2016

“I Am Because We Are”: A Portrait of Trans* Postsecondary Educators’ Experiences in Higher Education

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Recommended Citation
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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

“I AM BECAUSE WE ARE”: A PORTRAIT OF TRANS* POSTSECONDARY EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY
SYMONE L. SIMMONS
CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 2016
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The night I turned in my comprehensive exam, I had a dream of a birth. In my dream, I brought a new baby to my office and when asked what the baby’s name was, I replied Nora. When I awoke from that dream I was able to remember those details, which is a very rare occurrence for me. When I got to work, I told my supervisor the story because she was among the group in my dream who asked about the baby. She told me that she believes that births in dreams are new beginnings. As I had just submitted my revised comprehensive exam, I was moving into a new stage, a new beginning…the dissertation. That night my dissertation was born and I call it Nora. Reading and writing trans* narratives for me has brought me more into a world of possibilities, a world of familiarity in a queer sense, acceptance, motivation, love, and peace. I love that through the process of Nora I was also developing Symone and that feels good.

There are so many people that have contributed to my getting to this point. I cannot possibly acknowledge them all here, but everyone is in my heart. I’d like to begin by thanking my mom and dad, who have been supporting me throughout my life. Sure there have been some tensions, but I wouldn’t trade them for the world. I’d also like to thank the rest of my family, who looks out for and takes care of each other.

Next I’d like to thank my long-time friend Rhonda, who has been there through many identity changes and clarifications, degrees, and relationships. I love you friend.

Where would I be without my writing buddies and support who are also members of my cohort, friends, and extended family? Thank you Indria, Kim, T.J., Z, Ben,
Shannon, Sara, Kara, Z, and Dian. You all helped me plug through, even or especially when I didn’t want to. Thank you for your support.

To my wonderful committee, thank you for your belief, support, and challenge. Bridget, your approach of letting me lead the way really helped me continue finding and sharing my voice. I appreciate your seeing in me what I sometimes didn’t see in myself. To Jay and Oiyan, thank you for reviewing my work with me and helping me work through it. I am a better writer and researcher because of you all.

To the T* Circle, your influence in my life has helped me grow personally and professionally in the last few years. What a ride? I look forward to our continued growth and connection.

To the educators that shared their stories with me, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. This is but a glimpse into our worlds as trans* educators and I certainly appreciate your opening up to me. I hope you know I cherish you all.

Finally, to my loving and devoted wife, thank you doesn’t even begin to show the love and gratitude I have for you. NONE of this is possible without you. You are my best friend, my co-pilot, and my confidant. You have been my rock, my coach, my inspiration, and the boost I’ve needed to make it through this journey. I’m so happy I found you and that you love me unconditionally. I’ll say it anyway, THANK YOU.

To the countless unnamed people who have been and continue to be there, know that I appreciate and love you all.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................................... iii

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................................... viii

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................................... ix

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................................ x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1
  Problem Statement ................................................................................................................................. 4
  Language ............................................................................................................................................... 5
    Gender ................................................................................................................................................. 7
    Trans*gender .................................................................................................................................... 9
    Cisgender ......................................................................................................................................... 11
  Background of Study ............................................................................................................................ 12
  Significance of Study ............................................................................................................................ 13
  Portraiture Design ............................................................................................................................... 15
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................................... 17
  Organization of the Chapters ................................................................................................................ 17

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................... 18
  Contexts ............................................................................................................................................... 18
  Postsecondary Research Using Bronfenbrenner’s (Bio)Ecological Model .......................................... 22
  Intersectionality ..................................................................................................................................... 24
  Summary .............................................................................................................................................. 28
  Literature Review ............................................................................................................................... 29
  Genderism Within/as a Macrosystem .................................................................................................... 30
  Gender and Genderism in Higher Education ....................................................................................... 35
    History ............................................................................................................................................... 35
    Spaces .............................................................................................................................................. 36
    Educators ........................................................................................................................................ 39
    Academics ....................................................................................................................................... 40
    Policies ............................................................................................................................................ 42
  Trans* Experiences in Higher Education ............................................................................................. 44
    Educators’ Experiences ..................................................................................................................... 45
    Summary ........................................................................................................................................... 48
  Trans* in Relationships ....................................................................................................................... 48
    Early Life .......................................................................................................................................... 49
    Witnessing and Mirroring .................................................................................................................. 51
    Processes and Milestones ................................................................................................................ 53
    Summary .......................................................................................................................................... 54
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................................. 55
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .............................................. 56
 Overview ........................................................................................................... 56
 Discovering Portraiture ..................................................................................... 56
 Portraitist/Researcher Positionality ................................................................. 65
 Methods ............................................................................................................. 69
 Participant Selection ......................................................................................... 69
 Data Generation ............................................................................................... 73
 Participant Confidentiality ................................................................................ 78
 Preparing the Canvas ........................................................................................ 79
 Participant-Observation and Interviews ............................................................ 79
 Trustworthiness .................................................................................................. 81
 The Portrait ........................................................................................................ 82
 Limitations .......................................................................................................... 85
 Summary ............................................................................................................ 86

 CHAPTER FOUR: MEET THE EDUCATORS .................................................... 87
 Trans* Educator Snapshots .............................................................................. 87
 Alex ...................................................................................................................... 87
 Austin ................................................................................................................... 87
 Dean ..................................................................................................................... 87
 Hal ....................................................................................................................... 88
 Huixol .................................................................................................................. 88
 Jace ....................................................................................................................... 88
 Kody ..................................................................................................................... 88
 Kyle London ...................................................................................................... 89
 Layla ..................................................................................................................... 89
 Martina ............................................................................................................... 89
 MW ....................................................................................................................... 89
 Riley ..................................................................................................................... 90
 Sebastian ............................................................................................................ 90
 Sloane ................................................................................................................ 90
 Coming T*ogether: A Fishbowl Panel .............................................................. 91
 Before the Fishbowl ......................................................................................... 91
 Setting the Stage (Navigating Identities and Relationships) ......................... 92
 Introductions ...................................................................................................... 93
 Breaking Artificial Boundaries/Binaries: Re/Defining Gender ..................... 97
 More Than Gender ............................................................................................ 107
 Negotiating Campus Role ................................................................................ 111
 Trans* Enough .................................................................................................. 120
 Isolation and Invisibility/Hypervisibility on Campus .................................... 125
 Negotiating Campus Relationships ................................................................. 132

 CHAPTER FIVE: TRANS* EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES .............................. 141
 Building and Maintaining Communities ....................................................... 141
 Institutions Haven’t Arrived Yet ................................................................. 146
 Staying in Higher Education ........................................................................... 148
Developing a Trans* Consciousness ................................................................. 152
Taking Care of Ourselves ............................................................................ 154
Wrapping up and Departing ........................................................................ 160
Summary and Conclusions .......................................................................... 161

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS .......... 163
Framework and Analysis ............................................................................. 165
Persisting and Resisting .............................................................................. 167
A Sketch Portrait .......................................................................................... 168
Findings and Literature ................................................................................ 170
Relationships and Communities .................................................................. 170
Co-Construction/Co-Authoring ................................................................. 172
Identities at/in Work .................................................................................... 178
Trans* Consciousness .................................................................................. 180
Research Implications ................................................................................. 182
Being the Portraitist ...................................................................................... 182
The Possibilities and Limits of Labels ......................................................... 184
Future Research .......................................................................................... 186
Practical Implications .................................................................................. 189
Representation and More ............................................................................ 189
Addressing Policies and Facilities .............................................................. 190
Summary ...................................................................................................... 192
Final Thoughts and Reflections .................................................................... 194

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET ........................................................... 197

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION PROTOCOL ......................... 199

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ......................................................... 201

APPENDIX D: DISSERTATION MEMO PROTOCOL ..................................... 204

APPENDIX E: SYMONE’S GENDER JOURNEYING ...................................... 206

REFERENCE LIST ........................................................................................ 214

VITA .............................................................................................................. 227
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Trans* Educator Demographics............................................................................ 71
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Gender Identities ................................................................. 107
ABSTRACT

Within higher education, trans* students have become more visible and advocacy for them important. To support these claims, scholars have conducted research and produced literature on trans* college students’ identity development and experiences on campuses. However, the lived experiences of trans* educators working in colleges and universities are missing from the literature, consequently from the minds of scholars, practitioners, and administrators alike. Trans* educators experiences are important because they contribute to shifts in higher education conversations around supporting and affirming trans* people on campus. Trans* educators are mentors, advisors, and role-models, teachers, and advocates, and perhaps knowing their journey and how they can better be supported on and off campus will allow them to continue fulfilling their roles on campus and thrive in higher education. Additionally, knowing their journeys better can help expand notions of gender in their offices, departments, units and the university as a whole. The purpose of this study is to help make more visible the lives of trans* postsecondary educators, while expanding notions of gender. Applying portraiture methodology, with semi-structured interviews and a participant-observation, this study identified the critical roles of identity, relationships, and community in trans* educators’ experiences.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A common and all too true narrative of trans* people and experiences is one of invisibility, harassment, being questioned about their identities and existence, and misunderstood and examples of these experiences are everywhere, from larger scale to intimate encounters. In fact, many trans* people have died by their own hands or the hands of others since I began writing my dissertation. For example, on December 11, 2014 a 12-year old killed himself (I do not know what pronouns this young person used, but he was used by mourners who wrote about him) because of the bullying they received for their gender nonconformity – he was a cheerleader (Gremore, 2014). A few days before that, individuals and organizations participating in the International Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR) paid tribute to the hundreds of trans* people, mostly trans* feminine people of color, murdered across the world that year (Memoralizing 2014). In 2015, the world saw the longest list of transgender women murdered. And like so many others, I experienced harassment, similar to other trans* and gender non-conforming people across the globe, some of whom are physically assaulted and murdered, while going to a public bathroom on the campus where I work. Someone waited for me to exit so they could snap a picture of “the guy” in the women’s bathroom. The stories of trans* people help illuminate issues of bias, discrimination, and limitations associated with gender. Trans* educators’ can also expand notions and conceptions of
gender through their experiences and analyses through multiple gender lenses. Each and every day, trans* people, including educators, are excluded, ignored, minimized, marginalized, bullied, and killed. And still, there are many others who also thrive, live, love, and educate. The purpose of this dissertation is to help make more visible the lives of trans* educators, whom are navigating within the context of higher education, while expanding notions of gender, in the hopes that people of all genders can live, learn, and work in affirming, safe, and healthy environments.

Within higher education, trans* students have become more visible and advocacy for them extremely important. To support these claims, literature has emerged on trans* college students’ experiences on campuses and their identity development (Bilodeau, 2005; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010) and leadership capacities (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). While limited, this literature provides a glimpse into the identities and experiences of trans* college students. Scholars reported trans* students’ encountered harassment and discrimination and had a lower sense of belonging to the campus community than their cisgender peers (Beemyn, 2005a, 2005b; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). For these students, experiences with invisibility as well as personal and institutional discrimination, based on their gender identity, were also prominent (Beemyn, 2005a, 2005b; Beemyn et al., 2005; Nakamura, 1998; Negrete, 2007). Additionally, there are some studies about their engagement, involvement, and leadership on campus (Dugan et al., 2012; Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). However, the higher education and student affairs community know virtually nothing about the lived experiences of trans* educators working in colleges and
universities. The current conversations around trans* identities in higher education are not only focused on students, but also center around pronouns, healthcare, bathrooms, and residence hall rooms. Though these are crucial to increasing awareness and safety for trans* students on campus, exploring trans* educators’ experiences have the potential to expand notions of gender and inclusion on campuses, by considering beyond the student demographic, as well as the relationship between higher education institutions and trans* people.

Similar to trans* students, trans* educators navigate universities and systems from various positions (e.g., undergraduate student leader, administrator, graduate student), and currently as staff and faculty occupy spaces in the university that can be positions of power and influence over policy, curriculum, and other aspects of university operations and student support. Documenting their experiences will fill a gap in the current body of literature. Furthermore, addressing this gap is important because these educators are in positions to model as mentors, advisors, and role-models to students, and perhaps knowing their journey and how they can better be supported will allow them to fulfill their roles on campus. Additionally knowing trans* educators’ journeys better can contribute to expanded notions of gender in their offices, departments, units and the university as a whole. Moreover, these educators provide counternarratives to bleak outcomes for trans* people navigating educational institutions and systems. Trans* people develop identities across multiple contexts, including higher education which has an oppressive history around gender (Bilodeau, 2005; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005).
In the remainder of this chapter, I provide an introduction to the relevance of my study. Prior to getting into the relevance, I provide context around my topic in the form of a problem statement, which precedes the section on language and how I use certain terms and constructs throughout my dissertation. Contrary to some binary conceptions, gender is a complex construct and identity, and therefore I need to provide working understandings. From there, I speak specifically to the significance and purpose of my study, including the research questions and methodology. I conclude this chapter with a preview of the remaining five chapters of my dissertation that include the methodology, findings, and finally, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

**Problem Statement**

I recently co-authored an article focused on trans* postsecondary educators which illuminates how trans* people, in particular trans* educators, are not expected in higher education (Jourian, Simmons, & Devaney, 2015). It is evident that trans* educators are not expected in policy or practice of higher education because structures and institutions have been created for certain kinds of people, namely women and men only. Because of challenging barriers trans* people may face, which sometimes contribute to exclusion in the educational system, just being in their positions is considered a milestone because popular discourse says they should be dead, unemployed, and experiencing homelessness, if not Laverne Cox or Caitlyn Jenner. Yet, trans* educators’, like myself and the participants in my study, needs and identities are ignored and compromised, which contributes to variations in experiences and development. Higher education is exclusionary, yet trans* educators exist. We are models on campus. We influence policy.
We contribute to curriculum and co-curriculum. We are developing. However, campuses have been constructed in a particular way that marginalize, exclude, and negatively impact trans* people (Bilodeau, 2007; Spade, 2011b; Spade & Wahng, 2004). The most discriminatory policies and practices affect (e.g. through policing, denial of access, and verbal and physical assaults) those who step outside of strict and rigid gender boundaries. An expanded and inclusive focus on trans* people, particularly educators, lends itself to more complex understandings, fewer incidents of discrimination, and the development of more inclusive policies, practices, and structures to support the development of everyone on campus. In my dissertation, I explore the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators currently working and/or teaching in higher education to expand on trans* experiences, in general, and specifically in higher education, as well as expand notions of gender.

Language

In this section, I unpack and explain some of the language and my choices around language in my dissertation. Language is important and has implications throughout everyone’s lives. I am recognizing this more and more as I am currently learning French. Particularly as it relates to gender; French is gendered, like English and Spanish, there are little girls and little boys and women and men and depending on which perceived gender is being referenced, specific pronouns and variations in words are used. A problem with such gendered communication is people are continually evolving and language has its limitations. Wilchins (2004) conveyed this sentiment when trying to describe themself, “Language had always felt like a poor tool, one that didn't even begin to capture the ways
I felt about the world or the things in my head” (p. 1). Moreover, because of the power of language to name things, how and whether something is named implicates what does or does not exist, and even who does and does not exist. If you cannot be named, you must not exist. Wilchens went on to say “They [everyone] seem to believe that all these named things really exist and that anything that isn't named, somehow doesn't exist” (p. 2).

Language and how it is used and understood influences everyone’s lives, especially with regards to constructions of gender and transgender (Jagose, 1996; Wilchins, 2004). Therefore, in this section, I provide conceptualizations of gender, including gender attribution, gender identity and expression, and sex (sex-assigned-at-birth), transgender and trans*, and cisgender that influence and inform my understandings, and therefore my study.

Moreover, throughout my dissertation, I am intentional in my pronoun use, where I do not know what pronoun scholars use opting to use neutral pronouns instead of binary she and he. A pronoun is a word that is used to replace a proper noun, usually someone’s name. Just tell a story about someone else to begin to see the pervasiveness and gendered nature of pronouns. Therefore, throughout my dissertation, I will most often use gender neutral pronouns to refer to people when I do not know their pronouns. The most common gender neutral pronoun and the word of the year in 2015 is they (or some derivative of it, i.e. them and theirs, Bennet, 2015). In this case “they” can be singular and/or plural. Additionally, in my findings section, I use the pronouns that educators told me to use when referring to them. Examples include ze/hir and ze/zem/zir.
Gender

To talk about transgender, we have to first talk about gender. So, what is gender? Just as language has evolved so too have conceptions of gender itself. Gender is biopsychosocial (Bussey, 2011; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Some of the earliest conceptions were that gender and sex were the same, thereby being determined by biology, namely primary sex characteristics or genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones (Meyerowitz, 2009). Sex has been limited to vaginas and penises, disregarding the multiple and diverse configurations of hormones, chromosomes, primary and secondary characteristics, simplifying diversity to two options: female or male. However, female and male are designations assigned at birth based on genitalia. Challenging the assumption that sex and gender are synonymous, which is steeped in biological determinism, sex-assigned-at-birth recognizes the imposition of a sex on a person as well as leaves room for multiple gender experiences (Wilchins, 2004). Though a person does not have control over their sex assignment they can have more control over how they identify and express their gender. Female and male capture sex assigned at birth and labels such as trans*, genderqueer, woman, and man describe gender identities.

Some scholars also connected gender to specific traits such as masculinity, femininity, and androgyny (Bem, 1981, 1983; Galambos, Almeida, & Peterson, 1990). Within higher education research, policy, and practice, there is no single definition of gender though there are limited possibilities for how one should do gender. And, most often the topic of gender is discussed in higher education the assumption is women, as if only women have a gender. Conceptualizations of gender as a social construction means
that how people understand gender changes throughout cultural contexts and time (Bank, 2011). The so-called *rules* of gender are not inherent, but rather have been created and reinforced by people and systems to control people’s behaviors and attitudes and have changed over time (Bornstein, 1994; Butler, 1999).

Gender is much more than biology, chromosomes, and labels. Gender has multiple components, including gender identity, gender presentation (expression), and gender attribution. Gender identity includes personal feelings and designations people have and use for their own gender(s), including how they think and feel about their gender. In other words, it is an internal sense of self as an infinite number of identifications, including man, woman, trans*, genderqueer, between or outside (Wilchins, 2004), or no label at all. How one chooses to display their gender to others and/or themselves through such aspects as clothing, hair, adornments, mannerisms, and other external cues is considered their gender expression/presentation (Lev, 2004; Lucal, 1999; Rands, 2009) which may or may not align with how someone identifies. Queer theorists, such as Butler (1999), and I tend to agree, argued that gender was something individuals *did*, rather than something they *were*, describing gender as a performance.

Gender is not a solo performance. Gender attribution highlights a relationship between one’s own gender and outside others. Gender attribution occurs when outsiders or observers try to discern others’ genders based on external cues (e.g., secondary sex characteristics) or their perceptions of that person’s sex-assigned-at-birth (Bornstein, 1994; Rands, 2009), which they interpret as gender. Gender attribution demonstrates a co-construction of gender in that an individual constructs their gender while also
receiving messages from outside influences about what the construction *should and should not be* (Butler, 1999).

**Trans*gender**

Throughout history and the world, there have been people embodying different genders even if there was no umbrella term to describe them. In particular, this study is about the experiences of trans* educators. The Latin origins of *Trans*, which means to move across or on the other side of help translate transgender as moving across genders. Historically, transgender has been understood as changing one’s sex from female to male or male to female, in other words, from one sex to the other in a binary construction of gender/sex (Binaohan, 2014). Often people did not know someone was living as a gender different than their sex assigned at birth until their death, though sometimes close others and loved ones knew about the person’s identities and expressions. *Transgender* was introduced into the lexicon some 40 years ago but became a widespread label only recently (Stryker, 2008; Valentine, 2007). Before transgender, the term transvestite had been coined by Magnus Hirschfield in 1910 (Beemyn, 2013). However trans* people ourselves have expanded conceptualizations and experiences to describe transgender as any gender that challenges or deviates from the traditional binary or transcends gendered expectations (Bornstein, 1994; Wilchins, 2004), including any and all “variations of gender norms and expectations” (Stryker, 2008, p. 19). This challenge or deviation can be an intentional statement against the gender binary, and/or the person is being themselves.

As a way to expand conceptualizations and who is included in the transgender conversation, even more recent is the use of an umbrella term trans*. The exact origin of
trans with the asterisk is not known, some have connected its origins to computer speak, whereby when an asterisk is used in a search, more options are returned from the search (K. Winters, personal communication, December 4, 2013). For instance, enter trans* into a search engine such as Google and one get results related to trans with the asterisk, trans unions, trans health, trans-lation, trans-national, and on and on. The asterisk is meant as a sign of inclusivity, recognizing many, varied identities that transcend expectations in diverse ways (Tompkins, 2014). There are also challenges to the trans with the asterisks, with some arguing that it essentially places people and identities into a larger category even though they may not identify with the label. A number of authors noted a rapidly expanding language used to describe transgender experiences, including phrases like gender variant, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, boy dyke, drag king, butch, translesbian, and ambiguously gendered (Bomstein, 1994; Feinberg, 1996; Stryker, 2008; Wilchins, 2004). For the purpose of this study, the term trans* will serve primarily as an inclusive term for individuals who transgress societal expectations around gender, constructing their identities and describing their experience through a range of terminologies, including those outlined above. I also recognize that not all people who meet these criteria will or want to identify with trans*.

Some people who identify with some of the aforementioned labels may or may not identify with or as trans*. For the most part, literature about trans* narratives and experiences have been from a White, transmisogynist perspective, meaning excluding people of color and portraying a medicalized experience (Binaohan, 2014). Scholars have indicated communities of color may not identify with terms such as trans*, even if they
challenges binary assumptions (Lane-Steele, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008). Terms from communities of color such as two-spirit (Native American), stud and masculine of center (African American/Black), mahu (Hawaiian) or paksu mudang (Korean), have also emerged and been tied to trans*. However, these are also cultural and community identities and labels that may not be understood through a historically White trans* lens. These terms and associated community understandings provide context for understanding the intersectionalities that influence constructions and conceptualizations of gender throughout life and time. These definitions demonstrate instability of gender, influences of other identities and external factors, and the importance of understanding gender as a continually developing identity. For the purposes of this study, I use trans* most often to refer to a range of trans* identities. However, because individuals will be allowed to name their own identities, I will mirror scholars’ and educators’ language when describing their individual identities.

