You know, if it's really bad, I'll go home and pour myself a glass of wine. But at the end of the day, it's like, what am I really gonna do?

Lily had been out longer than other participants and getting misgendered was still upsetting to her. However, she had previous experience that provided her resilience in these situations, She was four years into her transition at the time and described being gendered correctly as having "lost its glamour," because now it was just the norm. Lily described being misgendered as a weird experience, comparing it to being called an obviously incorrect name and saying it is just weird. Lily's feelings on being gendered correctly or incorrectly show how time, or the chronosystem, is important in analyzing students' experiences. Someone earlier in their

transition may be more sensitive to being misgendered or deadnamed, and might experience more gender euphoria from getting gendered correctly, where Lily had experienced being gendered correctly often enough that it no longer solicited emotional reactions that were as intense.

Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) described feeling different emotions according to who was misgendering them. They told me that for close friends, there was an ease with which Alex could joke around and make fun of their friends if their friends accidentally misgendered them, but they explain that,

> If it's someone who I've consistently told, especially someone of authority who I've consistently told who makes an honest mistake. Even though it's not intentional, it usually makes me feel like a little bit worse because I'm like, Oh, even though you're trying your hardest, it feels like your hardest is not enough to my standards.

Alex's quote illustrates how different microsystems in a mesosystem can have dissimilar effects on a student. The mesosystem is made up of multiple microsystems; in this example, Alex's friends are a separate microsystem from authority figures in Alex's life. Alex experienced varying emotions depending on who was misgendering them and how often Alex had told the person they are nonbinary; Alex was comfortable correcting their friends, but not comfortable correcting a person in a position of power over them. Similar to microsystems, this quote also shows the interaction between Risman's (2004) individual and interactional levels of the gender structure. Alex experienced authority figures' expectations that Alex was their AGAB instead of nonbinary, and when these authority figures misgendered Alex, Alex felt othered. The othering and social expectations that Alex experienced in the interactional level caused Alex to internalize others' incorrect perceptions of their gender in their individual level.

Interestingly, both Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) and Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) worked as teaching assistants and both expressed discomfort at correcting those who

they were tutoring because they had more power than the students. Rory expressed that they would not correct students because they felt doing so might make the students feel mad, guilty, or generally not keen to ask questions, which Rory felt would make them worse at their job. Other participants, like Lily (white, 22, woman), echoed Rory's, Penn's, and Alex's discomfort at correcting those who misgendered or deadnamed them due to power imbalances. Lily expressed discomfort at correcting professors because although "the paperwork prevents that from being taken against us, it's on paper and how the hell would I ever prove it if it did have a negative consequences in the long run." Students' reluctance to correct those who misgender them, even with policies stating it will not be held against them (like at Lily's school) show that universities still have a long way to go to make trans students feel safe and affirmed in their gender. This reluctance also shows the relationship between interactional level, or microsystem experiences and the institutional, or macrolevel. Though participants are only speaking of experiences with specific individuals, they implicitly recognize that these smaller interactions happen in the context of their larger university, which they do not trust to protect them in the face of potential conflict with those in positions of power.

Some participants mentioned that they often relied on friends to correct those who misgender them. Lily (white, 22, woman) and Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) both expressed that though they were not comfortable correcting those who misgendered them, their friends often corrected people on their behalf. Lily specifically told me that her friends "will go to bat for me and I go to bat for them pretty frequently." Lily and Alex both lean on their queer networks as a resilience strategy when being misgendered and in return both Alex and Lily, and their friends, have a support system to stand up for them. For these

examples, queer kinship goes beyond emotional support; Lily and Alex's queer friends actively make sure that Lily and Alex are being gendered correctly.

Though the microaggression of being misgendered can seem a small annoyance, these can add up and become extremely detrimental to trans and nonbinary people's mental health (Pitcher 2019; Seelman et al. 2017), and this was reiterated by the participants. However, Lily (white, 22, woman) experienced weaker negative reactions due to chronosystem. In this case, chronosystem represents the amount of time she had been out. The person doing the misgendering also affected how students reaction to being misgendered. As Rory, Penn, and Lily's experiences have shown above this matter is further complicated when taking into account power dynamics, whether the one being misgendered has more or less power than the one doing the misgendering. However, Lily and Alex show how microsystems of queer kinship networks can serve as a tactic for trans and nonbinary students to protect each other.