**Cisgender**

Finally, related to trans* or transgender is cisgender or cis. Early writings capturing trans* experiences positioned transgender people as abnormal when compared to people who were not transgender or what they called, normal (Green, 2006). Transgender activists recognized a need for a term for folks who did not identify as trans* so that there was no hierarchy or inherent bias in how transgender folks were discussed in research, literature, and everyday discussions. The term cisgender was born (Aultman, 2014). *Cis*, from Latin, meaning on the same side, describes people whose gender identity and/or presentation aligns with theirs and others’ expectations based on
their sex assignment at birth. Cisgender is often implied when referring to people who are not trans*. Even if it is not directly stated, cisgender people are often the overwhelming majority of any sample when discussing gender. Therefore, I wanted to name and acknowledge this. In the next section, I provide additional background for exploring trans* postsecondary educators experiences, including the background for my study, which includes a summary of my conceptual framework and literature review.

**Background of Study**

The conceptual framework that informed my study included the bioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). The bioecological perspective is a framework applied to understanding development of individuals in multiple systems, from microsystems including relationships and communities which are close to them and which they consistently interact to macrosystems which include cultural traditions and ideologies that influence their daily lived experiences, often sub and unconsciously (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). I also applied intersectionality with the bioecological perspective. Using intersectionality as a lens encourages an examination of interlocking systems of oppression, power, and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Additionally, for individual development, intersectionality also recognizes and addresses multiple identities, experiences, and development occurring simultaneously. Through a bioecological intersectional perspective, I explored gender and trans* identities and experiences within genderism and higher education.

For trans* postsecondary educators, higher education is part of the macrosystem which influences their particular campus microsystem. Though each institution has its
own distinct features, histories, ideologies, and customs, the history, construction, and functional components of higher education influence institutions and people across campuses, to varying degrees. The history of gender in higher education is important to explore to illuminate the ways in which higher education and institutions were constructed and continues to exclude, marginalize, and ignore gender variance, and not that trans* people are somehow deviant. Without critical examination of the impact and influence of constructions of systems, there may be a tendency to blame those disempowered by these systems (DuBois, 1994).

This study aimed to understand the unique experiences of trans* postsecondary educators. I was curious about the impact of being, learning, developing, and teaching in higher education environments. Through exploring the individual in context, I illuminated the complexities of their experiences. To accomplish my goals, and foreground a range of experiences, I applied a qualitative research design, portraiture.

**Significance of Study**

Living, learning, and working within such environments and systems makes the broad topic of trans* experiences important to students, faculty, staff, and others within and outside of higher education for a number of reasons. First, gender is often a significant component of a person’s core identity throughout their life, and as people develop so too does their gender identity (Glover & Kaplan, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2013). Also, researchers and recommendations of best practices for higher education professionals suggest educators can be most effective in their work if they have first undergone their own development so they can recognize attitudes and behaviors in
students and can use their own developmental stories to understand and guide students (Owens, 2010). Postsecondary educators are also responsible for constructing and implementing curricular and co-curricular experiences and policies to develop students’ whole selves (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Part of what I aimed to do with this study was provide perspective into trans* educators experiences. I focused on trans* educators because I believe incorporating and illuminating diverse gender identities and perspectives underscores experiences that are missing while also providing more perspective into how trans* people are navigating higher education systems. Marginalized people have constructed creative ways to challenge and engage with systemic oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and others (Collins, 2002; Dubois, 1994). Therefore, I was interested and invested in exploring the unique experiences of trans* educators and curious about what this study would reveal about their experiences. Higher education is gendered and sexist, perhaps learning from trans* educators how they interact and counteract this system can provide ways for students, faculty, and staff to actively work against gendered and sexist systems—more tools, so to speak, to dismantle the master’s house (Lorde, 1984).

Trans* educators’ experiences are at the forefront of this study. I chose higher education as the context because of the historical invisibility of trans* people in institutions as well as mine and other’s current experiences (Beemyn, 2005a, 2005b; Beemyn et al., 2005; Nakamura, 1998; Negrete, 2007) and the histories of resistance on campuses (Stockdill & Danico, 2012). Trans* people are invisible because our stories do
not get told, yet the perpetual binary story is told, reinforced, protected, and upheld. Although these stories are not widely known, trans* educators do exist. Furthermore, I wanted to actively add more educators and trans* voices, narratives, experiences, and perspectives to the literature in higher education, alongside some emerging trans* scholars writing about trans* identities and experiences (Jourian et al., 2015; Nicolazzo, in press-a). At this moment in higher education, trans* is more visible in the mainstream media and is gaining momentum and visibility in educational institutions, including K-12 and higher education.

**Portraiture Design**

To capture a range of trans* educators experiences, I used portraiture methodology. Portraiture is a form of qualitative research developed out of a blending of other qualitative methodologies such as ethnography, autoethnography, critical race theory, oral history, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In general, qualitative research is about “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Initially applied “to document the culture of schools, the life stories of individuals, and the relationships among families, communities, and schools” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvi), portraiture is a design that seeks the essence of experiences and identities, while highlighting uniqueness in those experiences. It has helped researchers explore women of color leaders in higher education (Ashby-Scott, 2005) and African American women involved with a student organization
(Bailey, 2012). Portraiture allowed me to capture and convey some of the complexities of trans* postsecondary educators experiences.

More specifically, several of the goals of portraiture made it an ideal methodology for understanding trans* postsecondary educators experiences. First, through rigorous ethnographic inquiry and good writing, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) posited that a well-crafted portrait allows readers to empathize with the participants and understand aspects of an unknown world. Trans* people and identities are still largely not understood and/or misunderstood. Moreover, because the portrait is meant to evoke images, memories, and feelings, it becomes more accessible to people outside of the academy, other places where people interact with trans* folks. In addition, the role of the researcher is evident and explicitly visible throughout the research process. As someone who identifies as a Black trans*genderqueer postsecondary educator, it was important to me to acknowledge my positionality throughout the process. I am deeply invested in and connected to my topic and intended to construct a portrait that captured trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences. Because social science research has a tendency to focus on disparities, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) encouraged “searching for goodness” as an integral component of portraiture. In this case, searching for goodness in trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences provided counternarratives to conceptions of trans* experiences as only despair.
Research Questions

Utilizing a portraiture research design, I answered my two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators on the campuses in which they work, live, and/or learn?
2. What are the strategies trans* postsecondary educators use to persist [and resist] in higher education?

Organization of the Chapters

The remainder of this dissertation includes my conceptual framework, literature review, methodology and methods, a portrait of trans* educators experiences through a semi-fictional depiction of a dialogue among them, discussion, implications, and recommendations, references, and appendices including a brief snapshot into my gender journey. Chapter Two focuses on my conceptual framework which foregrounds important aspects of the lenses through which I conceived, analyzed, and synthesized my study, and the literature review which explores macro and micro systems and contexts as well as experiences connected to identities, gender and trans* in particular. Chapter Three lays out the research design and methods for my study. In the Fourth and Fifth Chapters, I introduce the 14 trans* postsecondary educators in my study through a semi-fictional panel where the educators discuss their experiences on campus. The Sixth and final chapter discusses the implications of my study, draws conclusions about trans* experiences and identities in higher education, and makes recommendations for improving higher education for trans* educators. I conclude that chapter with some final thoughts and reflections.
CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to explore trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences, I began by acknowledging the influence and interaction of their contexts and diverse, intersecting identities. To that end, my conceptual framework, which influenced how I reviewed the literature later in this chapter, and my methodological choices, combines Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) bioecological perspective and an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This lens helped situate trans* postsecondary educators within multiple contexts, specifically genderism and higher education, while also recognizing trans* educators’ agency, experiences, and interactions within these contexts and systems. In the next part of this chapter, I describe Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological perspective (1999) and intersectionality (1989), how they have been incorporated into higher education scholarship, and how they helped situate trans* postsecondary educators and informed my study. I conclude the chapter with a summary.

Contexts

Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) bioecological perspective provides a framework to acknowledge and explore a bidirectional relationship between and among developing individuals and the multiple environments and processes they navigate. Over a span of 40 plus years, Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1999) has sought to construct a theoretical perspective to interrogate the impact of environment on shaping human development over the
lifespan. For example, with trans* postsecondary educators, interactions between
genderism, higher education, and the educators provide a picture of their experiences.
Bronfenbrenner (1999) outlined four key elements of development: process-person-
context-time.

Originally called the ecological systems theory, the most recent iteration is a
bioecological perspective that takes into consideration a person’s lived experiences
through intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systems interactions through time
(Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). This bioecological
perspective also makes a distinction between environments and processes, whereby
processes are the activities and interactions occurring within and across various contexts
and environments, called systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1999). Within context are five
systems of environments, in which people interact throughout their lives: micro-, exo-,
macro-, meso-, and chrono-systems.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) ecological perspective provides a framework to explore
the educators’ experiences on campus and their strategies of persistence (resistance). The
educator is at the center with higher education as part of their microsystem. Trans*
educators’ microsystems include people, activities, and places that are closest to them in
proximity and influence, such as their family, peers, friends, schools, homes, colleagues
and students on campus, while the exosystem includes more indirect influences, such as
extended family, media, and something like a partner’s job. Because of its proximity and
connection to individuals, the microsystem significantly influences their experiences
(Bronfenbrenner, 1999). The microsystem of interest for this study is trans* educators’
work environments and institutions, relationships with peers, students, and administrators, and interactions with policies and practices on their campuses.

Throughout the history of higher education, trans* people have been largely ignored in scholarship and practice. Gender segregation in higher education as well as experiences of exclusion, bias, and discrimination influence the lives trans* people in higher education (Beemyn, 2005a, 2005b; Bilodeau, 2005; Jourian et al., 2015). Though trans* postsecondary educators have a significant relationship to campus environments in which they learn, work, and sometimes live, they are not necessarily represented or considered in its operation. Consider that in order to become postsecondary educators, one must navigate institutions of higher education for a significant part of their lives and development. In order to paint a more complete picture of trans* educators’ experiences, it is critical to understand the interacting contexts and construction of higher education as it relates to gender.

Trans* educators’ macrosystem includes laws and policies influencing and governing people, institutional and cultural practices that shape experiences, and beliefs and larger ideals that one navigates throughout life (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). In this case, genderism is one of many ideologies that infiltrates institutions and impacts trans* people’s lives (Bilodeau, 2005). Specifically, genderism severely impacts trans* people’s lives because of constructions of and perpetuation that women and men are the only valid genders, and within an ideological hierarchy, women and trans* people are less valued, excluded, harmed, and sometimes killed. How higher education has been constructed around this conceptualization of gender has significant impacts on the experiences of
trans* students and educators on campuses (Beemyn, 2005a; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010).

These experiences have looked different over time, as the chronosystem of the bioecological model describes time itself such as particular moments that occur across one’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; 1999). For example, throughout their lives trans* people continually develop their genders and may have various understandings and experiences of disclosures about it to oneself and others. Moreover, exploring the literature with the chronosystem in mind involves recognition of changes across time within the various systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). For instance, the word transgender was not a part of the macrosystem and microsystem lexicon just 50 years ago, yet there were people embodying spectrums of genders (Beemyn, 2013; Valentine, 2007). Within society, and specifically higher education, there has been an increase in awareness and visibility of trans* people across institutions, yet experiences of bias, exclusion, and discrimination persist. Although the history of conceptualizations and constructions of gender in higher education have looked different over time, trans* people have largely been invisible in academics, personnel, theory, physical structures, and policies throughout the history of higher education.

Exploring the interrelationships, or mesosystem, between these systems, as well as understanding them individually, helps describe the complexities of trans* postsecondary educators’ multiple environments. Taken together, I explored the ways in which the systems interacted with one another to shape educators’ experiences. For instance, trans* people working in a particularly trans* phobic environment, but who
have supportive family and friends environments, as well as confidence in their identities may have different experiences than if their institution were supportive, but their family and friends were not, and they were still uncertain in their trans* identity.

**Postsecondary Research Using Bronfenbrenner’s (Bio)Ecological Model**

Though Bronfenbrenner’s ecological (1977) and bioecological (1999) perspectives have mostly been used in quantitative studies, and focused overwhelmingly on early childhood and adolescent development. Most often focused on family and school/work systems, the model translates to higher education and can be applied to trans* postsecondary educators. Some scholars within higher education have applied the (bio)ecological framework to understand students’ identities and experiences (Chavez, 2014; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Renn, 2003). Specifically, Renn conducted a qualitative study exploring racial identity development of 38 biracial students. Renn utilized the ecology model as a framework to understand various influences on these students’ racial identity development. Through open-ended interviews, written responses, and campus observations, Renn discussed an interaction between process-person-context-time for biracial college students (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1999). For Renn (2003), considering the person meant understanding parental background, cultural knowledge before college and prior experiences with other cultural groups. Renn also described the other elements and used students’ words to demonstrate their understandings and experiences.

Similarly, Guardia and Evans (2008) utilized the ecological perspective to explore racial identity development of seven Latino fraternity men attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Through three semi-structured interviews, a focus group, observation,
document collection, and journaling, Guardia and Evans depicted a complex racial identity development. Guardia and Evans described various factors, across systems, which influenced development such as language, the Latino fraternity, gender, and their HSI. Whereas Renn (2003) was explicit about the process-person-context-time relationship, Guardia and Evans (2008) mostly focused on macro and micro contexts.

These studies from higher education demonstrate the usefulness of the (bio)ecological perspective as a framework for understanding trans* educators’ experiences and it has been used and applied in various ways to explore people’s development in contexts. However, there are a few limitations with how the model has been applied. First, though researchers discussed the process-person-context-time elements of the model, the bidirectionality of the interactions are missed. For example, Renn (2003) and Guardia and Evans (2008) both described, in-depth, the influence of the various contexts and processes on students’ racial identity development, yet they failed to mention how students then impact these same systems, therefore, implicating a unidirectional interaction; context impacts person only. For my study, I was interested in understanding both directions of interaction. Trans* educators are not simply passive recipients of influence; they are active participants in the process.

Another critique of past application of the bioecological perspective to explore gender is that gender is used in two limited ways; Gender is either an identity descriptor that separates women/girls from men/boys or gender is but one way to describe the sample, but there is no real consideration of gender beyond a binary or descriptive (Tudge et al., 2009). Virtually no studies exist that apply the bioecological model to
understand *a process* of gender identity development, rather than a stagnant position to be named. Though there are limited uses of the bioecological model to study gender, it offers a focused framework for understanding trans* educators’ experiences.

Applying the bioecological model as a framework to my literature situates trans* educators’ development and experiences within a particular time, social and cultural contexts, institutions, and developmental moment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1999). However, on its own, the bioecological perspective tells only part of the story. Though the bioecological perspective focuses on relationships between and among systems, it does not fully account for unique experiences of individuals because of their multiple identities and the impacts of multiple interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression on their experiences. In order to center these experiences and further an understanding of the complexities of trans* postsecondary educators, I combined an intersectional lens with the bioecological perspective as a framework for this study. In the next section, I describe intersectionality and its application in my study.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality itself was born out of a need to incorporate and understand the experiences of those people who were least heard in areas and disciplines such as the civil rights movement, feminism, and law (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Ferree, 2009). Examining further the interaction between person and context, intersectionality specifically acknowledges people’s multiple identities as well as oppressive systems in which they live, work, and learn (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008; Ferree, 2009; McCall, 2005). A book was recently published that focuses on *Intersectionality and Higher*
Education, demonstrating the influence and impact intersectionality has had on the field (Mitchell Jr, Simmons, & Greyerbiehl, 2014). One of the chapters described the influence of intersectionality throughout the research process, from conception to completion (Tillapaugh & Nicolazzo, 2014). My project has been similar. Intersectionality is part of my experience, how I conceptualized my topic, reviewed the literature, collected my data, drew my conclusions, and ultimately discussed implications. Specifically, for my literature review, intersectionality required an intentional reading of who is missing from the literature. This conscious examination requires an awareness and willingness to address multiple identities that contribute to experiences. And it is naming the structural and systemic systems of power, privilege, and oppression also at work. For example, exploring how trans* people of color are uniquely positioned and impacted by systemic oppressions such as discrimination and job loss is the work of an intersectional lens (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011).

One of the earliest writings about intersectionality was W.E.B. DuBois’ Souls of Black Folk (1994). DuBois wrote about the double-consciousness of Black men who existed in a society of tense racial discourse. Double-consciousness described the experience of living in multiple social worlds, one Black and the other American. The individuals DuBois wrote about, including himself to a certain degree, were not valued as Black people and not considered American, and their rights and privileges as men were restricted and prohibited. DuBois’ writings demonstrated understanding and incorporation of characteristics from multiple identities, with the goal of integrating them into a complete self; Authenticity. However, given the cultural climate, there were
policies and attitudes that perpetuated negative perceptions and limited access for Black people. The systems disempowered and then blamed them, leaving Black men to devise creative strategies for engaging with/in the systems. DuBois argued that “The burden belongs to the nation, but has sometimes been placed on the groups that are marginalized” (p. 23). DuBois showed how a marginalized group could counteract and resist a system of oppression (through his life and writings) in much the same way I hope my portrait reveals how trans* educators exhibit new and creative ways to counteract and resist oppressive higher education systems. Though DuBois is not necessarily credited with intersectionality, because when he wrote about it he called it double consciousness, these concepts are connected, if not comparable. Double-consciousness offers insight into the individual, whereby people have various awarenesses of how systems influence them and find ways to navigate. DuBois described defacto (unwritten) laws that affected Black people, and the laws Crenshaw (1989) described were written in the (law) books. They both touched on unique positions within systems, and called out the systems’ role in oppression.

Crenshaw (1989, 1991) coined the term intersectionality, during the critical race theory movement in the 1980s when examining the influence of race and gender in Black women’s experiences with employment, and later, violence. Furthering the work of DuBois (1994, originally published in 1903), Crenshaw explained various ways laws were not designed to secure Black women’s employment rights because they did not account for intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989). It was difficult for Black women to bring cases of gender or race discrimination if companies also hired White women AND
Black men. Because of their unique position as Black women, their voices and experiences could not be captured by looking at race or gender alone, or separately (Crenshaw, 1991).

Although Crenshaw was the first person to coin the term intersectionality, she was not the only one to examine and argue the ways Black women’s experiences are uniquely shaped by race and gender (Davis, 2008). For some time Black women’s experiences became synonymous with intersectionality. However, the original intention was not to only focus on these two particular identities, but rather suggested “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 358). To continue understanding multiple experiences, Nash (2008) challenged users of intersectionality to expand the boundaries of the theory beyond that of the Black woman’s experience, which had been conceptualized and understood as a monolithic experience. For Crenshaw (1989), race and gender may have been salient to her, which influenced the lens through which she viewed the law. Though critical and important, there are numerous intersectional perspectives and experiences that need to be examined, in addition to Black women, the law, and violence, such as trans* postsecondary educators, genderism, and higher education.

As Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and other authors wrote about intersectionality, it became apparent that it was more than a theory of individuals’ identities, although identity was a core component. Intersectionality foregrounds the ways multiple social categories connect to inform and influence people’s experiences in relation to power, privilege, oppression, and inequality (Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005; Torres, Jones, & Renn,
Clearly, marginalization and oppression are key factors when defining and discussing intersectionality. Although important, marginalization and oppression are also only part of intersectionality. In addition to recognizing and understanding marginalization and oppression, an intersectional lens may also highlight the privilege, empowerment, and liberation that exist as part of the lives and experiences of trans* people. I used an intersectional lens to examine, within systems, a range of experiences from oppressive to liberating, which occurred and influenced the trans* educators’ lives and experiences in tandem.

DuBois (1903, 1994) was concerned with Black men whereas Crenshaw (1989, 1991) focused on the unique position of Black women. Neither considered people outside the gender binary. Intersectionality has garnered much attention and questions about its purpose, usefulness, and applications. Some higher education scholars have recognized the need for and value of applications of intersectionality in higher education research (Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2014; Stewart, 2008), which exploring multiple identities within systems of power, domination, privilege, and oppression is also crucial to understanding experiences of historically marginalized groups. Therefore, I added an intersectional lens to explore the literature to acknowledge unique experiences of trans* people.

**Summary**

Exploring trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences in higher education is the main premise and focus of my study. The (bio)ecological perspective (1999) provides a framework to explore relationships and interactions between and among trans*
postsecondary educators and the contexts in which they actively engage and interact. Even if they do not directly engage in particular spaces, they may still be influenced by certain systems. As a lens, intersectionality (1989, 1991) foregrounds complex examinations of intersections of identities and systems of power, privilege, liberation, and oppression. Through these lenses, I explore literature about the macrosystem of genderism and its manifestations within a microsystem of institutions within higher education, while exploring trans* identities, and the relationships between these. My conceptual framework provides a lens to understand trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences. It provides a glimpse into trans* lives in context, while expanding ways to consider gender and trans* in higher education.

**Literature Review**

I address relevant literature that supports the need for and significance of my dissertation study, focused on experiences of trans* postsecondary educators. To situate these educators, my literature review is divided into four larger sections. First, to set a larger context and explore aspects of intersectionality within macrosystems, I unpack genderism as an ideology that interacts with institutions and individuals. From there, I explore how macrosystems such as genderism have influenced microsystems, particularly institutions in higher education and individual institutions in which trans* educators live, learn, and work. Then I focus specifically on trans* experiences in higher education. Finally, to understand the individuals within these contexts and expand notions of gender, I present studies that explore trans*gender identities broadly.
Genderism Within/as a Macrosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1999) described macrosystems as overarching cultures and subcultures that manifest in such places as social, institutional, and educational systems, which people navigate throughout their lives. This overarching system also shapes experiences. A significant overarching system that impacts higher education and trans* educators is genderism. Specifically, genderism includes structures of inequality grounded in assumptions of only two genders and associated roles and expectations. Genderism is supported by systems of power, domination, oppression and privilege whereby representations of male/manness are normalized and idealized (Bilodeau, 2009; Wilchins, 2004). Women and trans* people are thus marginalized. Whiteness, able-bodiedness, Christianity, cisgender identities are also normalized and idealized. Furthermore, these systems of oppression, privilege, and power interlock and interact together to differently impact people’s lives (Crenshaw, 1979; Dubois, 1994; hooks, 1994; Johnson, 2006). For example, trans* women of color are more likely to be homeless, unemployed, and/or living with a preventable or treatable condition without seeking medical assistance (Grant et al., 2011). Conversely, White transmasculine folks are more likely to persist through higher education and secure positions in academia than trans* feminine folks of color.

Wilchins (2004) coined the term genderism to describe the systemic privileging of the binary, two-gender (women and men) constructions whereby individuals who fall outside of these two genders may be policed, harassed, and intimidated. Often, not only privileging men and women, but perpetuating that they are the only valid genders (Butler,
1999; Feinberg, 1996; Wilchins, 2004). Expounding on that, Carter (2000) described the pervasiveness of genderism:

> Every person raised in this nation, including those who are transgendered (*sic*), was socialized to believe in the existence of only two sexes: male and female. Certain emotions, communication styles, careers and clothing choices are socially limited to one sex or the other. (p. 265)

This quote highlights a couple dominant perspectives on sex and gender. First, there is a conceptualization that sex and gender are binary, meaning there are only two and for all intents and purposes “opposite” each other. Second is the idea that sex determines gender, which then connects to particular life outcomes and expressions. Overall, this demonstrates socialization and the way structures are set up that reinforces that one’s sex and gender are biological, predetermined, and stable. However, this binary and restrictive perspective leaves little room for the complexities of lived experiences of gender identity and expression. Whether called genderism (Carter, 2000; Wilchins, 2004), or transgender oppression (Catalano & Griffin, 2016) it is an ideology of constructed rules of gender, which has become common sense in U.S. society.

In addition to the sex and gender as binary and stable constructions, meaning no one can change their sex or gender at any point, genderism requires biology, but really genitals, as the essential sign of sex and gender (Carter, 2000; Gilbert, 2009; Wilchins, 2004). Because of the biological assumption, there is a belief that being either male or female is recognized before birth, throughout life, and after death. Garfinkel (1967) went so far as to posit that dichotomous sex is natural, and scientific evidence that suggests otherwise is of little consequence.
Within and outside higher education, trans* people are greatly affected by genderism and bigenderism (Bilodeau, 2007; Gilbert, 2009; Wilchins, 2004). For example, *Injustice at Every Turn*, produced by the National LGBTQ Task Force, was the first large study exploring the experiences of transgender people within various systems and included 6,540 transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) individuals from 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and U.S. Virgin Islands (Grant et al., 2011). The report explored complexities of experiences by addressing some of the intersectional aspects of trans* experiences. Just as the title alludes, *Injustice at Every Turn*, illuminated that trans* and GNC people face injustice at every turn, across macro and micro systems; in childhood housing, education, employment, health and healthcare, the military, workplaces, at the grocery store, from police, and many other sites (Grant et al., 2011). In almost every category from homelessness and unemployment to harassment and assault by police, trans* people of color experienced these at higher proportions. The report also showed that 22% of trans* people age 25-44 were currently in school (Grant et al., 2011). These trans* people are undergraduate and graduate students, as well as educators in higher education. These are bleak outcomes for trans* people. Because trans* postsecondary educators spend a significant part of their lives in formal education settings, particularly colleges and universities, my study seeks to go behind some of these statistics to uncover stories of trans* postsecondary educators.

In the U.S., trans* and GNC people are one of the most vulnerable populations for experiencing violence and discrimination steeped in genderism (Grant et al., 2011). Of particular importance are the effects of multiple identities and experiences. The combined
impacts of sexism, racism, and transphobia significantly affects trans* people of color, and specifically, trans* feminine people of color, contributing to higher levels of violence and discrimination for them. Some of the ways in which genderism operates for trans* people are in healthcare, police and jails, identity documents, and homelessness (Grant et al., 2011). One aspect of these issues are the national landscape for trans* people, including laws and policies that do and do not protect them. As of the end of 2014, 16 states plus Washington, D.C. have trans*-inclusive non-discrimination laws. Furthermore, within 21 of the remaining states, 156 cities and counties have similar laws. Unfortunately, there are still 13 states that do not have statewide, citywide, or countywide trans*-inclusive laws. That means that of the over 300 million people in this country, close to 55% live in a place without trans*-inclusive non-discrimination policies (Grant et al., 2011). And that is all before students, faculty, and staff step into genderist higher education. Bias and discrimination occur systemically through laws, and policies (e.g., marriage equality) as well as individual/interpersonal experiences. Laws and policies are but one part of the equation of inclusion, protection, and affirming. Next I explore the interpersonal aspects.

Relationships and interactions with others also reinforces genderism. For example, policing occurs when individuals observe what they view as gender deviant or non-conforming behavior, dress, or expressions and they confront the person whether directly or indirectly (sometimes with violence) to address the deviance. For example, trans* people who do not “pass” or adequately fulfill the role of their felt or expected genders may experience gender policing in gender segregated public spaces, such as
bathrooms. These spaces also include locker rooms, athletic teams, fraternities, affinity groups, prayer spaces, and residence halls. This component of genderism is an example of what Butler (1999) meant when they asserted, “One does not do one’s gender alone. One is always doing with or for another, even if the other is imaginary” (p. 1). In other words, even when someone is alone, they may still consider others when making choices about how to live and present themselves (e.g., clothing, accessories, hair). Furthermore, “it is crucial to recognize that the bathroom problem is much more than a glitch in the machinery of gender segregation and is better described in terms of the violent enforcement of our current gender system” (Feinberg, 1996, p. 25). For example, someone who was assigned male at birth and performs or expresses femininity may encounter serious policing in the form of emotional or physical harassment/assault, whether internal or external (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Harper, 2008).

A documentary about trans* experiences, particularly in the bathroom, aptly named *Toilet Training* (Sylvia Rivera Law Project & Mateik, 2003), explores these experiences. One woman described how law enforcement sometimes get involved in the interpersonal policing. She remembers being in a public bathroom and hearing someone over a loud speaker call for the man in the bathroom to come out. She feared for her safety if there was something going on in the bathroom that required police involvement. As she looked around and found no other person in the bathroom, she realized they were talking about her. She was the “man” in the bathroom, but she knew in her heart and soul that she was a woman (Sylvia Rivera Law Project & Mateik, 2003). This is but one example of trans* bodies and lives being controlled and policed. The next section reveals
the influence of genderism on the construction of higher education and its impact on trans* people within this microsystem.

**Gender and Genderism in Higher Education**

Embedded within the macrosystem of genderism are microsystems of institutions in higher education. Microsystems include environments and roles for a particular amount of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Trans* postsecondary educators spend a significant amount of time in higher education, engaging with various areas, as students, leaders, administrators, and educators. To explore more closely microsystems of institutions that impact trans* postsecondary educators, this section examines manifestations of genderism in the history, spaces, personnel, academics, and policies of higher education. These are areas that researchers have connected to trans* students’ experiences, and recommended educators address (Alexander, 2009; Beemyn, 2005b), which also interact with trans* educators experiences.

**History**

History and time are elements of the bioecological perspective. Therefore it is important to understand the historical context of gender in higher education. A dominant narrative in the United States and higher education prescribed White, heterosexual, cisgender, able bodied identities as normal (Thelin, 2011). Anyone who deviated was not admitted to institutions, was not considered in research and practice, and was faced with numerous other barriers of prejudice, discrimination, and inequity. Specifically, higher education is not immune to the effects of genderism and bigenderism, and has a history of gender exclusion (Bilodeau, 2007; Gilbert, 2009; Thelin, 2011). When higher education
was first implemented in the United States, only men, and very specific men: White, wealthy, Protestants were allowed to attend (Thelin, 2011).

The earliest colleges were created to prepare men to become ministers (Thelin, 2011; Wright, 1988). Women, people of color, poor people, and others were essentially barred from participation (James, 1985; Wechsler, 1984). The impact of such exclusion has resulted in demarcated, and often marginalizing, experiences once these populations were admitted into institutions of higher education. Moreover, once women were admitted, higher education became a replica of the larger binary ideology. For example, women’s colleges, single sex residence halls, curricula, and policies perpetuated that only cisgender women and men were on college campuses. Furthermore, current conversations and debates about admitting trans* women into women’s colleges, as well as the implications of admitting trans* men, demonstrates genderism at multiple levels of institutions. The message is that sex and gender cannot be changed, folks assigned male at birth will always be men and folks assigned female at birth will always be women. These and other gender rules and separation were fundamental to how higher education began and, in many ways, still exists today.

**Spaces**

One of the most impactful ways that higher education has constructed and perpetuated the gender binary is through physical structures, which make up the college or university. Not without a struggle, but once women were admitted into higher education, separate spaces (colleges and dormitories) were constructed to segregate them (Solomon, 1985; Thelin, 2011; Wein, 1974). The oldest women’s college and the
thirteenth oldest college, Salem College, was originally founded as a school for girls, and began granting college degrees in the 1890s (History, 2012). Because of genderist perceptions and perpetuations, trans* and genderqueer people accessing women’s colleges, such as Salem, and residence halls today have been most often relegated to learning and living in spaces that correspond to their sex assigned at birth (or the sex listed on their identity documents), no matter their gender identity or expression (Bleiberg, 2003). For example, only 155 out of over 4,000 colleges/universities offer some kind of gender inclusive housing option, otherwise students are assigned to rooms based on their sex assigned at birth which is collected on admissions and housing forms (Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, n.d.). Though this construction has definitely had an impact on college students living on campuses, it also has the potential to impact trans* postsecondary educators working and living on campuses. Educators are also completing forms that require them to name their sex or gender and often there is not an option to not answer.

Throughout history, as institutions became more integrated and coeducational, additional spaces were created on campuses such as women’s centers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student (LGBT) centers, gender and sexuality centers, and cultural centers. These spaces were intended to provide support, education, and advocacy for traditionally excluded and marginalized students (Beemyn, 2002; Byrne, 2000; Marine, 2011a; Patton Davis, 2006). They were created on campuses to advance awareness of women’s issues on campus, support the promotion of women’s visibility
(Marine, 2011b), and were crucial for improving the climate for women on campus (Byrne, 2000).

These centers also provided a “home away from home” for students who spent time in them, because they provided space to be authentic and interact with people who shared similar identities and experiences. Venzant Chambers and McCready (2011) acknowledged “schools can play a major role in creating supportive, affirming environments that not only welcome various viewpoints but also incorporate them into the mainstream school culture” (p. 1371). This study, though focused on high school students, connected to counterspaces on campuses. However, as with the gendered institutions and residence halls, these separate spaces became segregated and separated within the larger university and were places the mostly White, male administration could house the problems of gender, race, and sexuality equity. Within these spaces, there was little power to impact policy and personnel changes. Though they existed, women’s, LGBT, gender and sexuality, and multicultural centers have historically neglected trans* identities (Bryne, 2000; Kasper, 2004). Likewise, many of these centers were focused on students and were not designed to support postsecondary educators. What about spaces and homes away from homes for educators? Often educators are the ones facilitating these spaces for students, but who is facilitating space for them? There is a juxtaposition of trans* educators in positions of power, and also experiencing oppressive forces that mitigate that power.
This section focuses on the introduction of women into higher education, which also parallels the marginalization and then increased visibility of trans* folks on campus. The rise of coeducation complicated campus life in the U.S. (Rhatigan, 2009; Rury & Harper, 1986; Schwartz, 1997), as has the increased awareness and visibility of trans* people in higher education. To address increased enrollment of women, many college presidents began to appoint female faculty members to “advise, assist, and counsel the new ‘minority’ population on campus” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 504). Administrators saw this as a means and opportunity to open education to more women, both as students and as deans of women (Nidiffer, 2000; Rhagitan, 2009; Schwartz, 2003). The roles of deans of women and men were to direct the academics and careers of men and women by providing guidance toward constructive and useful ends (Schwartz, 1997). While deans of women were appointed with a sense of urgency to “take care of the girls,” deans of men were not because male students were viewed as part of the natural order (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 2003). Deans of men were considered big brothers or uncle figures and made up their role as they went along (Schwartz, 2003).

However, as campuses began enrolling more veterans, the issues of men and women, as men and women, were no longer at the forefront because institutions were focused on the returning veterans. Moreover, institutions were restructuring, eliminating the specialty dean positions for deans of students and vice presidents (Nidiffer, 2000). As a result, the deans of men and women positions were eliminated (Nidiffer, 2000; Rhagitan, 2009). With the new focus and structures, after the deans were dismantled, the
former deans of men became the new deans of students, vice presidents, and administrators, while deans of women became subordinate or disappeared altogether, along with women students. The “coeducational campuses became a ‘man’s world’ once again” (Schwartz, 2003, p. 516). The deans of women were treated as if they were disposable, similar to Black teachers during desegregation. Currently there is also still a lack of women in leadership positions as well as trans* people.

Similar to former deans of women, trans* educators have also faced many barriers and exclusion accessing positions in higher education. A recent article describing a panel discussion among nine trans* educators at a national conference described a process of “Trans* educators (re)claiming space and voice in higher education and student affairs” (Jourian et al., 2015). The article was a recreation of the process of creating space by constructing and structuring a trans* educators’ panel discussion. The article also included post-conference reflections in the trans* educators’ own words. During the three-hour discussion, the educators discussed several topics, including the exclusion they felt in higher education. Ultimately, the authors concluded that trans* educators are not expected in higher education, and thus experience invisibility and hypervisibility as a result (Jourain et al., 2015). Though not expected, trans* educators are working in and on higher education.

**Academics**

In order to address invisibility in academics, courses such as women’s and queer studies have centered the lives and experiences of women and queer people (Jagose, 1996; Wiegman, 2005). Early in its history, in the 1970s, women’s studies was
consistently defined as “the study of the history and culture of women, or education for and about women to end the oppression of, or the discrimination against women” (Zimmerman, 2005, p. 3). Zimmerman added it is a field that attempts to shape and understand woman or women, gender, and sexuality as categories of analysis. In the beginning, women’s studies often neglected the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, disability, and sexuality with gender (Wiegman, 2005). However, feminists of color made it intellectually irresponsible to talk about ‘woman’ as an undifferentiated universal category (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

Queer studies were a disruption of an assumption, in women and lesbian and gay studies, of the “predictable connection between gender, sex, and the body” (Jagose, 1996, p. 9). Queer and women’s studies provide educational opportunities to understand gender, other social identities, and larger influences (Zimmerman, 2005). For instance, research and scholarship from these disciplines included different kinds of “women” and those who may not identify as women, such as Jewish, Native American, and women with disabilities, queer, trans*, and genderqueer to name a few (Jagose, 1996; Wiegman, 2005; Zimmerman, 2005). Women’s and queer studies provided different tools to make sense of these multiple points of convergence and conflict. Ultimately women’s and queer studies provided the history, foundation, and tools to consider beyond binary restrictions (Jagose, 1996; Wiegman, 2005; Zimmerman, 2005).

In addition to feminists of color, trans* academics have disrupted the category of gender and woman and added trans* experiences to the literature (Devor, 2004; Feinberg, 1996; Jourian et al., 2015; Lev, 2004). As a result of expansion and acknowledging the
non-universal nature of the category woman, some women’s studies programs are changing their names to include or focus on gender studies or to gender and sexuality studies or to women and gender studies (Wiegman, 2005). These new and renamed programs aim to reach different students and be more inclusive of variations in constructions of gender, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality including lesbian and gay, queer, and transgender studies.

To this end, the first transgender studies program at Arizona is hiring faculty and has provided space for the editorial board of a new peer reviewed journal, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (The Department of Gender & Women's Studies, n.d.). According to the Arizona website, “Transgender studies concerns itself with the variability and contingency of gender, sexuality, identity, and embodiment across time, space, languages, and cultures” (The Department of Gender & Women's Studies, n.d.). The focus of the program ranges from “socio-political, legal, and economic consequences of noncompliance with gender norms” to “the emergence of novel forms of embodied subjectivity within contemporary techno-cultural environments” (The Department of Gender & Women's Studies, n.d., para. 2). Moreover, I was recently involved in a workshop with the authors of the first ever intro to trans* studies textbook. These examples show how trans* identities and experiences are slowly entering the conversation, literature, and practice in higher education.

**Policies**

In addition to access and visibility of trans* educators in spaces, personnel, and academics, the policies in higher education are riddled with genderism (Bilodeau, 2009;
As such, the construction of policies on campus has primarily focused on women and men; policies such as Title IX, Affirmative Action, and non-discrimination policies have been implemented to protect women (initially) students from violence, harassment, discrimination, and inequity on campuses (Solomon, 1985). Of particular concern were the discrepancies in participation in education and athletics between girls and boys, women and men (Brake, 2001). Title IX explains “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination…” (United States Department of Justice, n.d.). Title IX allowed women to compete in athletics, albeit segregated athletics. Recently, the Office of Civil Rights and the Department of Education have clarified Title IX to include protections based on gender identity, gender expression, and non-binary expressions, which theoretically includes trans* identified people (United States Department of Education, 2014). Educators, myself included, still question what this means and how it will be implemented and applied.

In addition to governmental policies, institutions of higher education are constructing more inclusive non-discrimination policies as well. These policies are typically accessible through the university website and include specific identities that are protected (e.g., sex, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation). Recent iterations of these policies include protections for gender identity and/or expression. This formal acknowledgement of protected identities has not always been in place, but non-discrimination policies allow trans* people to identify the priorities of a campus and what the campus climate might be like for them. However, there is a difference between
espoused and lived policy. A survey of 19 higher education institutions that adopted non-discrimination policies that included gender identity and/or expression prior to 2005 revealed that these policies affected little change on campus (Beemyn, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005). Campuses may claim an environment of inclusion, but the climate may still feel hostile for trans* students (Beemyn, 2005a, 2005b, Beemyn et al., 2005) and educators. Further, many religious institutions are filing for religious exemptions so as not to fully support trans* people on campus. Therefore, the next section describes research exploring trans* experiences in higher education.

**Trans* Experiences in Higher Education**

A history of segregation, exclusion, and difficulties acknowledging and supporting all genders, has contributed to a hostile and *chilly climate* in higher education environment for people identifying with various sexualities and genders, e.g. trans* students (Beemyn, 2005a; Bilodeau, 2005). As a result of recent identification, vocalization, and recognition of trans* students and desires to understand their experiences, a few researchers have explored the impacts of environment on trans* student experiences (Beemyn, 2005a; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005). In these studies, trans* students’ reported more encounters with harassment and discrimination and lower sense of belonging to the campus community (Beemyn, 2005a; Beemyn et al., 2005). For these students, experiences with invisibility, as well as personal and institutional discrimination, based on their gender identity, were prominent (Beemyn, 2005a; Beemyn et al., 2005; Nakamura, 1998; Negrete, 2007). Beemyn et al. (2005) surveyed the higher education landscape and expounded on issues trans* students face on
campuses. Ultimately, similar to the national study mentioned earlier, from the residence halls to healthcare, records to classrooms, trans* students were affected, whether they felt excluded and discriminated against or included and accepted. My study builds on this and explored trans* educators’ experiences on campus.

**Educators’ Experiences**

As educators continue to struggle with how to improve the climate for LGBT students, they have only begun to acknowledge and improve the climate for LGBT educators (Smith, Wright, Reilly, & Esposito, 2008). Most of the limited information about the experiences of trans* on campus is from a student perspective (Beemyn, 2005a; Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005). This literature has included educators’ roles in supporting students who identify as trans*. However one of the first of its kind, Rankin and colleagues (2010) conducted a mixed-method study with LGBT students, faculty, and staff to explore the *State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*. Data were collected through a survey that included one open-ended question that asked participants to expound on their experiences in higher education. Their sample included a group of trans* faculty, staff, and administrators (n = 176) that they collapsed into three categories: transmasculine (TM), transfeminine (TF), and gender non-conforming (GNC). Although faculty, staff, and administrators were included in the sample, when the results were presented, all respondents, including students were collapsed together so it is difficult to tease apart the experiences of the educators.

However, Rankin et al. (2010) reported that participants who identified as transmasculine, transfeminine, or genderqueer “were at more risk for harassment on
college campuses” than their cisgender peers (p. 62). My study centers on trans* identified educators to further depict and tease apart their experiences in higher education. Although people who identified as trans* were more likely to experience harassment, the form, location and source, and reactions were different (Rankin et al., 2010). For instance, transfeminine participants experienced deliberate exclusion or were ignored, while transmasculine participants experienced being stared at or singled out as a resident authority on all things LGBT (Rankin et al., 2010). Moreover, the location of the harassment for trans*-identified folks were in class, although transfeminine participants were also likely to experience harassment while in public or walking. The source of the harassment also varied for trans* participants. While GNC and transfeminine participants experienced harassment from a peer, transmasculine received harassment from a superior (Rankin, et al., 2010). The ways in which trans* people responded to the harassment also varied. Transfeminine and GNC people were more likely to react by confronting, avoiding, or making a complaint (Rankin et al., 2010). Furthermore, transfeminine respondents were most likely to feel embarrassed, avoid the harasser, and feel afraid. On the other hand, transmasculine participants were most likely to feel angry and/or tell a friend. These experiences demonstrate the significant impacts of genderism in trans* students and educators’ experiences on campus.

Rankin et al. (2010) were also conscious of the importance of understanding experiences from an intersectional perspective. Therefore, in addition to exploring varying experiences through sexual and gender identity lenses, they also explored experiences of gender identity and racial/ethnic identity. There were similar experiences
of harassment for People of Color and White participants regardless of gender identity. Yet the researchers wanted to explore differences across gender identity for People of Color. When comparing trans* with cisgender People of Color (POC), trans* POCs were significantly more likely to experience harassment than cisgender LGBQ POCs. Additionally, trans* and women of Color were more likely to attribute the experienced harassment to gender identity than race. As such, Rankin et al. (2010) concluded that gender identity was more salient for them than racial identity.

Rankin et al. (2010) also revealed that trans* participants were less comfortable with their campus climate, department/work unit climate, and class than cisgender participants. Of the trans* respondents, transmasculine were the least likely to feel comfortable across the three aforementioned areas of campus climate. Their discomfort probably comes in part to their observations and perceptions of harassment on campus (Rankin et al., 2010). More than 60% of each group of trans* educators observed harassment and were more likely to attribute the harassment to gender identity and expression (Rankin et al., 2010). The observations of harassment were related to the types of harassment participants’ experienced. For example, transfeminine participants were more likely to observe deliberate exclusion or ignoring (Rankin et al., 2010). My study also explored multiple identities, including gender, race, and sexual orientation among others that come up for educators.

Relatedly, during the panel discussion of nine trans* educators described earlier, the educators also discussed some of their experiences on campuses. One of the ways they perceived receiving support on campus was through the correct use of pronouns by
individuals and institutions, as in position descriptions (Jourian et al., 2015). Yet, there were many more unsupportive experiences including struggling for legal protections, being viewed as a test case, misuse of pronouns, the pervasiveness of Whiteness, gender policing, and issues of disclosure (Jourian et al., 2015). These educators were aware of the role of genderism and intersectionality in their lives and experiences as trans* educators, which bodes well for my study in which participants were able to describe their experiences in connection to intersectionality and micro-macro systems.

**Summary**

In this section of my literature review, I outlined constructions and conceptualizations of gender in higher education. Specifically, I addressed how constructions of gender influenced segregation and invisibility in spaces, personnel, academics, and policies within institutions of higher education. For much of the history of gender in higher education, trans* identities and experiences are largely invisible. These constructions have had a significant impact on trans* students and educators on campuses. However, as Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1999) explained, development is bidirectional. Trans* educators are impacted by experiences in higher education and they are active participants in their environments. In the next section, I expound on trans* identity with an expressed goal of situating trans* identities within microsystems of relationships and interpersonal interactions.