How Negative Experiences Affect Transgender and Nonbinary Students

Negative experiences, whether in the macro or microsystems, had several effects on participants. Feeling unsafe and lonely, feeling like they cannot present authentically, feeling like they cannot even be honest about their gender identity, and feeling like they do not belong are the major ways that participants reported being affected by negative experiences.

About one-fifth of survey participants reported that they feared for their physical safety on their campus often or very often (20.6%). About one-quarter (24.1%) of participants only sometimes feared for their safety and 55.2% never or rarely feared for their safety. This was echoed by Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person). Rory described only presenting in a gender non-conforming manner after school hours at a campus event and felt that they were only safe

because “I was with my other trans friends and it felt very nice and comfortable, just by numbers. Cause there's so many of us I'm like, ‘Oh, I won't get attacked.’” Part of Rory’s fear to dress outwardly gender non-conforming was due to a gay cis male being beaten into a comatose state in the town Rory attended college in when they were a freshman. Rory was only comfortable presenting in a gender non-conforming way in the microsystem of their trans friend group, knowing that the macrosystem of the college was not an accepting place for just one trans person alone. However, having the trans kinship microsystem allowed Rory to play with their gender presentation and feel somewhat safe- not just emotionally, but also physically. Rory shows how queer kinship can be an excellent resilience strategy, even in situations that are possibly unsafe for trans students.

Survey respondents were mixed in whether they felt they could present their gender authentically on campus. Out of the 23 respondents that answered this question, 10 responded that they believed they could present their gender authentically on campus. One respondent specifically mentioned that their classes were on Zoom and not having their whole body visible helped them feel more comfortable in an authentic gender presentation. Seven survey participants responded that they do not feel comfortable presenting authentically, for reasons ranging from their college being very Trump-supporting, to not wanting to experience any negative attention, and one respondent even reported that LGBTQ+ people on their campus have experienced violence. Two participants specifically mentioned being at Christian colleges as a reason why they did not feel comfortable presenting the way that they wanted. Some participants felt they had to choose their presentation based on the microsystem, as the following quote illustrates.

> I feel like I can usually present my gender authentically on campus, but I get misgendered frequently since I am still in the early stages of my transition. I am worried about looking

> bad in [general education courses] or my minor courses so my gender expression becomes more muted in those contexts. My major is usually very supportive, especially around peers, but I do not feel that way outside of my major.

This survey respondent recognizes that their microsystem has a large effect on the way that they feel comfortable presenting their gender. As River (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) illustrates, a college's climate can have a large effect on if a student is comfortable enough to be out, but it can also influence one's gender presentation. River was perceived as a woman but dressed fairly androgynously, with short hair and functional pants. Though River felt lucky that they were perceived as a woman and therefore did not perceive that people cared about their androgynous presentation, they noted that a male student in their major received gender policing for wearing hair down to his mid back. River explains,

> If I were assigned male at birth and chose to wear more traditionally feminine clothing or makeup or jewelry or wore long hair or something along those lines, I would have been approached by a professor and said, Hey, you can't do that.

Though River was not directly gender policed, they were able to see that their campus (and major) would not be accepting toward presentations that were considered gender non-conforming. Interestingly, River told me that they felt lucky to not be out because they would not feel the pressure to look and act androgynous to be perceived as a valid nonbinary person. Not all nonbinary people feel the need to present in a certain way, but one virtual ethnography found that many nonbinary people attempt to look genderless or androgynous by wearing "neutral" clothing like jeans and t-shirts, or mixing clothes associated with men or women (Darwin 2017). The policing that River witnessed at their college was from one specific professor, but their major emphasized dressing professionally in a conservative manner, and this microsystem would not allow for men or people perceived as men to present in a feminine manner.

Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), Lily (white, 22, woman), and Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) all noted that their campus experiences affected how they present. For Rory, painting their nails, doing slight makeup, or presenting in a feminine manner spurred comments by students and even professors. One professor often used the words "vibrant" or "funky" to describe Rory, which though Rory recognized the professor may have been well-meaning, nevertheless made them feel tokenized and othered. When Rory presented and passed as male, they experienced gender dysphoria. Along with gender dysphoria came with discomfort related to their major. Rory's major was male-dominated, and they described a tension between wanting to speak up in class but also feeling that people would perceive a male dominating class environment, especially when there were few women in class. Rory did not feel comfortable presenting in a gender non-conforming manner in these microsystems, but "passing" as male also came with discomfort for Rory. Rory's discomfort as passing came partly because they wanted to make conversations about gender more inclusive to trans and nonbinary individuals, but felt that some cis women in class may perceive this as a man attempting to condemn feminism.