**Trans* in Relationships**

There is no monolithic trans* experience. In this section, I combined theoretical and conceptual perspectives and lived experiences to describe how researchers have
conceptualized and presented trans* identities. Understanding trans* identities involves a complex process continuously evolving over the life span.

Researchers have described an early process of socialization around gender and the ways in which individuals organize and respond to the information and experiences (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bem, 1981, 1983; Morgan & Stevens, 2012). Moreover, throughout development, there are opportunities and experiences with other trans* people to be in community (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Devor, 2004; Jourian et al., 2015). Another instrumental component is portraying one’s gender to oneself and others, which has been described as a performance (Butler, 1999; Lev, 2004). Models of gender identity development for trans* and genderqueer college students have also acknowledged a complex and fluid development (Bilodeau, 2005; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). These studies demonstrate an on-going process of transgender identity development and I am interested in exploring trans* educators experiences with these processes.

**Early Life**

There are dynamic influences such as biology, parents, peers, media, and the self (as in self-monitoring and regulating) on gender and gender identity development throughout life beginning before birth and continuing through death. As was mentioned earlier, constructions of gender exist even before birth, which contributes to gender identity expectations before conception (Bussey, 2011; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Frequently, biology is one of the earliest influences on gender identity (Glover & Kaplan, 2009). Specifically, sex-assigned-at-birth (different than gender) is influenced by biology, hormones, reproductive capacities, and chromosomes, but ultimately the baby’s genitalia
determine the designation female OR male on the birth certificate. In addition these characteristics also influence how the person will develop over time, including secondary sex characteristics such as broad shoulders, hips, facial hair, menstrual cycle, and chest development.

Although biology and human evolution contribute to bodily structures, there are a range of options for gender identities and expressions, rather than fixed gender determination based only on sex assigned at birth (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Butler, 1999; Lucal, 1999; Wilchins, 2004). As a result of the influences on gender from conception, one of the first questions people ask expectant parents is “boy or girl?”—setting off a slew of presuppositions and assumptions about who the baby will or should become. This is so ingrained that even the first question strangers ask about my dog is “boy or girl?” Not only are there inherent assumptions based on whether the answer is boy or girl, but those are the only two options. They assume the baby will become a masculine man who is attracted to women if assigned male at birth or a feminine woman who is attracted to men if assigned female. Often the parents themselves are curious about the sex of their baby, which they then construe as the baby’s gender. Because they know the genitalia they then interpret that into outward expectations of expression, presentation, attitudes, and behaviors. Examples of these influences are the colors and clothes a child is encouraged to wear (and not wear), the types of toys with which the child should play, and activities in which the child is allowed to participate (Hamlin, Ruble, & Amodio, 2011). Overall, these assumptions and expectations influence gender identity from the beginning of a person’s life (Bussey & Bandura, 1999;
Hamlin et al., 2011) and exist well into adulthood which is why I am interested in studying trans* adults.

**Witnessing and Mirroring**

An example of ways in which trans* people’s identity challenges genderism is through acknowledging and recognizing themselves and each other. Devor’s (2004) model of transsexual identity formation was built on Cass’s (1984) model of homosexuality identity formation and Ebaugh’s (1988) role exit work. Devor (2004) utilized multiple data sources, including personal experience, face-to-face interviews, private consultations, private conversations, meetings at conferences, committees, and other intimate interactions with people who identified as transsexual (sic) or transgendered (sic), and mostly male-to-female (MtF) to construct the model. An important note that Devor made for the reader is that the model is not a one-size fits all that could be applied to anyone who identifies as transsexual or transgender. People have different experiences and journeys and will pass through the model in their own way, faster, slower, and overlapping. Devor also acknowledged that the model may not even apply for some. One reason is because, similar to other models and theories the examples used to demonstrate each stage were mostly White trans*-identified people. Devor also honored and recognized the challenges that accompany inter and intrapersonal processes that trans* people face as they move through development: “Being/becoming transsexual or transgendered (sic) is never an easy process” (p. 66).

Devor (2004) provided a useful table of the 14-stage model that included characteristics and actions for each stage. Within the 14 stages, Devor attempted to
capture some of the nuances of trans* identity development that may not be explicit in other models and theories. Underlying the model are the concepts and experiences of witnessing and mirroring.

Devor (2004) described witnessing as being seen by others for who you are, whereas mirroring means having people who you see yourself like also see you like them. The ideas of witnessing and mirroring demonstrate the influence of other’s perceptions and their impact on trans* identities.

Each of us has a deep need to be witnessed by others for whom we are like. Each of us wants to see ourselves mirrored in others’ eyes as we see ourselves. Each of us needs to know that people who we think we are like also see us as like them. (p. 46)

In describing this component of trans* identity, Devor challenged Bem’s (1984) binary construction and acknowledged the lived experiences of trans* people. Devor (2004) contended:

transsexualism only makes sense within the context of a society in which there exists a nearly universally accepted way of understanding gender which teaches people to function as if certain ideological presumptions were elemental truths rather than the products of particular social arrangements. (p. 44)

Devor also expounded on the notion of external influences on constructing gender. Devor wrote, “For persons to socially legitimate their gender identity claims, they must ultimately have bodies which match their gender claims in socially expected ways” (p. 45). Mirroring and witnessing for trans* people means they are seen for who they believe themselves to be. They can be great sources of affirmation, and can also contribute to disempowerment if someone’s body does not conform to social expectations resulting in not being seen, or worse policing, harassment, and bias.
Processes and Milestones

Researchers exploring trans* identity in college or of college students have focused on processes and milestones throughout life (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bilodeau, 2005). One of the first, if not the first, article published about trans* college students’ experiences was a case study of two undergraduate students at a Midwestern university (Bilodeau, 2005). Bilodeau conducted interviews with the students, and analyzed them through D’Augelli’s (1994) lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) life span model to create a transgender-specific developmental model. The students’ own words were used to demonstrate the findings and themes related to their (trans*) gender identity. Bilodeau (2005) identified several influences on transgender identity development for two college students. Specific internal processes such as recognition of their identity, as well as external processes such as observing models, sharing their experiences, creating social networks of acceptance, family, and friends influenced the students’ gender identity development. Though the author identified the students as transgender during the study, the students also described experiences that demonstrated the complexities of gender and trans* identities. Another significant influence for the students was participating in campus organizations, and the resulting friendships, and sometimes, romantic relationships (Bilodeau, 2005). These internal and external processes influence trans* educators identities and experiences as well.

Another study focused on trans* identities was turned into a book about The Lives of Transgender People (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Utilizing surveys and follow-up interviews Beemyn and Rankin included over 4,000 participants and 400 follow up
interviews to explore trans* identity development in one of the largest trans* studies. They described trans* identity development as milestones through which many of the participants experienced at some point(s) in their development. The milestones included such experiences as learning about and meeting other trans*-identified people to deciding how to express oneself as trans* or genderqueer (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). These milestones provide a framework for understanding trans* postsecondary educators’ gender identity development. One of the critiques of Beemyn and Rankin’s work is that although they allowed participants to fill in their own gender identity, they ultimately collapsed the many categories into the aforementioned four. However, allowing participants to fill in a blank was more inclusive than how campus administration collects demographic information, which does not reflect people’s own experiences (Johnston, Ozaki, Pizzolato, & Chaudhari, 2014). For my study, I named all of the educators’ gender identities. Additionally, as with many studies not specifically addressing racial/ethnic identities, the sample for this study was overwhelmingly White (~86%) (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Therefore, it is difficult to address the nuances that may be present for participants at the intersections of identities and experiences. However, conducting interviews allowed for deeper analysis. For the current study I oversampled trans* educators of color which resulted in 50% people of color. This contributed to exploring aspects of their identities and experiences related to race.

**Summary**

In this section, I explored aspects of trans* identity and experiences that have been researched across multiple trans* people, which were relevant to the trans*
postsecondary educators’ experiences. In recent years, there has been an increase in exploring trans* college students identities and experiences (Bilodeau, 2005; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). These studies begin to increase visibility and awareness of trans* identities and experiences on campuses. It is also important to explore the identities of trans* postsecondary educators in higher education to expand on campus climate, trans* identity, gender studies, and intersectional research and practice.

This literature review provided research on trans* experiences and identity, specifically focused on contextual and theoretical backgrounds for exploring the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators. Higher education has been a site of struggle around gender inclusion, and I sought to understand trans* educators’ experiences in this environment. Given the history of trans* experiences and visibility in higher education, and previous research, I focused on trans* educators’ experiences and explored how they were navigating the terrain of higher education.

**Research Questions**

The conceptual framework and literature review framed, informed, and influenced data collection and analysis. This study explored the unique experiences of postsecondary educators through the following research questions.

1. What are the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators on the campuses in which they work, live, and/or attend school?

2. What are the strategies trans* postsecondary educators use to persist in higher education?
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. (Faith, 2012, para. 13-14)

Overview

In this chapter, I describe and support the research design for my dissertation exploring the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators. As a way to introduce portraiture methodology, I remind the reader of the context of my study before describing the design. Next, I provide an introduction to portraiture that describes the goals of portraiture and conveys its usefulness for addressing the research questions of my study. Additionally, I describe the methods for data collection as they are connected to elements of developing a portrait. Next, I discuss my process of analysis and how the data are presented. Lastly, limitations in portraiture methodology and constructing the final portrait are considered.

Discovering Portraiture

People understand themselves and their world through language and narrative. In Chapter One, I introduced and expanded on language connected to gender along with its uses, meanings, and understandings. In this Chapter, I connect the power of language and narratives with the portrayal of the educators (Waterhouse, 2007). What gives something meaning to a person “depends on the discourses they have available to them” (p. 275). For example, I used the written and spoken language available to me to
construct Chapter One, just as other trans* people use what is available to them to talk about and understand their experiences. I have read many stories about trans* people, some identifying as gender nonconforming people, genderqueer people, trans men, and trans women. Sometimes they authored their stories, sometimes they were written by others. What drew me into those stories were the ways in which the stories were told. Through internal and external dialogue, memories, reflections, and questions, the author(s) constructed stories of experiences with pain, happiness, sadness, triumph, determination, and life. The stories were not necessarily neat and linear, but rather sporadic—as life can be sometimes. There was an acknowledgement of a continuous back and forth between individuals and their worlds. Bronfrenbrenner’s (1999) bioecological systems combined with intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) are apparent in these stories. For example, Janet Mock (2014) acknowledged the impact living in Hawaii, with access to mahu—a known and respected third gender—helped her in her development. Moreover, postsecondary education afforded her certain access to platforms and resources which other trans* women of color have not. I aim to show more discourses on the experiences of trans* people through the educators’ own words and my interpretations. My dissertation aims to make trans* postsecondary educators, literally, more visible by applying a portraiture methodology and related methods to answer my research questions. The interview and panel questions evoked and invited stories to describe their identities and experiences. Through constructing portraits from their stories, I answered two questions:
1. What are the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators on the campuses in which they work, live, and/or attend school?

2. What are the strategies trans* postsecondary educators use to persist in higher education?

When I came across portraiture, I was excited and texting one of my writing buddies as well as my advisor to proclaim, “I’ve found my methodology!” That methodology was portraiture, and the same thing that drew me to the stories about trans* people, the storytelling and capturing of an essence of experience is what resonated with me about portraiture.

Singing My Life…Portraiture Methodology
Strumming my pain with his fingers,
Singing my life with his words,
Killing me softly with his song,
Killing me softly with his song,
Telling my whole life with his words,
Killing me softly with his song. (Gimbel, Fox, & Lieberman, 1971)

The lyrics to this song, originally recorded by Roberta Flack in 1972 and remade by The Fugees in 1995, communicate a major goal of portraiture as a methodology that captures the essence of experiences. Portraiture blends art and science to create a picture with words. It therefore crosses boundaries between aesthetic and empirical (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Like a song maker’s ability to write a song that helps a listener feel understood, not alone, and in community, portraiture is used to tell stories about individuals and groups through words, like songs. Individuals and groups should also believe as if the author captured the essence of their story: Telling my life with his [sic] words.
Portraiture is a methodology of qualitative research. It developed out of a blending of other qualitative methodologies such as ethnography, autoethnography, oral history, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, portraiture draws on the systematic and careful descriptions of ethnography and autoethnography, a focus on experiences and consciousness of phenomenology, and the art of storytelling from oral and narrative traditions. In general, qualitative research is about “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Similarly, the portraits “are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Like Lynn (2006) and Hill (2005), I am interested in understanding trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences through their stories and perspectives within their campus contexts.

Portraiture, as a methodology, was coined by Lawrence-Lightfoot, a self-proclaimed sociologist, ethnographer, and biographer. When Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) wrote of inventing portraiture, she acknowledged that the blending of art and science was not new, artists and scholars had long been collaborating to demonstrate fluidity and complexities of human experiences. Moreover scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois (1994) combined elements of autobiography, history, and activism to build bridges between theory and practice, research and action. Double-consciousness was part of a larger
social commentary developed out of DuBois’ own experiences as well as observations, interpretations, and rich description. Portraiture encourages similar exploration.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) initially set out “to document the culture of schools, the life stories of individuals, and the relationships among families, communities, and schools” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1983, p. xvi).

Like that of my anthropological colleagues, my research inquiry was designed to reveal holistic, complex descriptions of school culture. In each setting I sought to create an organizational map. I wanted to document the schools' essential features, their generic character, the values that define their curricular goals, and their institutional structures; and I wanted to explore the connections between the style and personality of individual school actors and the collective character of the school. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986, p. 15)

Portraiture has been used to explore marginalized groups and situate the researcher. To understand the health and resilience of African American women leaders in higher education, Ashby-Scott (2005) detailed accounts of the women’s experiences through interviews and a focus group. Portraits of four women of color leaders in a public four-year higher education institution in the Pacific Northwest were used to explore successes and challenges of women of color in leadership positions in higher education, while celebrating their success in those positions. The researcher identified four themes from the women’s stories and experiences that illuminated how they were successful in academia and why they stayed. The themes from the women of color leaders in higher education portrait were authenticity; strength, perseverance, and resilience; support systems; and seeking a balanced life. Explored through a feminist lens, Ashby-Scott was able to portray the lives and experiences of women of color in historically White male spaces. Similarly, portraiture allowed me to capture and convey
the complexities of the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators in the White, cisgender, male privileged spaces of higher education - spaces where trans* identities are not generally recognized, let alone privileged.

Portraiture is a qualitative methodology that foregrounds people and their experiences in social, historical, and cultural contexts (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Born out of research in education, scholars have continued to apply portraiture methodologies and methods to research educators. In particular, portraiture has focused on gender, race, and educational institutions (Ashby-Scott, 2005; Bailey, 2012; Hill, 2005; Lynn, 2006).

Several of the goals of portraiture made it an ideal methodology for my study. First, portraiture was an apt methodology for my study because the role of the researcher as instrument is central and encourages the researcher to insert themselves and their experiences alongside the participants, thereby acknowledging and honoring the relationship between researcher and participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Because of my identification with the participants as a trans* genderqueer person working in higher education, I believe value was added when I shared my experiences and was in conversation with the participants. So as not to overpower the portrait with my own narrative, I practiced Lawrence-Lightfoot’s six ways the researcher uses voice in portraiture to capture and amplify, in this case, trans* educators’ experiences: as witness, as interpretation, as preoccupation, as autobiography, listening for voice, and voice in dialogue.
Voice as witness means that the researcher is acting as an observer, “on the edge of the scene – a boundary sitter – scanning the action, systematically gathering the details of behavior, expression, and talk” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986, p. 87). As a witness, the researcher is recording the “what” (happened) of a situation and then applies the “why” with the next type of voice Lawrence-Lightfoot described, *voice as interpretation*. When the researcher uses their voice as interpretation they are attempting to make sense of the information. The portraitist utilizes thin and thick descriptions to draw their interpretations and allow readers to draw their own interpretations as well. The next type of voice Lawrence-Lightfoot described was *voice as preoccupation*. Voice as preoccupation is essentially the lens, I as the researcher, looks through throughout the research process. Therefore the portraitist/researcher must constantly engage in reflexivity to recognize and, to a certain degree, contain their assumptions and biases.

Moreover, as participants engage in the process, they are also involved in a self-reflective process. My conceptual and theoretical frameworks and components of my positionality provide a glimpse of the assumptions, understandings, and background that I believe influenced my dissertation process including construction of research and interview questions, literature, and research methods.

Next, voice as autobiography builds on preoccupation reflects my life story and includes experiences that directly relate to my topic. The first three aspects of voice referred mainly to the researcher’s voice. The next two types of voice incorporate the participants. *Listening for voice* is not necessarily about the facts and what people are saying, but instead how the person shares the facts and the feelings behind/underneath the
stories, including body language, silences and hesitations in speech. Hill (2005) constructed poetic portraits to convey the experiences of three Black women professors. Hill’s interpretation and incorporation of context and voice was true to their understanding that “voice fills the space of the framework” (p. 96) – context being the framework. Listening for others’ voices refers to how the portraitist seeks out and tries to capture “its texture and cadence, exploring its meaning and transporting its sound and message into the text through carefully selected quotations” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 99). Hill’s (2005) short poems described and amplified the professors’ experiences within their particular contexts.

Finally, voice in dialogue is just that, a dialogue among and between researcher, participants, and readers. The portraitist “places herself in the middle of the action” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986, p. 103). Together with the participants’ voices, they both express their views and together define meaning-making. The reader gets involved and is able to hear (read) the researcher’s and participants’ perspectives. Therefore, relationship building is at the center of portraiture.

Through utilizing voice in my inquiry I learned from trans* postsecondary educators about their experiences and conveyed those experiences descriptively into a well-crafted portrait that, hopefully, allows one to empathize with the participants and understand aspects of an unknown world (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I chose this methodology because it allowed me to help readers connect with trans* educators in meaningful and rich ways, and this was particularly important in my study because trans* people are often marginalized, ignored or invisible to many people. In addition, because
the portraitist is the instrument of inquiry, from constructing the focus of inquiry to creating the narrative and everything in between, my role as the researcher/portraitist was evident and explicitly visible throughout the research process (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As someone who identifies as a Black trans* genderqueer postsecondary educator, disclosing my identities and how they inform my experiences and positions was extremely important for me and the research process. Lastly, the idea of searching for goodness provides a balance to monolithic conceptions of trans* as pathology and wrong. In searching for goodness, the focus of the portraitist is on identifying what is happening, what is working, and why - ultimately seeking strength in lived experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

When Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) sought goodness in schools, she described that it was more than separate, reducible measureable qualities such as test scores and graduates, but also included an immeasurable whole. The whole included those things and ideologies, goals, motivation as well as indices of truancy and vandalism. Similarly, my study sought to portray trans* educators’ immeasurable whole experiences, including trials and tribulations, successes and empowerment. The whole includes strength, challenges, weaknesses, imperfections, and vulnerabilities of trans* educators’ experiences in higher education (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986).

Borrowing from portraiture methodology with a critical race lens, Lynn (2006) constructed a portrait of one Black, male teacher. Lynn incorporated aspects of portraiture because it challenges research that does not consider contextual factors in inquiry, race in particular. Lynn was interested in how race and gender interacted in the
teacher’s life. Lynn crafted a descriptive portrait of the teacher using the teacher’s own words alongside the researchers’ interpretations and observations. Lynn also connected aspects of Lynn’s own story to the teachers. One of the reasons portraiture works well with the bioecological perspective and intersectionality is that together they consider and explore the roles of contexts and systems in people’s experiences. Lynn challenged dominant narratives of Black men as I am challenging dominant, monolithic narratives of trans* and educator.

**Portraitist/Researcher Positionality**

As described earlier in this chapter, my positionality and role as the researcher/portraitist are *voice as preoccupation* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Briefly, voice as preoccupation can be understood as the ways in which the portraitist’s observations and writing are shaped by their assumptions. In essence, this is similar to feminist standpoint theory, whereby I recognize and describe how who I am influenced the lens through which I explored my topic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004; Zimmerman, 2005). These assumptions are influenced by my disciplinary background, theoretical perspectives, intellectual interests, and understanding of relevant literature (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Ultimately, voice as preoccupation describes aspects of my lens.

Positioning myself includes naming aspects of my identities in relation to the topic of the study. For example, Bailey (2012) utilized portraiture to illuminate voices of undergraduate women, three Black and one Mexican-American, and all members of a sorority attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Bailey, demonstrating voice as
preoccupation, was also explicit about who they were as the researcher/portraitist and how that influenced various aspects of the study. The researcher identified as a former student leader and current Black queer student affairs professional, acknowledging familiarity and comfort with the environment. Additionally, Bailey spoke to their assumptions, which were influenced by their “deep engagement with the topic because it represents my own academic successes and struggles” (p. 58). Bailey continued naming and owning their relationship to the topic and discussed intentional efforts of reflexivity to examine biases.

Although I identify as trans*genderqueer and present masculine of center, at the beginning of this project, I was most often read and treated as a woman, gender non-conforming, yes, but woman/female nonetheless, with the customary ma’am, she/her/hers, and not given a second look upon entering a women’s restroom. However, months into the project, as I began to change my presentation, these experiences changed. My trans* identity was virtually invisible to others unless I named it specifically, but that changed over time. For example, I have used the same women’s bathroom whenever I am in a particular building with no issues. However, this semester, while attending a meeting and using that restroom, as I am walking in and someone else is walking out I hear them ask out loud “did a guy just go in there?” I brushed it off, did my business, and as I was leaving the bathroom, this same person was outside the door with their phone up ready to take a photo of “the guy in the women’s bathroom.” Not wanting to get into an altercation, I swiftly walked past the person back to my meeting. Immediately I reached out to my trans* educator kin and described what occurred. They affirmed and supported
me, suggested courses of action, and acknowledged how messed up (not in those words) that happened. In the moment, like so many others, I was grateful for them. This is but one example of how my trans* identity has influenced my experiences on campus.

I also work in a Gender and Sexuality Center where my gender and sexuality are welcomed, recognized, sometimes celebrated, and part of the conversations and workshops I facilitate I am often disclosing aspects of my identity and as I experience physical changes, I also experience the world and my work differently. I bring a lot of myself into my work.

My race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, and sex assigned at birth interact in ways where I experience oppression and privilege, often concurrently and simultaneously. I am also influenced by 32 years of living and learning in the United States which has reinforced certain messages around whose life, body, and work matters and whose does not; much of my knowledge has come from a U.S.-centered life, education, and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Throughout my life, my understanding of gender and higher education has been influenced by experiences and knowledge within and outside (e.g., familial, cultural, and societal) of me, and therefore is co-created (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Moreover, higher education has been a space and place to explore aspects of myself and my identity. My epistemology – or way of knowing – has heavily influenced my methodological choices because I believe that knowledge is experience and co-created. Portraiture provides a perfect platform to understand trans* educators’ experiences, and the final portrait represents co-constructed realities of the participants’ and my experiences in higher education.
Building on voice as preoccupation, *voice as autobiography*, as mentioned previously, reflects the portraitist’s own history, including familial, cultural, ideological, and educational (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) that directly relate to my topic. For example, my gender journeying has been an ongoing process throughout my life. Early experiences of being perceived and named a tomboy have had a significant impact on my understanding. Furthermore, I currently work in higher education at a Gender and Sexuality Center where I provide education and training around gender and sexuality identities and issues. As such, I am a visible queer and trans* educator on and off campus who witnesses and works to address trans* inclusion and exclusion on campus on a daily basis. I am deeply invested in expanding understandings of gender, contributing to inclusion on and off college campuses. My connection to the topic is personal and professional. Therefore, throughout the process, I have engaged in reflexivity to acknowledge and address issues and questions that arise. As a part of that process, and to expand on my *voice as autobiography*, I have also included an appendix (see Appendix I) that provides a glimpse into some of my experiences as a trans* genderqueer postsecondary educator.

So as not to overpower the portraits with my own narrative, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described three additional ways the researcher should use voice in portraiture: as witness, listening for voice, and voice in dialogue. These types are described as they relate to my methods of data collection. Moreover, the relationship between researcher and participant illuminates how participants were selected.
Methods

My qualitative study aims for thick and thin descriptive data. I utilized multiple methods to gather data to better understand the educators’ experiences in higher education. The methods of interviewing and participant-observation are in line with portraiture as well as my conceptual framework. This section describes participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and a brief introduction to how the data are presented in the next chapter.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were selected through my connections and relationships with other educators, some trans*-identified, as well as online communities. As I mentioned in Chapter One, trans* is an umbrella concept to capture multiple identities and experiences. In my call for participants, I described some of the labels educators might use:

I am using trans* as an inclusive term for individuals who transgress societal expectations for gender expression, constructing their identities and describing their experiences in various ways: trans*, transgender, transwoman, transman, genderqueer, and agender just a few of the ways folks might identify.

Given the invisibility of trans* educators, these networks were some of the only ways for me to access some of the educators. Specifically, I employed a combination of convenience and snowball sampling from established networks of educators. First, I employed convenience sampling through networks including the T* Circle (Jourian et al., 2015), transacademics listserv, LGBTQ Research and Researchers in Higher Education and Student Affairs Facebook group, direct emails to known trans* educators, and emails to contacts to forward on to others. Prior to ACPA 2015 in March, I reached out to
members of the T* Circle collective to recruit them for my study, knowing I would see and sit on a panel with them at the Convention. I also used that as an opportunity to complete my participant-observation and conduct interviews. Additionally, I sent a call for participants via email (see Appendix A) to the aforementioned listservs to recruit more educators. After receiving several responses, mainly from White trans* educators, but knowing I wanted more trans* educators of color, I then reached out to specific people of color in my networks who could also share the call with their networks. Through these methods, I received a great response.

Ultimately, I interviewed 14 trans* postsecondary educators from California to Connecticut, three of whom also participated in the T* Circle panel I observed. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the trans* educators included in my study. Trans* was used as an umbrella term to capture a range of gender identities and experiences. I allowed educators to self-select into the study based on the criteria of identifying in some way as trans* and working in higher education. These educators described a range of gender identities (i.e., masculine of center, transman, and genderqueer) and experiences with some overlap in how educators named their genders. However, even when there was overlap, the ways in which other identities and labels were included and/or the ways in which they described their identities were unique to each person. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of trans* identified postsecondary educators. There was one person I was encouraged to contact who ultimately self-selected out because they did not believe my call included them as a transsexual. In an email to me they wrote,

While I am a trans man of color who is also a postsecondary educator, the language of your call leads me to believe I am not who you are looking for for
your project…If you don’t mean to exclude transsexuals you might want to change the language of your call. If you do mean to exclude transsexuals, you wouldn’t be the first and [I] wouldn’t take it personally.

Table 1. Trans* Educator Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in Higher Ed</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Inst. Type</th>
<th>Pronoun(s)</th>
<th>Gender &amp; Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Graduate Assistant/Doctoral Associate</td>
<td>Large (&gt;18,000) public, four-year, Midwest</td>
<td>they, them, theirs</td>
<td>Genderqueer; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Doctoral Student/Teaching</td>
<td>Large (&gt;18,000) public, four-year, Midwest</td>
<td>ze/hir</td>
<td>Gender non-conforming; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kody</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Violence Prevention Program Manager</td>
<td>Large (&gt;35,000) public, four-year, west coast</td>
<td>they, them, theirs</td>
<td>trans*genderqueer; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Residence Hall Director</td>
<td>Land grant public research (&gt;30,000), east coast</td>
<td>they, them, theirs</td>
<td>Genderqueer; Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle London</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Large (&gt;16,000) public research, Midwest</td>
<td>ze, zem, zir</td>
<td>Gender queer, gender non-conforming, non-binary trans* identified, masculine-of-center; Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Community college (&gt;15,000), two-year Midwest</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>man, transgender; Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Director Multicultural and Women’s</td>
<td>Large public (&gt;30,000), west coast</td>
<td>she/her/feminine</td>
<td>feminine, transwoman; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Program Coordinator in LGBTQI Life</td>
<td>Large private (&gt;12,000), south</td>
<td>they, them, theirs</td>
<td>masculine appearing, genderqueer, trans, and exploring agender; White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Women’s and LGBTQ Services Coordinator</td>
<td>Four-year public (&gt;7,000), Midwest</td>
<td>they or she</td>
<td>masculine of center, gender nonconforming and Hapa; Multiracial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although I was not trying to exclude transsexuals, this educator read my call that way. However, there were others who decided to participate who also identified as transsexual, which demonstrates the complexities of individual identities and labels and why I allowed self-identification and used trans* as an umbrella.

Additionally, I combined student affairs professionals, also referred to as educators (Calhoun, 1996) and faculty, such that educator is an expansive label that includes people who teach and work in a variety of university or college settings. Their roles focus on curricular and co-curricular engagement and development of college students, including faculty and staff working across the university in academic departments such as sociology and higher education and areas such as the library, residential life, student activities, career development, academic advising, and multicultural affairs. The educators also engage with research and scholarship that informs and evaluates campus activities, educational policy, and may work in governmental and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, based on the educators identified for my study, postsecondary educators also include graduate students in
Master’s and doctoral programs in education, educational leadership, higher education administration, college student personnel, and other related areas because these educators fulfill dual roles as students and faculty/staff. Because I was interested in educators’ experience within higher education as a context, rather than the field, faculty also expanded beyond student affairs and higher education to include such areas as sociology. Moreover, I oversampled my people of color (POC) networks to connect with more trans* POCs. Because most of the literature exploring trans* identities and experiences includes a majority White sample and I wanted to be able to speak to and incorporate voices of color to explore gender, race, and intersectionality. In the end, half of my participants identified as people of color.

Data Generation

In terms of data generation for my study, there were two main sources. The first was my acting as participant-observer during the T* Circle panel discussion at the 2015 ACPA Convention. Prior to the panel, I obtained written permission through an informed consent (see Appendix A) from all T* Circle participants to audio-record and use the dialogue from the session for my dissertation study. The second was 60-90 minute individual interviews with educators during ACPA and the months following the conference. Although only T* Circle panelists had a chance to be part of the participant-observation, theoretically, any trans* educator connected to the networks I reached out to could have participated in an individual interview. Moreover, though I obtained consent from all T* Circle panelists, I did not include everyone in the study. I ended up only including the educators who participated in individual interviews.
I completed two interviews during the conference and recruited other trans* educators to participate in interviews. Following the conference, I interviewed the remaining educators via phone, Skype, or in-person (in Chicago). The participant-observation combined with individual interviews allowed me to explore the relationship between educators and their multiple systems (worlds).

**Consent form and demographic questionnaire.** Prior to data collection, each participant completed a consent form in compliance with Loyola University Chicago institutional review board standards. Once the consent form (see Appendix B) was completed, I asked educators to complete (in-person and via email depending on whether they completed their interview during or after ACPA) a demographic sheet. Educators who completed interviews at the conference site completed their demographic sheet just before their interview. Those who participated in an interview after the conference were emailed the demographic sheet when we confirmed the interview. I asked the educators to return the completed sheet to me prior to our scheduled interview (see Appendix C). The demographic sheet sought some basic information from the participant such as their education, sex assigned at birth, pronouns, gender identities, positions on campus and length of time in higher education, and other social identities that were important to them. The form was open ended so that educators could talk about these dimensions/elements of themselves the way they wanted and with the discourses and understandings they had access to. In this way, I viewed the demographic sheet as an extension of the interview; therefore, open-ended questions were best to capture educators’ own understandings and complexities (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).
Participant observation. While participating in the T* Circle panel discussion during the 2015 ACPA Convention in Tampa, FL, I also took a position as a witness, “on the edge of the scene – a boundary sitter – scanning the action, systematically gathering the details of behavior, expression, and talk” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 87). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis expanded on voice as witness to describe the stance of the researcher as an observer depicting patterns that folks in the scene may not notice. When Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis wrote about voice as witness, there was a distance between the observer and the observed. I was and am a member of this group, the T* Circle, which I think narrowed the distance between the scene and me.

When describing social movement research and the use of participant-observation, McCurdy and Uldam (2014) proposed a four quadrant understanding of participant-observation along two continua: insider/outsider and overt/covert. In my case, as someone so connected to the topic and participants, I was in the quadrant insider-overt. I was both a member of the group, and they were fully informed of my researcher status. Yet, my intentional observation with protocol still allowed me to take on a witness perspective of the panel. The participant-observer protocol (see Appendix E) demonstrates how I systematically used voice as witness, recording “what” (happened) during the panel, including issues and refrains that arose, as well as interesting and illuminating information to address my research questions. Throughout this process, other educators’ voices and mine were in dialogue. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described voice in dialogue as the conversation among researcher and actors, where both are expressing their views and defining meaning-making together. As the portraitist, I
placed myself “in the middle of the action” in the field and in writing and used my *voice in dialogue* with other trans* postsecondary educators (p. 103). The questions in the participant-observation protocol also provided an opportunity for reflection on how the panel conversation among us nine trans* educators addressed my research questions. Following the panel, I summarized what happened in the panel as well as made notes about what I was calling themes at the time which later became refrains, aspects that stood out, and questions I still had and how the data were addressing my research questions.

**Interviews.** To gain deeper understanding of trans* educators’ experiences, establishing rapport and developing relationships were critical to my study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As I discussed earlier, the educators in my study were connected to me and each other through some higher education and trans* networks. There were multiple categories of participant, for example, educators who I had prior professional or personal relationships, friend/colleague to someone in T* Circle, and people I met for the first time through my call for participants. A few of the educators even worked on the same campus as I did years back. To capture some of the nuances of trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences and feelings behind and underneath their stories, including body language, silences and hesitations in speech, I conducted one 60-90 minute interview with each of the 14 educators. The educators selected the date and time from several options and selected their preferred mode of communication, e.g., Skype, telephone, or in-person. In these interviews, I *listened for voice,* not only capturing the information about the educators’ gender identities and experiences on
campus, although I focused on their words, I also paid attention to non-verbal cues, including sighs and silences on phone calls.

During and following the interviews, I also made brief notes about words, phrases, and connections that stood out during the interviews across educators. In those interviews, educators were asked to expound on their demographic information, particularly their gender identities and other identities important to them, as well as their experiences as trans* postsecondary educators working/studying in higher education. The demographic sheet was used to collect a series of short answer responses to get at how they described and talked, through writing, about their identities and multiple experiences, specifically related to their campus contexts. The interviews allowed educators to expound on what they had written on the demographic sheet. In the interviews, we also talked about their perceptions and experiences of their campuses and their relationships to understand the context: physical landscape and setting as well as the historical, cultural, and ideological settings of their campuses (Chang, Milem, & Antonio, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Interviews also explored experiences outside of higher education, which were additional places educators’, identified communities.

At the conclusion of the interviews, each interview and the panel were transcribed with the assistance of a transcriptionist. As a part of singing their life and continued relationship, I shared raw transcripts of the interviews with the educators who participated in interviews for the study for edits and additional comments. In my message to educators, I asked them to:

- take some time to review it [transcript] and make any changes, additions, elaborations, or deletions that you want… Also, if there are things that have come
up for you, related to our interview or my study in general, that you want to share, please send that along as well.

Most of the feedback educators provided on transcripts was connected to keeping their identities masked. Educators were vulnerable in our interviews and wanted to keep their confidentiality, as did I. Additionally, there were other responses educators provided. For example, one educator sent the link to an article where they were featured, another said they were glad they were able to review it because they wanted to add to and clarify. In addition to reviewing for accurate representation of their words, they were also invited to expand on any aspects of their stories they wished. After follow up, all, but one educator either returned transcripts with track changes and/or an email with clarifications.

**Participant Confidentiality**

Given the relationships that some of the trans* educators in my study have, confidentiality was tricky within our overlapping networks. In fact, I am certain that many of them have talked to one another about their participation with one another. However, I have not disclosed, nor will I, anyone’s participation. Educators were also given the opportunity to select a pseudonym. Not everyone chose a pseudonym; however, I have not made any distinctions in the presentation of the data. Those who did select a pseudonym had stories and meanings behind them, like connections to family and mentors. One participant, after initially opting not to select a pseudonym, ultimately chose one at the conclusion of the interview because they were vulnerable and revealed private information about themselves and their institutions.

As was mentioned earlier, educators also received their transcripts and were given the opportunity to take out information that might identify them. During the member
checks, a few educators asked for specific references to be taken out as not to compromise their confidentiality, e.g. partner’s name or their nickname, which came up in the interview. Moreover, I shared preliminary findings and discussion chapters for feedback about the portrait and other feedforward about what emerged.

**Preparing the Canvas**

To construct a portrait of trans* postsecondary educators, the T* Circle panel and I audio recorded each interview and sent them to a third party, sans identifiers, for verbatim transcription. In addition to the transcripts, I also considered my participant-observation notes, memos, and artifacts such as photos taken at the conference, an open letter, and signs made by T* Circle. These were part of the analysis in that they provided contextual information. I also listened to each audio to immerse myself in the data. To listen for voice and pick up on things I may have missed during the interview, the transcriptions and notes from the interviews and panel were analyzed in multiple steps. By analyze, I mean making sense of the information gathered in the participant-observation and interviews also known as *voice as interpretation* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Although all of portraiture can be understood as interpretive, *voice as interpretation* determines aspects of the aesthetic whole, including the language, images, and balance of component parts (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Participant-Observation and Interviews**

There were multiple factors that contributed to how I processed the stories and interviews. In addition to the ongoing relationships and community with the T* Circle, I also felt a kinship and connection to Black and other POC educators, folks who shared
similar understandings of their gender identities, and educators who worked in similar settings. I was able to connect to each educator in different ways. Although portraiture has some prescriptions in how the study could be carried out, such as reading transcripts a specified amount of times, I found that I did not follow all prescriptions to the letter. I read through each transcript multiple times, and skimmed and scanned them many more.

Specifically, I read through and listened to the voices of the trans* postsecondary educators and used their words and reflections, along with my own interpretations, to answer my research questions. The first read through was to re-immerses myself in the interview and into their stories. I wanted to get a sense of what they were saying, and I made note of things that struck me through journaling and memoing (see Appendix D). As I read each, because I knew that ultimately I would weave the stories together to craft a portrait, I was also attuned to aspects that were shared across educators and aspects that contradicted what they were sharing. The second read through, was through printing the transcripts with the educators’ pseudonyms and placing them in a binder in order of interview. In this read through, I highlighted quotations and made notes in the margins for ways in which their stories addressed my research questions. I also made a brief notes sketch based on the second read through. The next two read throughs served multiple purposes in that I paid particular attention to the highlights and notes, transferring them to a separate theme document. The more I added the more refrains I identified. The final read through was to gather any additional information I may have missed. Once the quotations and refrains were together, I went through this document, highlighting and making notes.
This process contributed to collapsing refrains together and decreasing the number of refrains included in my dissertation that directly answered my research questions. Initially, I also listened to the audio before they were transcribed. After the final complete read through, I still occasionally scanned the transcripts and was transported back to the interviews and panel with the educators, hearing the educators’ voice and remembering subtleties like annoyance in their voice at the beginning of our interview, as I observed in Hal’s or sounds of affirmation as with Austin. Throughout the process, I wrestled with how much of myself to include and when and where to include it. I think initially my experiences and stories were dominating the pages. However, I continued wrestling, journaling and talking with people about my thoughts. Ultimately, I am not sure if there is balance, but I do not think balance was what I was going for; instead I sought to amplify our voices as trans* educators in higher education in various ways, not all the same ways.

**Trustworthiness**

Because of my personal and professional connection to my topic, I constantly engaged in reflexivity to recognize and, to a certain degree, contain my assumptions and biases (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) discussed the paradox of the portraitist voice as “central and peripheral” (p. 10). The portraitist does a lot of self-work in this process. In essence I was constantly negotiating my own experiences along with the educators’ as well as journaling about some of the tensions I felt balancing mine and the educators’ voices. Throughout the process, I went back and forth about how to incorporate my voice, while also making sure to address my research
questions. To this end, I continually engaged in reflexive memoing (see Appendix D) to acknowledge and address methodological, theoretical, and personal issues that arose throughout the data collection and analysis processes. I also talked out my hesitancies and challenges with other scholars, representing various racial, gender, sexual orientations, and roles on campus. Presentations of some findings at additional conferences (Women’s Day Conference, March 2016 in Chicago; Expanding Affinit* Trans* Educator Convenging, March 2016 in Chicago) served as additional spaces to solicit reactions and input from other trans* individuals to increase the study’s credibility.

**The Portrait**

In the next chapter, I present brief snapshots of each of the 14 trans* educators I interviewed. Following the snapshots is a fictionalized fishbowl conversation among these educators discussing their experiences on their campuses. Although this dialogue did not actually occur with all of the educators in the way it is presented, the dialogue uses direct quotes pulled from the interviews and T* Circle panel. The data are presented as if these educators are having a conversation with each other in a fishbowl dialogue. The data are presented in this way because community was a common theme across educators’ experiences, whether seeking, building, and/or missing community. I thought it would be particularly poignant to imagine these educators being able to come together to share their experiences with one another. Moreover, one of the goals of portraiture is for it to be accessible to people outside of the academy. By presenting the data as a fictionalized story, there is greater potential for the story to be more accessible, in and out
of the academy, and for people to be able to connect with the story and in some ways understand the trans* educators’ experiences.

In the chapter, I also provided brief introductions to demographic dimensions of the trans* educators who participated in my study, including their age, race, and gender identity as well as information about their roles and departments on campus at the time of the interviews. As identity and roles on campus are ever-evolving and changing, I am certain that some aspects of the educators have changed, shifted, and reoriented in some way. In fact, after sending the educators a working draft of the findings and conclusions chapters, Martina reached out to inform me that her role on campus had changed. However, since the dialogue was meant to capture a moment in time, the moment of our interview, I did not “update” the educators’ information.

A total of 14 educators participated in individual interviews. Of the 14, four of them were also panelists in the T* Circle dialogues. In addition to the 14 educators who provided their voices and experiences, I as researcher and portraitist added my voice and experiences. In some ways, I am also a participant. I participated in the panel with other trans* educators and my voice is woven throughout the next two chapters as a narrator and participant of the emerging portrait.

First, I present a snapshot of each educator; and a portrait of their experiences, painting a picture of them (not necessarily a physical description picture, but rather a descriptive portrayal of their experiences) with words. I primarily used the educators’ own words to construct these snapshots and the semi-fictional panel to honor them, their experiences, and how they identified. Some of the information was pulled from the
demographic sheet (see Appendix A). I asked questions such as “How would you describe yourself? And What aspects of your identity are important to you?” If they participated in individual interviews, the educators were asked to elaborate on the responses in the interview and to provide additional information.

Following the snapshots are the results presented as a semi-fictional fishbowl dialogue that explores the educators’ experiences on campus and the strategies they use to persist and resist in higher education. The names provided are, in most cases, pseudonyms and if there was a possibility of identifying someone based on specific details, those details were described more generally or omitted. The dialogue allows the reader to explore some of the anxieties and excitement educators experience on and off campus, which they described in the dialogue. The dialogue is presented as mostly direct quotations where the educators explore their identities and experiences through descriptions of their campuses and their experiences in their departments, with colleagues, peers, and students in higher education. Throughout the dialogue, there are a few textual differences to note: [Dialogue in brackets] are words, phrases, and questions I added to help the dialogue flow. They are minimal. “Dialogue with quotation marks” are direct quotes from transcripts; finally, my voice as the narrator is included in italics. As the narrator, I am here to connect some dots.

“The portrait is the researcher’s construction of a lived, contextual and cultural setting” (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 277). The purpose of my study was to explore experiences of trans* postsecondary educators. More specifically, my research questions focused on experiences in higher education related to their gender identities and strategies
to persist in higher education. Utilizing the aforementioned methods, I as the portraitist sketched, with words, trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences in context to capture their essence. Each educator’s experiences are conveyed as a composite portrait, in the form of a dialogue that explores refrains across educators. The portrait makes the lived realities and experiences of trans* postsecondary educators more visible. Through thin and thick descriptions, I provided information about trans* educators experiences on campus. Layered with the educators’ stories and experiences are my interpretations and connections of the information.

**Limitations**

Although portraiture was an ideal methodology for my study, there are limitations. First, a portrait is typically a photograph or painting of a person’s face or head and shoulders. A portrait is a representation of a whole. In this case, my final portrait is but a partial representation of trans* postsecondary educators, influenced and mediated by my voice. There is much that is unknown and untold. However, this was apparent at the onset. Furthermore, this essence or representation still adds missing voices to the dearth of trans* narratives in the literature.

Another limitation has to do with sampling for my study. I used convenience and snowball sampling by drawing trans* educators from specific connections, listservs, and a conference that included a specific sample of trans* postsecondary educators who are active on listservs and attend conferences. This did not include all trans* educators. However, I was still able to draw a diverse sample of educators with various races/ethnicities, institutional types, gender identities, and geographical locations through
these relationships and connections. Not so much a limitation, but something to continue discussing is also my role as researcher/portraitist, particularly my experiences and understandings of higher education and gender identity and my identity as trans*genderqueer educator, that were ever present throughout this process.