Rory's (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) negative experiences on campus led them to make the decision to only be partially out. Rory had had three different jobs on their campus in the past, and did not feel comfortable coming out because none of those jobs "made any base efforts or even talked about trans issues to make it clear that I can be safe and comfortable." Even small things, like putting pronouns in an e-mail signature, can signal to trans students that this is a safer place to be outwardly trans. During the COVID-19 pandemic Rory's classes became fully virtual and they felt comfortable putting their pronouns in their Zoom name, though they told me that generally, people perceived them as a cis male and used "he" pronouns. Rory was only comfortable coming out while taking in-person classes in a literature class where a

professor specifically asked the students' pronouns. Rory's discomfort coming out anywhere that was not explicitly trans-friendly illustrates the importance of microsystems; though Rory was comfortable enough to have their pronouns in Zoom, they were not comfortable enough to be out to their employers. Rory's experience also illustrates the theme of fluidity in queer theory. Because queer theorists take gender as at least partially a presentation, this presentation can be altered and fluid (Butler 1990; Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010). If one "does" gender, and gender is not a fixed attribute, then gender presentation can change dependent on microsystems or chronosystem (time) (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Rory was only comfortable presenting in ways that feel nonbinary to them in certain contexts, and the way they "do" gender changes depending on how trans-friendly the microsystem is that they are in at the time.

Lily (white, 22, woman) reported dressing very feminine, cis-normatively, and heteronormatively, saying that she would be more palatable to cisgender or heterosexual people, especially when applying for jobs. She told me that if this was not a consideration, she would likely dress more "butch" or masculine and have a mohawk. Lily also described feeling like she is internally more gender fluid, but that both of her genders sit on the more feminine side of the gender spectrum, so she labeled herself as a binary trans woman to avoid having to explain her genders to others as much. Her quote below illustrates how she intentionally situates her gender(s) with aesthetics.

> It's just so much easier to identify as a binary trans woman, when both of my genders sit in that exact spot or sit reasonably as a stylistic and aesthetic change and not a 'Oh God, one day I'm a boy, one day, I'm a girl.'

In this quote, Lily discusses the intertwinement between Nagoshi and Brzuzy's (2010) facets of gender identity: social construction, self-construction, and embodiment. The way she embodies her two genders are only slightly different, and Lily is aware that the social category of "woman"

is easier to identity with than a category like genderfluid, so the way she explains her gender to others is different than how she self-constructs it in her private life. The feeling that Lily has that identifying as a binary trans woman is easier than a nonbinary identity is largely due to the gender structure that legitimizes binary genders (Risman 2004).

Due to negative experiences, Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) did not feel like they belonged at their institution. All three of them mentioned that they do not feel they belong because of larger institutional factors; Alex was dissatisfied with how their college was handling COVID, Alex and Andrew felt that their colleges were not doing enough for students of color, and Rory did not feel they would be respected for their gender in all places and that there were no repercussions for transphobia.

Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) both felt that their colleges were particularly unfriendly to students of color. Both cited their colleges' respective reactions to Black Lives Matter protests. Students at Alex's colleges started protesting in response to multiple events, such as prevalent Nazi imagery on campus and an Instagram account targeting Black students. Alex felt that one reason for their campus's inaction was that it was a private, primarily white, Catholic university. Andrew felt that his college (a top ten U.S. college) had resources that they could devote to students of color, but that the administration felt the Black students should be satisfied with just their Black Community Services Center. Andrew had been extremely involved in attempting to get the university to cut off their contract with the local police, as well as attempting to get the African-American studies program departmentalized, neither of which were successful at the time of our interview. Alex and Andrews' perception of their colleges' apathy toward not only trans students, but also

students of color, were reasons they did not feel they belonged or were being served adequately on their campus.