Summary

In this chapter, I described and supported portraiture as the research design for my dissertation study exploring the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators. As a blending of science and art, portraiture was named by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) and was initially used by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) to explore school environments. Portraiture has also been used in educational research to explore experiences of Black woman professors, Black male teachers, African American student leaders, and others (Ashby-Scott, 2005; Bailey, 2012; Hill, 2005; Lynn, 2006). Like other researchers, the aspects of context and voice were instrumental in my study and influenced my decisions to include aspects of my story, collect data through interviews and participant-observation, and construct a portrait of trans* educators that searches for goodness. Portraiture has resulted in final portraits that take on many forms, e.g., poetry (Hill, 2005). To present the refrains, I decided to take some creative license. Throughout the chapter, I described how I applied portraiture and related research methods. Through a participant-observation and individual interviews, I captured the dynamics of trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences within higher education. As the portraitist, I wove together their voices and stories to create a larger portrait of the complexities of trans* experiences in higher education in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

MEET THE EDUCATORS

Trans* Educator Snapshots

Alex

Alex is a 30-year-old doctoral associate, focused on grants, teaching, research, and technology at a Midwestern institution. Alex has a Master’s in College Student Personnel and worked full-time for three years before starting a doctoral program. Alex described themself as “quirky, eccentric, highly intellectual. Queer, lower class, White.”

Austin

Austin is a 28-year-old Residence Hall Director at a large university in the northeast. Austin has worked in higher education for six years, four of them in their current position. Austin has a Master’s in College Student Personnel. They also described themself as African American, Black, college educated, middle class, American, able bodied person who has struggled with depression.

Dean

Dean is a 32-year-old doctoral candidate who teaches masters level courses in a Student Affairs/Higher Education program at the same Midwestern institution where Alex is a student. Dean recently earned hir Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and has worked in higher education for 11 years, with five years of full-time professional experience and the rest as a graduate student. Dean described hirself as a White, temporarily-able-bodied, gender non-conforming scholar-activist and educator.
Hal

Hal is a 55-year-old Associate Professor of Film Production at a large university in the west. Prior to receiving tenure, Hal also taught as a graduate student and adjunct professor for over 10 years. Hal grew up culturally Italian-American.

Huixol

Huixol (we-ch-ol) is a 24-year-old fraternity and sorority life program coordinator. Huixol is a new professional in the field, with nine months under their belt. Prior to the program coordinator position, Huixol was a graduate student for two years earning an M.A. in Educational Administration and Leadership. Z is also an artist who is expressive and reflective.

Jace

Jace is a 33-year-old Assistant Professor of Sociology at a university in the Midwest. Jace has a Ph.D. in Sociology and has worked in higher education for approximately six years, all at the same institution where he was recently awarded tenure. Jace also considers himself an academic, teacher, researcher, spouse, trans advocate, social justice worker, and lover of popular culture.

Kody

Kody is a 30-year-old program manager for a violence prevention program at a university on the west coast. Kody has a M.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs and has worked in higher education for eight years, five of those after their master’s degree. Kody identified as White, queer, mid-level professional, middle class in an interracial partnership.
Kyle London

Kyle London is a 41-year-old Associate Professor in a Student Affairs/Higher Education program at a Midwestern institution. Kyle has a Ph.D. in Higher Education and Educational Administration and has worked in higher education for 20 years, 10 of those in zir’s current position. Kyle identified as Black, single parent, mom, academic, scholar, and spiritual.

Layla

Layla, short for Euylayle, is 40-year-old director of “three arms of [diversity] centers” at a university on the west coast. Layla has a Master’s in Higher Education and has worked in higher education for 15 years, and about 20 months in her most recent position. She also described herself as a queer strong woman - resilient, confident and boisterous.

Martina

Martina is a 56-year-old Biology Professor and Director of Undergraduate Research. With a Ph.D. in Biology, Martina has been faculty at five institutions over the course of more than 20 years. Martina was also an adopted, first-generation college goer who was raised by “poor Mexican-American parents.”

MW

MW is a 31-year-old librarian, with a Master’s in Information Sciences, working at a community college in the Midwest. He has worked in higher education for nearly 12 years and in his current role over three years. He also described himself as a Black, Christian, gay man.
Riley

Riley is a 26-year-old Program Coordinator in an LGBTQ office at a private institution in the South. Riley has a Master’s in Higher Education and Student Affairs and has worked in higher education and their current position for three years. Riley described themselves as White, currently able-bodied, middle-class, U.S. citizen, queer trans, genderqueer, plural pronoun using student affairs professional. They also described themselves as a partner, furbaby parent, sibling, and child.

Sebastian

Sebastian is a 31-year-old woman’s and LGBTQ services coordinator at a college in the Midwest. Sebastian has a Masters of Education in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs and is currently a doctoral candidate in Higher Education Administration. She has worked in higher education for eight years, over two in their current position. Sebastian is also a lifelong learner and educator. They are the eldest of five siblings, a daughter, and a partner.

Sloane

Sloane is a 35-year-old Assistant Professor of Social Sciences at a community college in the Midwest. Sloane has a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies/Sociology. They have been teaching for 13 years, and at their current institution over four years. Sloane identified as multiracial and queer, and also as athlete, teacher, and driven.
Coming T*gether: A Fishbowl Panel

The proceeding semi-fictional fishbowl dialogue is a depiction of a conversation among trans* educators at a national conference. I participated on the panel, on which this is based, and acted as a participant-observer, taking notes, engaging, and reflecting on the dialogue. I have adapted a similar format to present the findings. In addition to quotations and dialogue from the T* Circle panel discussion, I have also woven in the voices from those educators who only participated in individual interviews. This fishbowl dialogue explores refrains connected to micro and macrosystems that emerged among educators’ experiences, including, names and pronouns, co-constructing identity, relationships and communities, and identities in/at work. Further, the fishbowl dialogue presents findings of on and off campus experiences specific to their identities and how they understand them and how they show up (e.g., multiple identities and intersectionality, and experiences of isolation, invisibility, and hypervisibility) on and off their campuses. I have positioned the refrains this way to demonstrate the multiple perspectives and experiences these educators’ carry with them every day, and in essence bring into different contexts.

Before the Fishbowl

*I arrived at the conference feeling excited that I would be united with the T*

Circle. I was disappointed to be doing it in a state that was trying to restrict liberties of trans* people in the form of bathroom legislation, with an organization that was signaling their awareness of the issue with gender neutral bathroom options at the conference. However, like many campuses across the country, organizational
leadership’s implementation of inclusive policies and practices were inconsistent and superficial. I was looking forward to spending time in our trans* bubble.

**Setting the Stage (Navigating Identities and Relationships)**

Kody and I were the first to arrive, setting out to trans* form the room with our session, starting with the furniture. We came in, rearranged the furniture so that we were in a circle in the middle of the room, in the middle of the “audience” chairs, in a fishbowl. As we placed the chairs into the circle, others started coming in, offering to help and make conversation. Once we all filed in and it was time to get started, there were nine trans* educators in a tightly formed inner circle, and nine trans* educators (something we would discover later) formed a ring around us, leaving our moderator as the only cisgender identified person in the room. The way the chairs and room were arranged, the inner circle could see each other, and the outer circle was at a distance where they could also see and be “in” the dialogue. The panel was set up in this way because we wanted folks to be able to see and hear one another, but we did not want to be at the front of the room like a traditional panel that is often elevated and separated from the audience. In this way, we were disrupting normative expectations of conference etiquette. We knew from our first dialogue that many people in the room might identify as trans* and we wanted to be with them. We also wanted them to be with us. We were inviting other trans* people to speak and share their experiences, stories, and questions. We invited other trans* educators to share their experiences with us.

The moderator was an associate professor who identified as a Black cisgender woman. Her role allowed panelists to have a conversation without the imposition of a
power structure within the group or one person needing to control the flow of the conversation. LPD was a perfect choice because she is a postsecondary educator who is attuned to issues of oppression, marginalization, and intersectionality, and ways in which they play out in higher education. LPD was there to help us move the dialogue along, facilitate the reflections from the audience, encourage us to elaborate and go deeper, and reflect back to us what she was hearing from the panel. Everything was all set, but as with many plans, ours changed. I invite the reader into some of the trans* educators’ panel conversation at the conference. We pick up as introductions are occurring.

**Introductions**

LPD started the dialogue, [With such an intimate audience, we can have everyone introduce themselves. Please include your name, pronouns, if any, and your role as well as how long you’ve worked in higher education. We’ll start with the panel and then the audience. Should I go first?]

*Everyone nodded in affirmation.*

My name is LPD and I’m an Associate Faculty member at a Midwestern university and these wonderful people have invited me to moderate this dialogue. My research focuses on culture centers and Black collegiate women. I’ve worked in higher education for some years.

*There was a collective laughter to LPD’s use of the word “some.”*

LPD continued, my preferred pronouns are she, her, and hers. Okay who would like to go next?

Alex was the first to speak, I’ll go.
LPD looked at Alex and asked, who would go after them. Alex looked left and said, lets go that way indicating Dean, the person to their left.

LPD said, OK.

My name is Alex and I use they/them/their pronouns. I’m a second year doctoral student at Midwestern University. I’ve worked in higher education for seven years, three of those as a professional and the other four as a student.

Dean - Doctoral candidate at a Midwestern university. I use ze and hir for pronouns. I have worked in higher education for 11 years, two as a master’s student, five years as a full-time professional, and now four as a doctoral student with Alex.

Hi folks. My name is Kody. I use they/them/their pronouns and I’m a Program Manager at a large university in the West. I’ve worked in higher education for eight years, five post-master’s.

Hi, I’m Austin. I work in residential life at a University in the Northeast. I have worked in higher education for six years, four of them in my current position. They/them/their pronouns or Austin.

Hello everyone. You can call me S and you can also use S as a pronoun or they/them/their. I am a doctoral candidate in higher education program. I am also an assistant director of a gender and sexuality center.

Once the inner circle introduced themselves, LPD invited the audience to also introduce themselves.

She said, Okay lets hear from folks in the audience.
Everyone looked around trying to see who would go first. After a few seconds,

*Riley spoke.*

Riley says, Hey.

LPD started, [Who will go after you?] *Mixing things up, Riley points to their right.*

LPD says, OK.

OK. Hey there. So happy to be here. I’m **Riley** and I’m a Program Coordinator in an LGBTQI office in a Southern University. I use they/them/theirs or just Riley. I’ve worked in higher education and in my current position for three years.

*Kyle, knowing zir was next, jumped in.*

Hi everyone. My name is **Kyle London** and I’m Associate Professor in higher education and student affairs at a university in the Midwest. I’ve worked in higher education since the mid-90s and in my current position about 10 years. I use ze/zim/zir pronouns.

Okay. Me? My name is **MW**. I’m a librarian at a community college, also in the Midwest. I’ve been in my current position about three and a half years and in higher education almost 12 years. Wow, it’s been that long? You can use he/him/his.

Hey y’all I’m Eulayle, but you can call me **Layla**. Most recently I was the Director of the Multicultural and Women’s Centers at an institution in the West. I left that position a few months ago. I’ve been in higher ed about 15 years. I use feminine pronouns.
Greetings folks. My name is **Sebastian** and I’m a Coordinator in women’s and LGBTQ services at a university in the Midwest and have been in that position for two and a half years.

“Since I’ve arrived at the university I've been moved around a couple of times [laugh] and the reason I sort of laugh a little bit when you ask that is today… So you know if you would have asked me a year ago then it was different and probably a little less than thirty days then it will probably be different again.”

Oh yeah, I’ve worked in higher education for eight years. You can use she or they for me.

Hello. I’m **Sloane** an Assistant Professor of Social Sciences at a community college in the Midwest. I’ve been teaching for 13 years and four and a half years at my current institution. I prefer they pronouns, but most people use she.

Hi. **Jace.** Assistant Professor of Sociology at a Midwestern University. I have worked in higher ed since 2009, all at the same institution. I recently was awarded tenure at my university. I use he/him/his pronouns.

My name is **Hal** and I’m an Associate Professor of Film in the Bay area. I started teaching as a grad student in 1996. I taught as an adjunct between 2000-2008. In 2008 I accepted the tenure track position here in Midwestern Institution. I am now tenured. I use he/him pronouns.

*It seemed that at that moment the faculty were looking around at each other with a knowing look. A look of acknowledgement and congratulations.*
Good afternoon. My name is Martina and I'm the Director of Undergraduate Research at a Jesuit Institution in the West. I have been a faculty member since 1991 and have worked at five institutions. I use she, her, etc. pronouns.

Hi. I’m Huixol (we-ch-ol), a Program Coordinator in a Sorority and Fraternity Office in the Pacific Northwest. My work in higher education started as a student. I had a graduate assistantship that paid for my master’s program two years prior to my current position. In terms of direct student affairs positions, I have been in the ‘new professional’ category for nearly nine months. I use they and Z for pronouns.

As we went around the room introducing ourselves, including our names, pronouns, and roles on our respective campuses, we were preparing the room for a dialogue among educators. Recently, the inclusion of pronouns is one way introductions unfold in higher education, especially when there is a consideration for trans* and gender non-conforming folks. This illuminates the importance of names and pronouns, however, there is a tension between naming/pronouning oneself and how that manifests in interpersonal and systemic encounters. After the introductions there was some reflection on the relationship between names, pronouns, and trans* educators in higher education.

Breaking Artificial Boundaries/Binaries: Re/Defining Gender

We looked around the room after introductions and realized the way we were positioned still created a sense of separation that we did not want. So before the group moved on, we decided to get rid of the artificial boundaries and invited everyone to make
one large circle. This represented another shift in the room and group, expanding the T* circle.

Once we were settled into one large circle, with the audience and panelists sitting together. LPD brought us back to the dialogue.

Since we’re mixing things up, I’m going to go a little off script here. I wonder if we could start with people talking about how they identify and what that means to and for them? LPD asked and then sat back.

Alex asks a clarifying question. [Do you mean our gender?]

You can answer that however you want, and we can start there? LPD answered with a smile.

“Well,” Alex elaborated, “[gender is] something I play with and is constantly on my mind…Most often when I talk about gender I identify as genderqueer, but I know that’s also loaded with a lot of different meanings and you know, tensions and I don’t necessarily feel entirely comfortable with that either. Androgynous, I don’t know. I guess I could see, I see value in a lot of different ways of identifying in the moment, contextually. So if I’m with somebody that I don’t know I’m not like, I’m not going to right away identify myself as a genderqueer person but I think that’s also a process of negotiation. Getting to know someone, figuring out if they’re okay to share that and would be able to understand it without me having to explain myself a billion times because that happens.”

Alex wanted to know if anyone else felt that way.
Kody was connecting with what Alex said and added, “Often times I talk about my gender just using ‘trans*’ because it is more recognizable by more people and I don’t always want to go into explaining. However, genderqueer is the identity label that is most salient to me.” Kody elaborated, “What genderqueer means to me is that my gender exists beyond a binary, and is beautifully complicated. Neither ‘man’ nor ‘woman’ encompasses how my gender feels, and I refuse to be labeled with such confining terms. I think some of the words that come to me are beautifully complex and ever evolving. I think that I have a lot yet to discover about my gender and I’m so excited about that.”

Kyle wanted to add to the genderqueer conversation… “So the gender-queer really is sort of that notion of not being ‘either...or’ and also ‘both...and’ and ‘neither.’ So that works for me.”

_LPD wanted to know if Kyle, and others, thought genderqueer captured zir’s gender._

Kyle continued, [Not really. I also identify as gender non-conforming, non-binary trans* identified, masculine-of-center].

“The gender-nonconforming is …tapping into the trans* gressiveness and really wanting to…having language that emphasizes the trans*gression of my gender presentation. So going from the inside out I'm not going to conform to a binary system or something that is appropriate so a deliberate resistance to that that I think the gender-nonconforming specifically pushes. Masculine-of-center helps to locate where I am on the gender spectrum,… I'm not dead-center,…and that helps to clarify that but it's a non-binary trans* identity… And I would rather be able to push for recognition as a non-
binary identified trans* person. So it's not simply about I've moved from here to there. No, I've never been there first of all…”

[Something you said really resonated with me.] Dean was feeling Kyle.

“[Yeah. Right?] Gender is both a personal identity—a way I identify for myself—as well as a political identity—I transgress and do not conform with gender norms. Because I see my identity as an act of resistance to gender norms, I identify as gender non-conforming more than genderqueer. For me, the name just seems to embody a bit more of the notion that I see what gender norms I am meant to follow and actively choose not to do that.”

Dean added, “And I have grown more confident and comfortable in thinking about how my trans*ness shows up in my role as an educator and as a scholar.”

Austin talked specifically about their socialization,

“[To add on to what folks are saying, like] I was raised female but don’t feel that describes how I experience myself or the world; therefore, I don’t go by female pronouns. I understand myself to be masculine centered [too]. I like expressing masculine and feel that is most true to me. I do appreciate the female perspective in how it informs my masculinity. I don’t want to perpetuate ‘traditional’ forms of masculinity that can be oppressive. Genderqueer [for me] says, my gender can’t be assumed, my experiences can’t be assumed. And I don’t feel I fit in the binary.”

Austin added,

“It's like I was raised female and I definitely value a lot of that experience. I feel like I’m masculine centered, but I’m not man. I may look like a queer man, but I’m not
man. I’m not female. But I’m not in the middle either. It's kind of like a combination of all my experiences and it kind of creates another gender for me. I don’t have a language for [it], but I’m not genderless. So really I live by that third gender idea because I do feel gendered.”

Sebastian described their gender as masculine of center with a female body. She identified with labels such as boi and gender nonconforming. Sebastian wanted to contribute to the conversation, she elaborated,

“I think gender nonconforming comes from this sense that I'm really dissatisfied with how society has attached really oppressive expectation of norms and values to female-bodied individuals. I feel that I don't conform to those gender traits and resist them quite actively…It means I feel most comfortable in dapper, fashionable and masculine attire, express more masculine traits and behaviors than feminine.”

The first few educators to share described non-binary identities. After Sebastian finished, there was a few moments of silence. People looked like they were checking in with themselves about what folks shared. LPD let the silence linger for a few more beats and then asked if anyone else wanted to talk about their identities.

“I am a transwoman…”

Everyone turned toward Layla.

She continued,

“I am queer, strong woman. I am resilient, confident and boisterous. I do believe my gender presentation, as well as my own identity, is pretty hyper feminine. I like to get my nails done; I like to do makeup… There's a reality that I, Layla, am kind of a half step
away from being a cartoon character because I’m so loud, I’m so outgoing and I’m very kind of in your face. [My mentor] said, ‘If you choose to become a dean of students the university that will embrace you you're just going to live, you're going to retire at.’ And what would be more in my success, and a few people have been saying this to me, former supervisors as well as mentors, that I really do need to embrace my hyper femininity and if I want to wear hats on Fridays then wear hats on Fridays.”

Martina was also thinking about the construct of gender and her own.

“While there are many nuances associated with ‘gender’, for me, it describes a suite of physical, emotional and mental qualities/patterns that are typical of females vs. males. Having lived much of my life as a male, I can attest that ‘life on the other side’ is quite distinct, in that as a female, I look different and feel and think in ways that were not common for me before entering transition. The other thing for me I suppose is the level of happiness that comes from aligning your values, your idea of who you are with your daily life and all the ways that can meet a hundred percent, that’s super cool...Because now there's less of dissonance, less of this pretending these things I always knew that I was I’m out there 100%, and that’s really wow.”

I wanted to add, so I chimed in.

“[I also use] trans* genderqueer and [also, I would add] fluid and I think that I used to treat it more rigidly, thinking that I had to be one way or another and how that often manifests before was hyper masculinity. But I think I’m at a point now where I just feel different and want to be able to express that and even if it doesn’t make sense to people or even if it doesn’t make sense to me sometimes that’s just what it is right? It's
the genderqueer, fluid; you know the sex assigned at birth just is that. It's a marker that folks use to make some assumptions that may or may not be accurate. May or may not be necessary, and I think that I sort of perform many gender expressions and ways of being and, you know, have gotten more comfortable with being able to do that, and I guess the last thing I would add is the intentionality. So I am pretty intentional in sort of challenging the binary. I try to do that in how I engage with the world. I try to do that in how I talk about things. So I guess it's both personal and felt and like this active resistance [like others have shared].”

Martina had been thinking about her gender journey,

“I’ve always told people because I’ve always had this vision in my life that’s why this gender issue never tore me down and made me incapable of living because I always knew that even if I went to my grave without having transitioned I was going to be okay because I had bigger fish to fry in my book which is this other stuff I’m alluding to. It might be sad and stuff but there was no way I was going to let this world get away without being better… So for me it's really been kind of like having an existence where the things I always knew I was about are really there on display and there's no dissonance anymore.”

Riley also resonated with the idea of masculine of center/masculine centered and explained [I’m connecting with what many of you have said. I see myself as] “masculine appearing, genderqueer, trans, and exploring agender…It means I describe my gender from an external and internal influences…for me personally …the development of my gender identity throughout my whole life has felt very natural and like I’ve had space to
do that for the most part. I never experienced a lot of dysphoria in any sense, in what people think that narrative is. Around like folks feeling trapped and like that’s just not been my narrative or my experience. When I have personally had these moments of self-discovery I had the space to explore that and like continue. And every piece of that has felt really natural. I just continue external influences that make me check or show up in different ways or like think I have to present in different ways, but like overall, just always how I see myself it’s been a very natural thing. …I've always been Riley in that I think my gender identity is really wrapped up in that because I think my personality has traits of like this middle or androgynous real feminine masculine that really connects to where my gender identity sits.”

LPD came in. [It seems like many of you have given this a lot of thought. How about others? What are you thinking or feeling?]

Trying to keep to themselves, but saying it loud enough that everyone heard, Sloane said, through clenched teeth, “Annoying!”

Everyone looked toward Sloane, and they could tell from our faces that we wanted them to say more.

Sloane continued,

“How I ‘see’ myself and how others see me are very different… I’m pretty aware of how others view me in terms of gender… I think most people would identify me as female just in terms of their interactions with me but that is not how I identify myself... generally I think of it as gender non-conforming or genderqueer. To me that means that I don’t subscribe to gender in its traditional male/female sense. I feel more comfortable
when I am viewed or treated as more masculine, but there are only a few folks who really know that about me.”

MW explained his identities of man and transgender, “man because that’s my own internal sense of my gender. I'm trying to describe more than that. Transgender because I guess it refers to my experience being assigned a different gender at birth and compared to my current identity transgender comes into just the history part of my gender identity.”