Though students may feel more comfortable and have a higher sense of belonging in certain microsystems on campus, a macrosystem that is seemingly hostile or even indifferent can create a sense of alienation for trans and nonbinary students. Though all but one participant were somewhat involved in different activities and communities on campus, this did not translate to them feeling that they belonged in the macrosystem of their larger institution. If students are in an environment where they feel unsafe, feel like they cannot present how they want, or feel like they cannot even be out, students are not going to feel like they belong in their institution. However, the interview participants described ways that their institutions could become more trans or nonbinary friendly.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Recommendations to Administrators

Interview participants offered advice to college administrators, with themes ranging from more people announcing pronouns, to gender-neutral bathrooms, to increasing trans representation at both the student and faculty level. Penn, (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) offered individual advice, saying that things as small as putting one's pronouns everywhere can make trans or nonbinary students know that this can be a safe person to seek support from.

Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer) and Lily (white, 22, woman) all stressed the need for colleges to make more of an effort into making trans and nonbinary students feel comfortable. Rory and Alex both highlighted the need for gender inclusive bathrooms to be more accessible; they both had trouble locating convenient gender neutral bathrooms and Rory frequently had to run if they had to use

the bathroom between class, so they would attempt to time it to where they would not have to use the restroom in between classes.

Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) and Lily (white, 22, woman) both sought to make administrators aware of the importance of trans representation, not just for students, but also for faculty. Andrew discussed how many cisgender people may have little to no experience with trans people, making it difficult for them to empathize. Lily also spoke about cis people having no experience with trans people, saying that many people watched *Orange is the new Black* and because Laverne Cox, a trans character, is the only exposure they have had to a trans woman, that is their idea of a trans person. This can lead cisgender people to stereotype trans people, whether consciously or not.

Andrew also stressed the importance of more trans representation for trans students, saying that trans students would feel safer because there would be faculty that understands their experiences. Lily echoes this theme in her quote:

> I understand that hiring anybody right now is difficult and that, especially because [my college] does not have the money to throw into things that in particular hiring people with the qualifications and the diversity at the same time is apparently very difficult at that level. And I get that in the same breath that I say that I shouldn't be learning studies from a cis lesbian. I shouldn't be learning anything about trans people from a cis person. I should not be asked to give a guest lecture as a trans person and a gender class my freshman year and say, yes, naively, because I don't know better.

Lily's story here reveals a couple of things; one, she reveals the importance of learning about trans people from trans people, and two, how she was tokenized as a young freshman who was not even 20 years old. Lily would likely not have these issues if there was at least one trans faculty member in the gender studies department. With more trans people hired at the university level, there would be more narratives; often times diversity initiatives take a one-size-fits-all approach, and Lily wanted her college to take a cue from some of the neighboring colleges in her

state that have at least six groups catering to different segments of the LGBTQ+ student population.

Lily explicitly brings attention to the varied experiences of trans and nonbinary individuals, a theme that has been found in literature about trans students as well as showing up throughout this research (Ashton 2019; Nicolazzo 2017). Though I was only able to interview six trans or nonbinary students, each of them had their own unique experiences and need different supports from their universities; this brings our attention to the necessity of having robust, wide-ranging institutional supports so that different trans or nonbinary students do not slip through the cracks. More pronouns, gender-neutral bathrooms, and trans representation are crucial supports for trans students, but we must be wary of attempting one-size-fits-all fixes.

Recommendations to Prospective Transgender College Students

Interview participants emphasized themes of community, safety, and self-expression for future trans or nonbinary college students. The most common piece of advice interview participants wanted to give to prospective trans college students was find community. This was suggested by half of the participants: Lily (white, 22, woman), Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man). Lily and Rory both advised students to live in a queer dorm if it at all possible. Lily said:

> Locate your nearest queer person and latch on for as long as you can, until you get yourself settled. This place is not easy being gay. There are a lot of good support systems, but if you do not have that circle, you'll drown. And I've seen a lot of people have that happen to them. It nearly happened to me and I think it's certainly getting better. But at the end of the day, academia is still exclusive against trans people.

Lily's quote illustrates the hardship that she has seen and experienced as a trans woman, and recognizes that given the hardships that trans students have to face, queer kinship can make the difference between a successful and rewarding college experience, or a negative experience

filled with isolation. Later, Lily told me that "queer people tend to be really good about situational awareness specifically," saying that if she needs to use a friend's actual pronouns and name only in certain situations but deadname around their parents, that is a common practice that shows the flexibility of queer networks. This quote emphasizes the importance of safety; knowing that different microsystems have different levels of safety and knowing when to use what pronouns or names can give trans students a profound sense of relief when they know somebody in their queer kinship network will not out them to those whom it is not safe to be out to.

Safety and awareness was a theme echoed by Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person), Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary), and Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer). Specifically, all three of these participants emphasized the importance of knowing how trans or nonbinary friendly a campus is before one decides to attend, even if it means just googling the college name along with the phrase "LGBTQ." Alex even said that they would not recommend a nonbinary student to attend their college because "they are working out a lot of issues." Earlier in the interview, Alex mentioned their schools' homophobic alumni groups as well as multiple racial hate crimes that were met with inaction from the college administration, so their advice to avoid their college was unsurprising.

Alex (Asian, 22, nonbinary, transmasc, genderqueer), and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) both emphasized the importance of self-expression even through discomfort. Andrew, a graduate student, specifically emphasized the importance of self-expression during one's undergraduate degree, saying:

> I think when you're an undergrad, I think it's like a really good time to just explore and be yourself. I don't think that there are a lot of like consequences or like things you have to worry about really as an undergrad. I think it's pretty like focused on just like self-expression and just like being yourself and like finding community. Whereas I think in

> grad school as like a trans person, I think that there can be a lot more that's you have to consider because you are building towards a career.

Andrew's quote emphasizes the different functions of an undergraduate degree versus a graduate degree, and he felt that undergraduates were able to have more freedom in exploring their identities.

These students' advice to prospective students, as well as administrators, shows their priorities. When giving advice to students, community, safety, exploration, and awareness of the environment were the main themes. When giving advice to administrators, students emphasized the importance of more trans representation, gender-neutral bathrooms, and educating faculty so trans students do not have to do spend the emotional energy to do it.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study affirms the usefulness of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model with regards to college students. The effects of chronosystem in regards to time of college was weaved through the entire research, from the limited amount of participants I was able to study, to the vastly different experience of attending college in a global pandemic, where many students are attending virtual classes. Chronosystem in reference to lifespan was also found important; Lily (white, 22, woman) and Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) had been out longer than most other participants. They, therefore, had different reactions and had learned coping mechanisms for many negative experiences they had, while participants like Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) who had just recently begun to transition experienced different kinds of discomfort.

The importance of macrosystem was also clear throughout this study. The macrosystem of students' colleges interacted with their larger macrosystems of the towns surrounding them to create unique experiences for each participant, even if their institutions had similar supports for trans students. Lily (white, 22, woman) and River (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) both experienced unfriendly towns, but Lily's campus was more friendly towards trans and LGBTQ+ students in general, which allowed Lily to be an out trans woman. This was purposeful on the part of Lily; part of her process choosing a college was choosing one that she knew had certain resources, while River was already attending college when they started to question their gender. Findings of this study affirmed the importance of the macrosystem of collegiate institutions; this

is illustrated by participants' struggles in finding gender related resources, not being able to change one's name, not being able to easily access gender neutral bathrooms, and not having classes with queer content. Conversely, having resources like an LGBTQ+ center and ways to change one's name without changing it legally allowed participants to feel more comfort and ease in their institutions. Clearly, the aspects like curriculum and bathrooms on campus affected the students in this study. Certain participants even explicitly discussed the importance of the macrosystem when discussing their comfort (or lack thereof) in their institutions. These experiences of feeling largely unsupported caused participants to feel unsafe or uncomfortable in their institutions, something that they navigated by finding their own smaller systems of support.

The microsystems' significance was also illustrated in this study and made up the bulk of the experiences that my participants discussed, whether positive or negative. Students described having their identities be up for debate, being called slurs, and seeing others being gender policed by individual professors. These small interactions, along with chilly campus climates, added up to make most of the interview students overall feel like they do not belong in their institutions. Many participants felt othered in their classrooms, and felt they needed to attempt to live up to gendered expectations. These experiences of status expectations and othering furthered the gender structure in micro ways. However, students were able to find reprieve in certain microsystems: mainly certain classrooms or departments, friends, and queer kinship groups. As Lily (white, 22, woman) and Rory (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) both asserted, queer kinship is not only beneficial emotionally, but there is also power in numbers. This was echoed in the recommendations section where Lily and Andrew (Black, 22, trans man) discussed the importance of trans representation.