Jace was nodding as MW spoke, and once MW was done, Jace added,

“So yeah when I think about, I mean I talk about my identities often like in either classes or presentations and I don’t identify as a man. I think [this] is the important thing. I think a lot of people assume that I do and I don’t necessarily think that’s a bad assumption but that word just doesn’t feel correct to me. It's like it doesn’t encompass the experiences I've had in my life. I didn’t experience a male socialization, so I have things about my past that were more female typical … So I think the words like guy or dude just kind of fit better because it doesn’t, at least in my mind, naturally assume some sort of biology that I don’t have and I’m okay with not having… I do not identify as male, as for me it’s a designation of not being socialized or raised as male.”

I sat there thinking they both talked about their socialization contributing to how they identify, yet they did not necessarily use the same words to name them.

Hal was also feeling connected as a transsexual man,

“For me that means I was born female and at some point I did medical transition with hormones and surgery in effort to align my physical self with the internal gender
that I feel like I've always had. That’s how I define it. I do identify as male although I think there's always some, in some ways I feel like we're all some place an individual version of gender. That probably doesn't just strictly adhere to male or female. For the sake of my life in the world I live as a man… I am a Transsexual Man. I’ve identified for years just as a transman that I identify as male; I have some differences as a transman from a cisgender man, including the fact I lived and was perceived as female for 37 years of my life so I have a history of those things such as I know that sexism exists firsthand, which I think from my experience, from cisgender men really question that, I think they kind of think that women are making sexism up. And that it doesn’t really exist because they haven't experienced it. But for me, I've had work experiences and other types of experiences that I've had sexism leveraged against me before I transitioned so the first 37 years of my life.”

*I could tell from her nods that Layla was connecting with Hal’s comment about sexism. She comes back to it later in the dialogue.*

Huixol, after a few moments of silence, said,

“[Hal, your comment about different versions of gender is interesting. I think] my gender is other. I am constantly rewriting the story of what my gender is because often the words that exist to describe genders, Two Spirit, nonconforming, and muxe don’t quite fit how I feel about who I really am. Other, in that way, is what fits right now.”

*As folks were describing their identities, LPD got up and started writing some of the words on a whiteboard that was in the room (see Figure 1).*
Figure 1 shows the identities of the educators in a word cloud to visually represent how they were describing their gender identities.

As we sat there, sharing our identities and understandings related to gender, it seemed that the possibilities of gender expanded with us. Hearing parts of ourselves in others’ stories, and also seeing how we may have slightly different perspectives and experiences. As we opened up the possibilities of gender, we wanted to know more about each other.

More Than Gender

In addition to talking about our gender identities, we also explored other aspects of ourselves that also influenced our experiences inside and outside of higher education.
LPD brings us back, “[Well, folks had a lot to share about their gender identities, I’m thinking about higher education and wondering] What are the intersections of identity that you think about and impact you specifically within higher ed?”

Martina was first to jump in. She said,

“Among other things, I am an adopted, first-generation college goer who was raised by poor Mexican-American parents in [city], California. While they were loving in many ways, they were not open to life choices which were different from what they considered normative and so I hid my trans nature for much of my life. In any case, perhaps as a result of the challenges of my background/upbringing, I developed into a kind, considerate and positive person who is helpful to everyone and who works hard to get things done but who is also funny and laid back. More generally, I strive in all I do to help make the world a better and more just place, both on and off campus.”

Kody shared next.

“Aside from my gender, the most salient aspects of my identity are my race (White), sexuality (queer), professional status (practitioner, mid-level professional), assigned birth sex (female and socialized as a girl/woman) and class (middle class). I am in an interracial partnership and that is also very salient for me.”

Dean started, “As a…” paused briefly and then went, “As a White, temporarily-able-bodied, gender non-conforming scholar-activist and educator I usually get really nervous stringing together identities, mostly because I worry it doesn’t actually mean that much or display a lot of introspection about what those identities mean. However, my racial identity, dis/ability identity, and my role/status as an educator and scholar are all
important to how I come to know myself (as well as the direction of my work itself). In particular, the privilege I have as a White and able-bodied person has motivated me to interrogate these identities more, particularly as they mediate my gender identity...these identities, more than others, are very present... on a regular basis, and very much influence how I see and think about both my own life and the world in which I live.”

Kody wanted to clarify.

“[Dean I completely agree.] So growing up as a White person and hearing a lot of what it means to be white and what I deserve as a White person and what value I bring as a White person, all of that nasty shit that I've internalized. So kind of having to challenge that and question that and constantly work on how does that show up in the way that I come to conversations that are cross racial and the way that I chose to lead with students or in the way I choose to lead with colleagues. Even in my relationship with my partner who’s not White, right? Acknowledging sort of how Whiteness comes to that.”

Jace contributed his perspective,

“I consider my own experience to be very fortunate one. I have been able, I’ve had a lot of benefits in my life that a lot of other people haven’t. I try to recognize that as much as possible because even though I see the world through a certain set of lenses, I know I have benefitted off of the privilege I got in society. So being a masculine presenting person has benefitted my life immensely. Being White, highly educated person has benefitted my life immensely... but that’s exactly why I think it's important that I do talk about these things because I can get a group of White high school teachers in [the state] to listen to me... I think a lot of times my colleagues don’t even think about
it. They just think about like I’m willing to do work that I think is important and I’m
certainly going to screw up occasionally, but I’m going to keep trying to make stuff
better.”

LPD was picking up a thread. [It seems that race seems to intersect with gender
for many of you. What do other folks, particularly folks of color, think about that?]

Sloane paused before adding,

“So I have less problems talking about race for example even though I’m multi-
racial. That’s really easy because like people kind of get that. So you know I can explore
that with my students for example…. Living life in the balance the in-betweens…a bit
unsettled. I would say my racial identity, sexual identity, and gender identity are all
important aspects of myself, but because they’re all three VERY invisible, I often
experience cognitive dissonance [between] how I view myself and how I’m certain
society views me, etc.”

Kyle had been trying to say something, but was allowing others to speak first,

“[I’m thinking about my] Blackness, I think part of it with being born and raised
in [large major city in the US] and so having connection through that geographic place,
also a history, a really powerful and rich history of blackness being raised in a
predominantly Black community with a Black mother, Black family, you know and
participating therefore in conversations always that were drenched in Blackness. And it
was good, it was affirming and it was how I first came to understand issues of oppression
and violence and in all of that was through that racialized lens. So that’s my first lens on
the world. And it's one that I have always held onto dearly; that's how I entered some
issues of justice and equity was through the lens of race and my own marginalized identity as a Black person and then connecting that to other people of color. And so it remains important and it remains, I think, a very valuable - I'm glad I had it because it's not work for me to, using an intersectional lens.”

LPD was looking at Huixol. Huixol, you look deep in thought, would you like to add something?

Huixol leaned into the circle more and said,

“Whether that be in my work, my art, my writings, my emotions, and then some. I am also reflective, spending more times than not considering the world and how I am affected and an effect in it. It is important that I am seen as a person that is outside of gender, connected to my culture, passionate about life, and proud to have family.”

After Huixol spoke, everyone seemed to be reflecting. After a few moments of silence, LPD asked if people were okay to take a break at that point. Everyone agreed. During the break we were talking to the people around us, learning a little more about where people were coming from and insights we were having.

Negotiating Campus Role

About seven minutes into our break we were informed that LPD had an emergency and would not return for the remainder of the session. Unbeknownst to the rest of us, LPD had already talked to Dean about not feeling well and that if she needed to leave, she asked if Dean could take over. Dean agreed, so when we were told that she would not return, Dean jumped right in to fill in as panelist/moderator without skipping a beat. As Dean filled in, the space seemed to shift slightly, again. Now we were a room of
only trans* educators. We were making history. We were now moderating ourselves and were about to get more into our conversation about our experiences.

Dean checked in with people to make sure we were okay with hir taking over. We assented with nods, smiles, verbalizations, and other signals that it was okay.

[Ok, so hearing what you all are saying about some of your identities, I’m curious, how, if at all, do your identities influence your role on campus?]

MW jumped right in,

“[As a librarian, I’m like a walking resource, literally.] I’ve used my gender identity to educate others at the campus. When I first came out at the college, I came out in the form of a gender identity workshop that I did. The first time I did that workshop, I didn’t come out. When the evaluation said, ‘This would be a lot better if it was done by a trans* person.’ I was like, okay. Then the second day I did the training - the same thing, I came out and it made a huge improvement. People were engaging more. People felt more comfortable asking questions and at that point I was like I think that being out really allows people, it’s seen as an educational tool right? I think peoples’ personal stories are the most effective tool they have in creating change.”

Sebastian concurred,

“I feel like my identities are my work. I feel like my identities are often under the microscope because of my work. Part of the negotiation that’s important for me to stay true to myself and keep parts of myself private and sacred and practice self care is that when I do training and education and other programs and sort of give examples to people about how to support trans* and LGBQ people, I have these set of lessons from my own
life that I feel comfortable sharing and that I have rehearsed in my head a little bit so that they are ready for retrieval.”

*Both MW and Sebastian used their identities as educational and teaching tools in an intentional way. This is a choice that they both made.*

Alex was reflecting and added, “I’m not out all the time and it changes based on where I’m at.”

Jace jumped in before Alex could finish.

“The classes I intentionally come out in are specifically about sexuality; other classes like intern class I don’t usually come out in. I feel like it might either be a distraction and students would get hung up on it or I also think that the fact that I, I even dislike this phrase, but I pass. Students often have no idea that I’m trans*. So I can use that to my advantage to get them to think about things in a different way...So it’s almost like I’m able to use the privilege that I have in looking like a white guy in a way to subtly subvert things that I think helps them not get hung up on stuff.”

Noticing Alex had not finished what they were saying, Dean interjected and turned to Alex. Alex did you have something else you wanted to add?

*Jace, realizing he had cut Alex off said, [My bad Alex.]*

Alex paused for a moment, looked down, gathered their thoughts and added,

“[Well], if I’m at an event with no form of community or support to back me up, because I’m pretty shy as an individual, I’m not going to be the first person to volunteer to talk or you know like meet all the people at an event. If I feel like the context is I don’t
know, okay for me to do that I’ll be more comfortable sharing that but it's usually not the first thing that I do every single time I meet someone.”

Having more to add, Jace continued after Alex -

“[I also wanted to add]…So I try to bring them into class and I think that, I decided to do very intentionally maybe three or four years ago because I know I have queer students, I know I have trans* students in the audience who are looking for any indication that they are ok and that they are loved and accepted because these two classes in particular, stats and methods, are gen ed courses. So majors who are all over the map take those courses.”

Sloane talked about their experiences in the classroom,

“[my campus is] predominantly heterosexual, cisgender White students…But I want to be neutral in a sense that I am accessible to students regardless of where they are on any identification scale, and so I tend to let them think what they want to think because it pushes their boundaries a little bit for example when they think I’m a lesbian…I sometimes worry that if I sort of commit in a way you know to how I personally identify or whatever the case may be I may lose some of those students that maybe thought differently about the topic I guess.”

“[Yeah, that resonates with my experience with some colleagues, they] kind of minimize[ed] like my feedback as [a] trans* professional. One really good example is we were asked to review some curriculum this person developed and I thought the curriculum was trans* phobic. So I shared that in a meeting space and the response was
basically, ‘It's important to separate the person from the professional.’ So kind of like the subtext there like because I was trans* like my feedback didn’t really count somehow.”

Kody shared in a low, steady voice.

*I was reflecting on this idea of being perceived as more or less credible if we disclose our identities, and the thought that goes into when and where to share. Mid thought, Hal jumped in with his experience feeling excluded from a department on campus.

Hal was thinking about his experience,

“there's a very strong woman gender studies community on campus, but they are very focused on feminism in such a way that it kind of enforces the binary, is what it seems to me. It really kind of pits women against men and men against women, but in that way it enforces man and woman and that's where I end up feeling like even though I've identified for years just as a transman. I have some differences as a transman from a cisgender man, including the fact I lived and was perceived as female for 37 years of my life so I have a history of those things such as I know that sexism exists firsthand, which I think from my experience, cisgender men really question that; I think they kind of think that women are making sexism up. And that it doesn’t' really exist because they haven't experienced it. But for me, I've had work experiences and other types of experiences that I've had sexism leveraged against me before I transitioned so the first 37 years of my life. But at [my institution] that is hardly ever considered in the realm of the woman gender studies program. I feel like I've been kind of positioned as, I don't know how to say this,
but kind of as a guy because I'm male and it's difficult for me because my history is what makes me different.”

Sloane connected with what Jace was saying,

“[With the LGBT student group I advised] I felt like I somehow needed to pull out some identity resume and like prove I was [queer]...I feel unwelcomed and uncomfortable in this space that’s supposed to be welcoming and I don’t so I chose to not be the advisor any longer...we don’t have something similar for faculty and I’m not so sure that if we did, I probably wouldn’t participate because that’s just more face time with people I don’t really want to hang with.”

That resonated with Layla,

“And that’s why for me, my own story when I talk about if for me my identity has been about surrendering privilege. I am treated like I’m less intelligent I don’t have the same opportunities that I had 10 years ago and it’s just insane [sic] to me. For me sexism is so prevalent because I lived with the privilege of being male for over 30 years. So when men say things or men constantly touch women there are things that have really happened to me in the past four to five years that I have really had to sit back and process and recognize that this is sexism, and I think my mentor said, ‘I’m not saying this to be a bitch, but you wanted to be a woman. Welcome to being a woman.’ And there’s sad truth to that. There’s absolutely some. The sexism in higher ed and the difference in how men and women are treated and the expectations of men and women, I know that I’m walking proof of sexism in our society.”
Austin contemplated whether to tell this story, and then decided to share their own story of exclusion.

“So I was just misgendered for like 2 years. I have this one colleague I’m thinking about who has really been a pain in my ass. I mean he is the epitome, he has been so violent towards me, he doesn’t even know it. He has flat out told me I don’t believe in this. Flat out told me. Three years in, continued to misgender me. Folks have been calling him out when he continues to misgender me. It's almost to the point where there are times I think he's doing it on purpose. When he recounts stories to me that he conversates with people about me where he had allowed misgendering to happen or misgenders me in the story. Or talks about people in a way where they’re misgendering me and uses the verbatim, know what I’m saying? …kept triggering me. He would always refer to me as his sister. I mean almost to a point of like it was just driving me wild. It was every time he would see me he would repeatedly, ‘My sister, my sister, my sister’. And it started triggering me so bad, I was like, I have to say something.”

Austin also recounts how this experience extended beyond the interactions with this one person,

“I remember it got to the point; we had a social justice workshop I had kind of helped organize. Someone pretty prominent in the field came and did a day-long workshop with us. And they misgendered me. I remember just feeling so betrayed. I was in a room with most of my department and a few folks from other departments in student affairs and no one said anything. And I remember just sitting there like, nobody's going to say anything? I remember just walking out. One of my supervisors came outside... And I
just started crying and I don’t cry. I mean I started crying. This was the supervisor I first came out to and I just said... I don’t even think I spoke honestly I think I just cried and she just kind of hugged me. Then she said, ‘I want you to know once you left folks did speak up and people did say something.’ A couple of my other colleagues had spoken up and I remember just saying ‘that’s great but I had left. It's like if you hadn’t of come out here to tell me I might not have known that.’”

*Expanding the dialogue beyond physical walls and boundaries of institutions, the educators also considered the influence and impacts of systemic structures and ideologies.*

Riley shared an example,

“The program coordinator that left before I started working there was a trans* man of color and folks would very much be like, ‘Oh you're the new ‘that person’s name,’ but also to engage me with this way of kind of like, I don’t know, but then I eventually got this very clear narrative that I was more approachable and friendly and kind and like spit the normative narrative, like ‘you're the nice white trans* person that will smile and talk to me’ like, ‘I can mess up and you won’t be angry’ or things like that.’ That narrative has become clearer in the three years that I’ve worked there. Like it's a joke in our office, but the joke is really real. Like we'll talk about it, we joke about this is why and what it looks like so I think it's grown to like, okay I can do some work here but then also how does that feel shitty, how does that feel around my own internalized guilt around that. Like, spaces I’m taking up that others folks should be.”

*Riley wanted to know whether other folks had similar experiences.*
Alex had been looking off in the distance and started speaking,

“Looking at how much Whiteness shows up in my daily lived experience and how I’m constantly fighting against that because contextually [institution’s] campus doesn’t allow me to really... It allows me to forget about [my Whiteness] and not recognize it daily. I think that’s... it’s a practice of habit, making the familiar strange and recognizing where privilege really impacts those experiences and those interconnections.”

[As far as my trans* identity], Alex continued,

“Like of course it impacts how I see the world. Of course it impacts how I see this department as safe or unsafe and how comfortable I feel willing to share about certain things at certain times, whether I talk about it or not. In most cases I feel more comfortable sharing with people of color because they get marginalization. So not saying our experiences are identical but they can empathize and I can empathize with their experiences too.”

Austin had been sitting and thinking about how they wanted to share their next comment. After careful consideration, Austin blurted,

“Transitioning in higher ed just feels very White to me. I don’t see trans people of color in higher ed, so that’s very difficult because I feel people like me, that I want to advocate for I’m not necessarily able to do that in this space. So I don’t feel like my whole self is really in this space, in this work and that really, really bothers me and hurts me.”
Trans* Enough

Austin elaborated on the idea of trans* enough with reflecting on the idea that transitioning is something they observe White people doing and because they do not see trans people of color in higher education, they also do not see them transitioning. As a result of not seeing folks who mirror them, the same people Austin wants to advocate for, they do not believe they bring their wholeself into their work in higher education.

Kyle London also explained, “[Trans* is White, binary, and medical]. There’s the not feeling trans* enough that I’m not, by the average person, ‘mistaken’ for a man. So this non-binaryness, not being on T, not having top surgery or bottom surgery or surgery period… like sometimes there is this angst of not being trans* enough that’s heightened by the almost complete absence of discussion in most spheres of non-binary trans* individuals and genderqueer, gender non-conforming individuals…so much of the discussion is founded within what is still a genderist, binaryist gender narrative of medical transition. Medically transitioning trans* people. And when that gets centered in the conversation about trans*-ness and trans* identities I don't feel trans* enough because that's what real trans* people do.”

Kyle added, “I am not trans* enough to be thought of as trans* on the street and I’m too trans* to be seen as normative.” Kyle chuckled, “The former bothers me; the latter does not.”

Dean said, [I think Kyle is bringing in another aspect of trans* experiences with this idea of trans* enough. Does anyone else want to speak to this notion of ‘trans* enough,’ whatever that means for you?]
Austin tapped into a very specific way that the notion of ‘trans* enough’ manifests in their life,

“So like if I don’t wear certain things I don’t earn the right to be called pronouns, you know? It's like, ‘Well you're not giving us enough to really earn that, we're not going to [use your] pronoun[s].’ You know what I mean? So yeah it's like, well yeah whatever... I'm about to go on a rant so I'm just going to leave it there. That really frustrates me. That not enough, not enough, it keeps coming back up, keeps that I’m not enough.”

“[I would agree that trans* is White, medical, and binary.] I think something else I would add is that [as part of this limited notion of trans*] I sometimes feel this pressure as a trans* higher ed person to sort of, be really put together and be really grounded and stable. Not influx in my own trans* identity. I think some of that is internalized trans* phobia of like I don’t want to perpetuate this awful stereotype [that] this trans* people [are] wishy washy or not knowing what we want or unstable. …so I’m very guarded around sort of how open and honest I will be with folks about my gender stuff,” added Kody.

*Both Kyle and Kody talked about some of the binary rules that may influence how they view and interact with their trans* identities.*

“I'm familiar with [people not recognizing me as trans*]. I wouldn’t necessarily call it comfortable, but I'm also not actively doing a whole heck of a lot in terms of my appearance for example to change that…I would say probably the only time that I might kind of play with it a little bit is sometimes I’ll wear a necktie to class or I, I mean I'm a
bodybuilder so that’s… it's an area that is a little outside of the norm perhaps. I still don’t know if that’s really enough for some of these who go huh I wonder? So...Okay. I think also because when I have interacted with the trans* community I really struggle to identify myself that way within that population because I feel like I wouldn’t necessarily be taken very seriously. So I kind of always, march with other identities that I have...I feel like I have to do so much to make it believable which makes me sad.”

Sloane also described thought processes that were present and influenced their idea of their own trans* ness. They also described their perspectives about their role in ‘helping’ people see them as trans.

I had a story from that very day about the internal thoughts and external influences.

“I’m telling y'all this morning I changed clothes seven times at least and like, I didn't know... I knew I wanted to wear a bow tie so that was the thing. But I just wanted to make sure I was presenting in the way that I wanted to and this idea of trans* enough. Like really feeling like sometimes the things that I do really make folks not see me as trans* or genderqueer. So I grow my nails, I wear earrings, like all these things that I do that folks will impose woman or female onto me so I’m constantly thinking about my gender expression and being very intentional about fighting against those expectations. But I am still met with them constantly especially in the work that I do.”

Dean encouraged me to continue. [What you’re saying is really resonating with me. Say more.]

I continued.
“[Well]. So [getting dressed] was part trans* stuff but it was also part presenter, so thinking about being in a space, being in front of folks I wanted to look good, right? So that was the concern. So it's part professional right and we can have a conversation about professionalism and presentation…I was thinking we are authoring our lives, people are just trying to write over it. So even getting up this morning it was for me mostly, but I also recognize that once I stepped out of the door someone else was going to interact with me.”

Dean jumped in there,

“And we don’t self-author out of context, right? So the context is systemic oppression whether that's genderism, racism, classism, compulsory able-bodiedness, all these things together are the web in which we are trying to write our stories collectively. Because I’m not even convinced that I’m just authoring my own life…it's not just that those messages are out there about not being trans* enough, but the shit of it is I’m starting to believe it. Right? And I'm starting to believe that I’m not enough, that I’m not good enough.”

We started building a bridge between trans*enough external and the trans*enough internal. The internal dialogue around “doing enough” coupled with external expectations and ideologies, trans* educators are anxious about being trans* enough for the group.

Martina also talked about negotiating the internal and external. Martina described her experience,
“Not everybody can do what they want to do. You know the people who are giving you grief and making your life hard, you know you name it. All the things you've probably heard so I knew if I didn’t do something in 2010 things were going to drift into badness. So that’s why I had to do something. So at least if I have to work my butt off and living kind of in my job at least I can do something personally for me. And not to be a fraud because I felt kind of like a fraud for a lot of years. I’m telling all these women and students of color be true to your dreams, you know? All your visions and I’m really good at helping them get there. It was kind of like but I really need to do this for myself at some point.”

With a curious look, Jace recalled,

“I tried to distance myself from my trans* identity when I first went on the job market and when I first got my academic job and I didn’t like it. It felt disingenuous, it felt like I was trying to hide things and it felt really uncomfortable. I remember having to talk about my childhood and instead of saying I played softball I changed it and said that I played baseball. That felt really gross.”