The importance of Nagoshi and Brzuzy's (2010) trans theory is also seen in this study. This theory posits that identity is an interaction between embodiment, self-construction, and social construction, all topics that participants discussed. Embodiment was a crucial part; in many contexts, participants did not feel comfortable embodying their gender the way they wanted due to real or perceived consequences, illustrated by Rory's (white, 21, nonbinary, trans person) discomfort with expressing femininity in situations where their other trans friends were not present. However, there were also positive experiences of embodiment discussed. Penn (mixed-race, 31, nonbinary) felt much more comfortable in their body once they came out as nonbinary, asserting that they were now able to play with their presentation instead of hiding their body away as they once did.

Self-construction and social construction of one's gender were also facets of trans theory found in this study. Many survey participants cited college as a place where they learned about being trans or nonbinary, saying they did not have experience with these terms beforehand, and this helped them understand and come to terms with their gender. As Lily (white, 22, woman) illustrated, having trans people in one's life can give people understandings of the meaning of being trans, which is socially constructed and can vary depending upon the person. However, this is not to say that there is no self-construction of gender involved. This self-construction gains meaning from one's lived experiences (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010), and each participant had different lived experiences that led them to create and understand their gender in different ways. An example of this is Lily. Lily labeled herself as a trans woman for simplicity, while recognizing that she really felt more genderfluid, but that both of her genders leaned feminine and therefore she was content labeling herself as a woman. However, her private understanding and self-construction of her gender went deeper than what she normally allowed others to see.

This research affirms Nagoshi and Brzuzy's (2010) trans theory by allowing us to see how the participants recognized the social construction of gender, their own self-construction of gender, and how they embodied their gender.

CONCLUSION

This study adds to the sociological literature by analyzing trans college students' experiences through multiple lenses of analyses, including both macro and micro effects. Though I organized results by macro and micro in the findings section, my findings suggest that the divide between macro and micro experiences may be "fuzzier" than often articulated in literature. In other words, there is currently a binary between macro and micro sociology, which, like the gender binary, does not fully capture and reflect people's true experiences. These "nonbinary" experiences were explained well by Lily, who linked her various negative experiences in microsystems to a broader, over-arching problem of transphobia and the strict binary gender structure. Therefore, this research also strengthens sociological literature by presenting a picture that encompasses both micro and macro experiences, and explaining that they are inextricably linked.

I also further literature not only on trans people's experiences, but also on how campus climate affects trans people and further strengthens the larger binary gender structure. This study highlights how people's environments can affect the embodiment, self-construction, and social construction of one's gender. Campuses lacking in structural supports can exacerbate existing inequalities between cisgender and transgender students, and colleges must work hard to create institutions that affirm trans and nonbinary students' genders. This research also contains recommendations relevant not only to colleges, but also any institution that strives to be more inclusive of all genders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Previous literature has found that there are many ways that colleges can become more trans-friendly places, whether in micro environments such as classrooms and organizations, or making macro, structural changes to the college itself.

Micro Level Changes

The first micro-level step is to simply adopt more trans-friendly language campus-wide, such as respecting one's pronouns and names (Singh, Meng, and Hansen 2013). Simply taking time to learn a student's name and pronouns can make a trans or nonbinary student feel much more supported and comfortable. Asking students to share their pronouns can signal to trans students that their environment is safe; however, some students may choose not to be out and therefore no student should be forced to share pronouns if they decline to do so when asked (Beemyn 2019). Additionally, educators should utilize more gender-neutral language regardless of whether or not there is a non-binary person in the room, particularly for majors that rely on professional gendered language (Goldberg 2019).

Macro Level Changes

Though certain macro level recommendations are costly and may be more difficult to achieve, there are some simple, cost-effective changes colleges can make. First, colleges should de-gender any single-occupancy bathrooms, and can also convert gendered bathrooms with multiple stalls into gender neutral bathrooms. Colleges should also allow students to room with whomever they want, as they would if they lived off-campus (Beemyn 2019). Though many colleges have gender-inclusive dorms, they are often on a higher price tier which can be prohibitive to students, and having one gender-inclusive dorm out of many does not do much to

destabilize the gender binary structure. The last inexpensive macro recommendation is to allow students to provide chosen name and gender identity on campus documents. According to Beemyn (2019), the best practice for this is to allow students to have two options, so that students who are not out to their parents can be out on campus but not be outed to their parents. Adding gender identity markers without any supporting evidence can recognize students' gender and only use their birth sex when legally required (Beemyn 2019).

Campus training on trans concerns is a macro-level avenue that would help create a more equitable college; many trans students report having to do much emotional labor surrounding trans education, and training for students and faculty would take the burden off of these students (Beemyn 2003; Singh et al. 2013). It is not enough to have one-time trainings that are optional; on-going trans awareness trainings can ensure that employees learn new information as it comes up, as well as ensure that employees retain this information (Wentling 2019).

Having a well-funded campus LGBTQ+ center is another step that would benefit trans and nonbinary students; these places would be able to create a safe space for LGBTQ+ students, as well as educate faculty and other students, offering trans-specific programming, and creating groups for gender-questioning students (Beemyn 2003). River's (white, 20, nonbinary, demi girl) experience on their conservative, chilly campus with no trans supports illustrates the importance of having an LGBTQ+ center. Trans people are also more likely to seek out the help of medical and mental health professionals over their lifetime, so it is crucial to make sure that there are counselors trained to have accurate, updated knowledge on trans populations and are able to treat trans and nonbinary students with respect (Swanbrow et al. 2017). Making it easy to obtain a knowledgeable counselor was one of the things that Lily (white, 22, woman) said was the most useful to her during her college experience.

Though there are many things that colleges can do to improve the experiences of their trans and nonbinary students, it is crucial to repeat that the trans experience is varied and fluid, and there can be no one-size-fits-all answers (Ashton 2019).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The data collection for this thesis was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This likely had an impact on the amount of trans and nonbinary people attending or continuing in college. This may also have had an effect on the amount of trans and nonbinary college students willing to lend me their time and emotional energy. According to Sprague (2016), people with less privilege generally have less power over their time and have extra demands on their energy, and since trans and nonbinary people experience heightened marginalization comparison to cisgender people, they are therefore less likely to have the time to participate in this kind of research. With a small quantitative sample of 49 I was not able to glean any statistically significant results; however, the descriptive results still tell a descriptive story of trans and nonbinary students' college experiences that often corresponded with my interviewees' experiences.

An additional limitation is the unusually large number of participants taking their classes online than would usually do so. All of the students I interviewed had either all or most of their classes online during the study period; this is an example of how chronosystem, or time, is important to consider in when studying college students. For example, Penn's experience of only attending school virtually and interacting only with their supportive department would likely have differed if they had not attended graduate school during a pandemic, because they would likely have been on campus physically.

Lastly, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the richness of the data I was able to collect, especially when considering queer theory in one's analysis. Gender identity can be and is often fluid (Ashton 2019), so this kind of study does not allow one to see how participants' gender identities or presentations may differ over time.

Future research that is longitudinal could provide data that is rich, in-depth, and captures the experience of gender that may fluctuate over time. Conducting a study that follows trans and nonbinary students from high school to college or throughout their college experience using Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological model would allow us to further examine the impact that college has on trans and nonbinary students, and would allow for a richer analysis using queer theory. Future researchers should also strive to research the experiences of nonbinary students, separate from their binary trans peers. A small amount of research has suggested that nonbinary graduate students were less secure in their gender identity than binary trans students, possibly due to the grand trans narrative of being in the "wrong body" that does not fit all nonbinary people (Beemyn 2019). Researching nonbinary students alone would allow us to understand those experiences they do not share with binary trans students, and therefore would allow us to develop more pathways for support.

Future research should also investigate gender identity in a "nonbinary" way that captures both micro and macro experiences. Macrosociology has the benefit of finding over-arching themes, but may do this at the expense of de-emphasizing subjects and their individual experiences and agency. However, when researchers blur the lines between macro and micro sociology, we can identify gaps in research and provide new concepts to change the way we see the social world (Krause 2013). Scholars can do this by examining trans individuals' micro experiences within certain contexts, and explain how these experiences accumulate to strengthen

or undermine the gender structure; or more likely, do both simultaneously. Mixed-methods approaches may be particularly suited to capturing the fuzzy macro/micro binary; quantitative data can capture macro patterns in a statistically meaningful way, and qualitative approaches can further enrich the data and capture people's nuanced, micro experiences.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
LETTER OF APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date: 08/26/2020

Principal Investigator: Emma Lee Allen-Morgan

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 08/26/2020

Protocol Number: 2004001098

Protocol Title: WARM OR CHILLY? AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAMPUS CLIMATE AND GENDER IDENTITY AMONG TRANSGENDER ANDNONBINARY STUDENTS

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol anddetermined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF
PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability,educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require furtherreview from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if andwhen:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except toeliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on thisprotocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNCif you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that arerelated or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - http://hhs.gov/ohrp/ and https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FOR SURVEY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Warm or Chilly? An Assessment of the Relationship Between Campus Climate and Gender Identity Among Transgender and Nonbinary Students
Researcher: Emma Lee Allen-Morgan, B.A., School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Research supervisor: Harmony Newman, Ph.D., Department of Sociology
Phone: (970) 351-2271 E-mail: harmony.newman@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to determine how campus climate and sense of belonging on campus affects the gender identity of transgender and nonbinary students.

Your participation in this project will be limited to one survey that should take no longer than 30 minutes to take.

We will take no identifying information. At the end of the experiment, we would be happy to share your data with you at your request. We will take every precaution in order to protect your anonymity. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a on a password protected laptop that only the researcher has access to.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. There is no risk for physical harm. Gender identity can be a sensitive subject for many, so if you feel any emotional discomfort I recommend the hotlines below.

Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860
LGBT National Help Center: 1-888-843-4564 or internet chat at https://www.glbthotline.org/

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please click yes if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse at Nicole.morse@unco.edu or at (970) 351-1910.
By clicking “yes,” you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Warm or Chilly? An Assessment of the Relationship Between Campus Climate and Gender Identity Among Transgender and Nonbinary Students
Researcher: Emma Lee Allen-Morgan, B.A., School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Research supervisor: Harmony Newman, Ph.D., Department of Sociology
Phone: (970) 351-2271 E-mail: harmony.newman@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to determine how campus climate and sense of belonging on campus affects the gender identity of transgender and nonbinary students.

Your participation in this project will be limited to an interview that should take in-between 30 minutes and 2 hours.

We will take no identifying information. At the end of the experiment, we would be happy to share your data with you at your request. We will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be assigned to the respondents to attempt to ensure confidentiality. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a on a password protected laptop that only the researcher has access to.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. There is no risk for physical harm. Gender identity can be a sensitive subject for many, so if you feel any emotional discomfort I recommend the hotlines below.

Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860
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By clicking “yes,” you are agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Campus Climate

1) How trans/nonbinary friendly have you found your campus?
2) Are you "out" on campus?

2a)What does that look like?

2a1) Are there some spaces where you're out and other spaces where you're not out?

2b) How/when do you decide to divulge this information?
2c) What kinds of reactions have you had?
2d) Where have you found the most support?
2e) Are there any negative experiences you feel comfortable sharing?
2f) Does your campus have a mechanism for you to tell them your name/pronouns?
2g) How friendly have you found it for other marginalized identities you may hold?
2h) Have you been misgendered/deadnamed? Can you tell me more about that experience? How do you navigate this? How does it make you feel? How often do experiences like that happen?
2i) Have there been times when peers, administrators, or professors have used your pronouns/name consistently? How does this make you feel? How often does this happen?

How Affected by Campus

3) Can you tell me about how your identity/sexuality affected your college experiences?

3a) How have your experiences on campus affected your gender presentation?

3b) How have your experiences on campus affected how you perceive your gender identity?

3c) Has your gender identity evolved/changed since you have been in college? If so, how?

Sense of Belonging

4) How involved are you on your campus?

4a) Is there an LGBTQ+ center on your campus?

4b) Are you involved?

4c) Do you feel like you belong at the college? Or in any smaller subgroups of your college?

4d) Are there certain spaces on campus you feel safer in than others?

4e) Are there certain spaces/faculty/persons that are gender affirming for you?

5) Do you live on or off campus?

5a) If changed, what made you move off/back on campus?
5b) Did/do you prefer living on or off campus?
5c) Do you have gender affirming roommates?
5d) Did your experience on campus change if you moved off?

Advice to Others

6) What advice would you give to an nonbinary/trans student about to attend your college?
7) What advice would you give to administrators at your college to help make nonbinary/trans students feel more supported/included?