Dean began, Phew, we just unpacked some stuff. Why don’t we take another break here. Say, 10 minutes?

Everyone nodded. I know I needed a break. Many educators were describing experiences of not being seen and validated in their identities. As a result, after our break, the conversation moved to how that felt and manifested on campus.
Isolation and Invisibility/Hypervisibility on Campus

“[During the break, I was thinking about wanting to talk about whether there are other trans* folks on your campus?]” Kyle London continued, “There are several trans* students on [my] campus, but I am the only out trans* faculty or staff member on campus - the entire campus. Over 1,000 employees at this institution. I am it. And I’ve asked several other people to try to find and dig out. There must be someone somewhere, hiding under a rock, in an office, behind a door. Nope, nope, just me.”

Martina nodded, “To my knowledge, I’m the only faculty or staff person who is openly trans*. There may be others who feel less safe about doing it.”

Hal’s desire for another transgender colleague was palpable,

“I would like to have more transgender colleagues. Even if they disagreed with me about everything, it would just be nice to have a couple more transgender colleagues… I mean I’m the only transgender faculty member on campus so at certain times I feel like my transgender identity is often misread or kind of overseen... Most of the time I feel very alone. I feel very isolated and misunderstood.”

He says with some hesitation.

Kody specified their perceptions of other trans* people on campus,

“I think I’m the only that I know of [like you said Martina, openly or] outwardly identified trans* person in my division at my institution and I work in a pretty large school. I work at a school where more than 35,000 students attend so the division of student affairs is really, really big. Having been there a year I haven’t connected with other trans* people in my division.”
Austin offered an additional perspective,

“[Let me think.] I would say I know other trans* folks who work here, folks of color, and people find their people. So it's not, I mean there's support in pockets; it definitely depends on what office you work in, it depends on what kind of position you have, but there are ways to connect on an individual level, small group level to people who can support you. I think that’s one thing that is positive.”

“[Austin, I agree.]” Huixol asserted,

“That’s why I’ve had to in many ways move and find other people on campus so I think the other folks that come to mind that I’ve really connected with are our director of our GLBTQ resource center who identifies as trans*, who identifies as an individual who just really gets more experience that I connect with and at the same time looks very different because they're in the one professional position for an entire center.”

Sloane brought in other aspects of their identity too.

“There are let me think, there are four of us [faculty] that are full time. I'm the only minority; there are four full time faculty and I mean that in every way that I’ve described. Race identity, sexual identity, gender identity.”

_Since Dean and Alex are on the same campus, they do have each other, to a certain extent; however, Alex still acknowledged feelings of isolation._ Alex continued, “Like I’m lucky to have someone in my program, but like my cohort no. I’m the only queer person; I’m the only trans* person. There are no students of color, so it's like well, token diversity.”

Alex talked about the benefits of some community and their seeking it:
“[At the same time,] like, having another trans* person in the department is really helpful and that's like the primary reason I came to [my institution] is because I knew I would have some support in some way, shape, or form from faculty, the students, and from you know just the curriculum. It was supportive. So I think that in a lot of ways, I did my best to go to a place I knew would be good for me that wouldn’t provide me so much challenge to where it would feel almost insurmountable to get a PhD.”

Dean described hir perception of cisgender administrators about the presence of trans* students on campus. Not only not being seen, but also being seen and not perceived as real. Dean recalled,

“I remember one particular moment when someone actually looked at me and said, ‘I don’t think we really have any trans* students on campus’ and I was floored because I’m like, I’m sitting right in front of you! I don’t know what kind of mental gymnastics you’re doing in your mind, but clearly there's something that’s off. I also remember the VP sending multiple emails out to the retention steering committee with my name in quotations, right? To the point where I needed to email her and say, ’No that’s my actual name it's not just an abbreviation I’m using.’ So that was, I think some of those instances were particularly frustrating. They really felt like I wasn’t being seen, that my identity was just, wasn’t real like this notion of putting one’s name in quotation.”

Sebastian elaborated on the impact of this isolation and invisibility,

“I'm exhausted. My campus is really exhausting me. It's sort of evoking these feelings of invisibility but also hopelessness and that's not who I am. It almost makes me
want to give up, leave higher ed for a little bit but I think my organization is just a hot ass mess. I just think it's a mess.”

After thinking and reflecting on their feelings of isolation, the educators explored how they felt and how it manifested on campus. Dean explained to the group,

“So I feel very, I guess in the true sense of the word I feel very queer when I’m walking on campus, like it’s hard not to feel very very queer walking around that space. Like in that sense just different, odd outside of… I think being, I’ve had experiences where literally I was walking into the university library to get a book and students had turned around to stare at me to the point where they almost run into the stacks. Or like I was in the business school not because I really wanted to be but because I had a meeting there and student will stop talking to each other and kind of look at me as I walk down the hallway. So queer as in outside, different, abnormal, to what people would think of as a [institution] student.”

**Educators described experiences of being the only one on their campus or being the only “out” trans* person on campus and for some this brought feelings of loneliness and frustration, maybe sadness. Being the only visible trans* person on campus contributed to a sense of invisibility and isolation within their campus communities. Conversely, they were sometimes (hyper)visible on campus, yet still the only one. Some educators also described some community, either to be had, or that they were part of that offered support.**

Austin reflected on their perception of how administration thinks about trans* people on their campus,
“I think something that might feel frustrating. It doesn’t feel organic. It feels like people are kind of doing things because it is on paper or people don’t really I want to say ‘get it.’ So in one way it's good, at least it's there. But in one way it’s kind of like, I don’t know you still feel position…It’s still kind of that burden effect of like, oh gosh here comes somebody else you kind of have to accommodate because on paper we have to do this, but it doesn’t show this is something we really want to do or something we are really embracing.”

Kyle connected to Austin’s feelings and with a heavy sigh began speaking, seemingly mid-sentence,

“A lot of weariness, I’m tired. So I’m weary of this place. I feel isolated. There’s loneliness, very lonely, very tired. Sometimes I feel aggravated and frustrated. There's just a thousand little microaggressions that happen on a pretty consistent basis around some aspect of my identity. And so there's frustration or aggravation, annoyance but I think the isolation and the weariness, just being really weary, is probably the dominant. Probably dominant. I'm ready to leave.”

Austin could relate,”

“It got to a point where I would be in meetings, I wouldn’t speak, I would sit in the back, I didn’t want to draw attention. I didn’t want to be misgendered. It got to the point where my director came up to me and said, ‘What is going on? You're not talking.’ I always like to chime in and say things, and I was just like, I just can’t risk it. I can’t risk the attention, being misgendered I just can’t. I can’t afford to put myself out there at this point; I can’t take any more blows. I just can’t take it.”
Dean said,

“[I know, right?] So my chair who I was talking about is incredibly kind and wonderful; she just doesn’t live in a queer world right? She has queer students that she knows so whether both queer trans* students as well as queer cis students that she knows. But she also is very forth right in saying she lives in a pretty heteronormative world. So she's married to a husband, has kids, [and] a lot of her friends are straight married with children that kind of stuff. So I think there are just moments where I wish she didn’t have to email me and say sorry I messed up on your pronouns kind of deal or sorry I just can’t seem to get my mind around this after a couple of years.”

Riley chimed in after Dean,

“I think usually the spaces around folks maybe in some faculty or academic areas who don’t interact or already kind of know me. So like I’ve heard some narratives around like the dean of our college of education avoiding me because she doesn’t want to mess up my pronouns and things of that nature. I hear that from students, like she told one of our students that and that student told me. This student also used They/Them/Their pronouns, but that person didn’t know at the time because they had just recently started using them. And just folks like that, when you don’t match what folks expect and they become uncomfortable and project it on you that like, profuse apologizing they do if they mess up a pronoun. So there's that, in those spaces where I’m like you just have to apologize once. Now you're making me uncomfortable, I feel bad that you feel bad.”

Kyle deepened the dialogue by focusing on intersectional identity and work as a faculty member,
“We are, though, way behind, so the general ignorance of trans* issues is so deep, so very deep and there is still a lot of internalized racial dominance that is present, that is very sort of unconscious bias in microaggression that are there on the part of some faculty and students. So there’s still the responsibility for doing most of the work around educating our students around diversity and inclusion, not just within the particular required class we have on it but across the curriculum falls to us who possess one or more of those marginalized identities, around race, sexuality, or gender, or all three.”

Dean cocked hir head to the side and added,

“So race became all the more salient and less theoretical which I think race has always been something that I’ve been cognizant of but has never really had a visceral reaction in the way that it has over the last six to nine months…How does my race show up in the classroom, right? How do I address race as a white person? And what’s my responsibility to address race as a white person even though, like you know a lot of white people say ‘Oh I don’t have to think about race.’ Well I think it’s actually pretty important that we think about race and I think it’s important that we are the ones talking about it in classroom spaces and not just waiting for colleagues of color to share their hurt pain and frustration.”

Thinking about their own experience, Kody added,

“[I hear y’all.] Like that I for many reasons choose not to open up my whole chest and bare my heart to them because it would be exhausting. I’m afraid that narrative would be co-opted. So the microaggressions that may not seem like a big deal to other folks, right. Like I don’t talk a lot about at work the ways in which I feel often times
really tokenized. I don’t talk a lot about at work, so you know if someone really knew me they would know that I do carry a lot of pain around my trans*ness and I feel I carry a lot of feeling really isolated. And feeling really like disconnected from people who I can really relate to or have some shared life experiences with. That feeling of isolation takes a toll. Sometimes I just want to be around other trans* people right or other genderqueer people. I don’t really talk about that at work… Sometimes I’m like the microaggressions. I can deal with the micro-aggressions because the larger issue is that, for the most part, feel safe and accepted on campus [and I know] that is not true for all trans* folks or all genderqueer folk on their campuses.”

**Negotiating Campus Relationships**

*Since some of the educators were alluding to them anyway, Dean asked about how the educators navigated these things within their relationships on campus.*

That resonated for MW, who said,

“The current students, I’m still getting to know. The exec board for the [LGBT group], I have their cell phone numbers. We text about club business and things like that, so I’m developing a relationship with them, but it’s still in the newer stages…So some of the students from the previous cohort called me poppa M. Then they just made up the nickname, so this year, totally unrelated, the students started calling me dad.”

Austin echoed MW’s comments,

“I have a lot, relationships are great with students. I think I have a great affinity with queer students on campus, specifically our genderqueer trans* students and Black students on campus. A lot of the advising I do is with certain organizations. So I’m the
primary advisory for our Black Student Association. I’m also an advisor for a
[genderqueer group]. And one is predominantly Black; one is predominantly White, so a
lot of the work I do with them is intersectional work. But the genderqueer students, I’ve
gotten so close with. I’ve learned at [institution] you really have to earn the trust of
LGBT students.”

Austin elaborated,

“[I told them] Look y’all, I’m on this journey. I’m right with you. I’m not here as
a staff member…Those students were the ones who have shown me the love and support
on this campus more than anyone.”

Kyle began,

“I’ve had a pretty good relationship with students [too, as a faculty member].
Students generally perceive me as very tough but fair as, yeah, I’m generally perceived to
be pretty much a hard ass…But there's sort of this also, like, ardent love for me as well.
Students are fighting to get in my classes; there's all of this adoration that I don't always
understand where that's coming from… Students of color, I think, are unsure sometimes
how to handle me, particularly other Black students because I'm not like them, so most of
our Black students that we have in our program are heterosexual and cisgender. We
haven't had a queer Black student in the program in a really long time, maybe since my
first or second year.”

Martina recalled,

“I mean students have been kind of the people who have pushed the faculty I
think to be on the cutting edge. So, for example, when I first started doing this in the
10/11 academic year I didn’t ask people to refer to me with any particular gender pronouns. I didn’t come out with a pronoun and say, hey this is what you must do. Somebody at some point clued me to in to it, like oh do you go visit rate my professor very often? It's like no I don’t; I’m not that kind of person. It was like, well you should go. Okay I’ll go look. So I noticed that people started using gender pronouns feminine style like the second semester I started presenting as female. Even though I never asked them - like whoa that’s a trip.”

Kody concurred,

“So the reason that feels relevant to me is because I oftentimes find myself relating more to the students around some of their activism, particularly as it relates to issues of trans*gender and genderqueer inclusion than I do to the administration so to speak.”

I was sitting there and wanted to get back into the conversation. So it seems that relationships with students are valuable and important, what about relationships with others on campus?

Layla was eager to share, “People were very excited to work with me because I bring a lot of energy; I’m a high energy person.”

There was a collective laughter.

MW described some of his colleagues, a group of straight, White, cisgender guys at my job.

“They’re all like English professors and we’re similar age or whatever and they ask me to do things. They’re cool, but they’re not really like work friends you know? Just
go out with them and they’re nice to me, and I appreciate when they invite me to things like sports bars; of course, I’m not really into but whatever. But the only person I was really close to at work was the gay guy who went away.”

Jace talked about his faculty colleagues,

“[I have the reverse experience.] There’s one guy I don’t talk about this stuff with, and he’s a more conservative colleague…so sometimes if I know I have a queer students I will advise them away from his classes if possible. But in terms of the rest of my colleagues, most of them are awesome. I mean at least five out of 12, we hang out regularly outside of campus.”

Kyle reflected,

“It’s interesting, so I think that I’ve always been on the outskirts because of the racial difference. I’m sort of a part of, but not quite, you know, so several of them will hang out together and like go shopping together or get together to go to the movies, get together to go beer tasting or whatever. I don’t drink beer, so I wouldn’t expect to be part of those things, but some of the other stuff, like people get together and socialize on their own in ways, like separate from sort of announced general departmental socialized things, gatherings that happen…But I think once I sort of came out as trans* or sort of pushing and articulating, getting other people to recognize that trans* identity, it just feels even more distant.”

Austin’s experience has been impacted,

“It's been very rough. Well I’ll say this, I feel like I have had support from my people in the department, you know my colleagues and friends I’m close with. You know
I remember when I told my supervisor, she was the first person I came out to so to speak, period, in my life. Her first reaction to me was, ‘This is going to be really hard for the department’ and it just hurt. It hurt…My supervisor said that, and I was just like ‘wow’.”

Sebastian recalled,

“[My supervisor] actually challenged my preferred name in one of our one on one meetings and asked me if I thought it caused confusion with other departments. That is a question he chose to ask in the middle of my updates.”

“[Wow. I’ve had a pretty good relationship with my supervisor,] before I even started, she wanted to send out a welcome email kind of like introducing me to the division and she knew that I identified as trans* and that I use They/Them/Their pronouns and she asked me like, ‘When I send this email out would it be helpful for you if I include in the email Kody uses They/Them/Their pronouns to hopefully minimize the number of times you would have to tell people that.’ And I had never had a supervisor ask me that before I started working somewhere, so that felt really good.”

Sloane, after considering, said,

“It’s kind of an interesting thing; people don’t really hang out outside of campus. It’s very, you’re on campus; you may say ‘hi’ if you pass each other in the hall, but you’re not really going to share a whole lot about your family or at least that’s been my experience.”

“I would describe the people I work with as really passionate and social justice oriented for the most part. In the Midwest niceness is always there too, and I find that my colleagues, for the most part, have a genuine niceness. It’s not riddled with racism,
sexism, and homophobia. I work with really good people. I think that’s what keeps me around.”

Sebastian noted and continued, “[However,] there is a definite divide between staff and faculty and me being community faculty; it’s like a status thing. I am lower on the totem pole.”

Dean agreed and noted,

“I’ve been able to find some good sources of support and find some people who I wasn’t necessarily thinking would be supportive at first but were actually really fantastic. So like the chair of my department has been wonderful, has been super supportive. It's actually interesting to see her call herself out when she messes up now rather than having me to do it.”

Alex goes on about their advisor,

“I’m part of his family. Then my advisor, he's just I don’t know. He's encouraging right at the right times. Like he knows enough about being a Black man to understand at least on an empathetic level what trans people go through so like I appreciate that about him. He's incredibly empathetic…”

*There is a different relationship to faculty depending on whether the faculty are peers and/or advisors and mentors. When reflecting on relationships with other staff in their office, they recognized some of the limits of relationships.*

Kody added,

“I feel completely supported by [my supervisor]. I’ve had to kind of, I don’t want to say educate her, but I’ve kind of had to tell her some different things or challenge
different ideas along the way in terms of making it about like inclusion and equity more broadly. But she’s been really open to that and has been really, also done a lot of her own work to make my work space feel safe and comfortable to the extent that she’s able.”

Huixol shared, “…My director is the one I feel most connected with…she explained to me ‘I don’t look to you to tell me a story rather I want to know how I can be your support as you build your story.’

I started pulling the stories together. Similar to the faculty piece, the relationships with staff seemed to range on a spectrum, including triggering and harmful interactions and supporting and affirming relationships. In addition to challenges with isolation and invisibility, there were also good people who support and affirm folks in their identities and experiences.

In that moment, we sat and reflected on how we were building our stories. Dean invited us to sit in the silence for a moment. After a minute or so, Dean let us know that was time, our three hours were up and it was time to end the session.

Dean wrapped us up, [We said so much. We shared so much. In this room, we talked about our existence. Our collective voices sharing about experiences and relationships on campus, our lives outside of higher education, connections (and sometimes lack thereof) to communities, and challenges we faced. We were, sometimes, guarded in our tone and confident with our words. Without a “cis gaze,” or cisgender people sitting in on the dialogue to hear about “those” trans people, we let loose and allowed shit to get real. There was guardedness because of some of the anxieties and anticipations folks brought in the room, but there was also an air of confidence because
just being in the room together affirmed our existence - our reality. We were in community receiving support and affirmation. Thank you all for coming to our session.]

After a collective sigh and some knowing glances at each other, we started standing to leave. However, it was clear that no one wanted to leave, not only to help put the chairs back in order, but to talk with one another. Once we put the furniture back the way we found it, with the audience and presenter divide, and started leaving the room so the next session facilitators could set up, we gathered outside of the room. We talked about wanting to continue the conversation. So we decided to post up in a spot in the hallway and continue the conversation.

After the dialogue, I kept reflecting on what transpired. In addition to meeting and connecting with other trans* educators, I was thinking about our moderator needing to leave and how we still filled that space. This was symbolic for me in terms of community. Though we selected LPD for very specific reasons, once she was out, it was apparent that we could moderate and guide ourselves. The community we desired we carved in that convention room and wanted to continue holding that space together.

For three hours we talked about who we were as trans* educators, what that meant, how we navigated relationships, isolation and invisibility, and feelings of enough. These were topics that we don't often share with colleagues, but being in that space together encouraged us to share our stories. As we moved into the new environment, we found a spot that was in the open, but not with heavy traffic necessarily. We settled in for
a conversation about continuing to build communities, persisting and resisting in higher education, what institutions are missing, and continuing to expand gender possibilities.
CHAPTER FIVE

TRANS* EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES

During the panel, we had connected with one another talking about our identities and relationships. Outside the room, we continued conversations around building and maintaining community, which contributed, in many ways, to our persistence and resistance in higher education. We also elaborated on something I am naming trans* consciousness, a lens through which we view the world related to our trans* experiences. Not everyone was able to join us, and it seemed that the non-binary folks were eager to continue connecting.

Building and Maintaining Communities

It seems that we are expanding gender possibilities on our campuses, interacting with and through multiple identities and systems, dealing with invisibility and isolation as well as fluctuating supportive interactions and relationships on campus. Though there is no one way we are experiencing our campuses, isolation and invisibility seem to be common threads. However, our relationships are significant, on and off campus.

After some chit chat and settling in, we gather close to pick back up our dialogue.

I began. I don’t think we need a moderator. Maybe we can just talk. And actually, I wanted to talk more about this concept of community. Where else do you find support and what does that look like?

Everyone sat silently for a minute and then Alex responded.
“So I spend time at a coffee shop a lot and like my cohort spends it together pretty much and we study and do work there. And my apartment I feel comfortable there… My brother and sister, they see me how I want to be seen. My ex in theater definitely sees me how I want to be seen because they just get it. They get who I am and they're not going to push me to change because I need to fit some kind of normative box. But yeah, they're like that's just Alex, no big deal.”

Sebastian added,

“There is a LGBT higher ed network in the [area I live] and they have happy hours; every once in a while. I play soccer with a community. It's a bunch of community organizers, activists, and lefties, and we get together and play when the weather is OK. I think Facebook has… the little that I use it, it has some benefits. It has queer people of color groups. That's pretty cool. I like that. Those are helpful and I can get a lot of resources from there. I like being inspired by the work that other people are doing. Even though we are in different states or different regions even, they are also persevering. That helps. They are thriving, really thriving, all of those people.”

Austin talked about being a part of a community of trans* educators.

“Like when I [think] about T* Circle and just sitting in that space and feeling uncomfortable and then getting more and more comfortable. Just really working through my own trans*phobia has been a big thing for me. I think I’ve definitely made leaps and bounds and just bringing to a lot of bullshit I’ve been taught about myself and others and really just sitting in it has been very good.”

Kody reflected,
“There’s other trans* folks on campus so there’s community to be had, community to be built…So there is this really loosely formed trans*, [network of trans* employees], and it’s kind of like a staff group. One thing that’s been hard for me [though] is that it’s really poorly organized. So there's no structure to it, and kind of when asked about it, what I was told was, ‘If you want to take it on and organize it’.”

Austin understood where Kody was coming from,

“I know here in Res life we've developed our own like folks of color group. We have a group text, we hang out or whatever, but as far as division there’s nothing like that for folks of color, queer folks of color who can just come together in fellowship. I know there are schools where they will have like staff of color retreat and events and things like that. So it's just of this notion of are you going to create it on your own [that you mention Kody] because we're not really going to make that a priority. And again an environment like this, it really should be more of a priority. Because there aren’t that many staff of color on this campus or queer folks on this campus that work here and it is extremely taxing. Extremely taxing.”

Huixol was adamant and thinking about a recent conference experience. Z was fired up,

“We need to do our own thing; we need to create our own space because it is not [there]. So how can we do that? Finding individuals and working to just be able to say look this is a clear space, this is an opportunity for us as queer identified folks what that means for us and just come and talk about what it looks like to be on our campus. What it
looks like to have the conversation that we do and just be ourselves a little more [is] nice and long overdue in that way.”

*The sentiment of seeking, building or creating community seems to be a message that folks are receiving and interpreting. Relationships with other Queer/Trans* People definitely includes the T* Circle and the communities that are forming within that group, with research, convenings, writing, and teaching. Sometimes, given their location in a smaller city/town or less diversity, educators might have to travel. Educators were identifying various communities outside of higher education (athletics, church, partners, collective, pets). They were identifying spaces to be authentically themselves.*

Sebastian also acknowledged their family,

“[Alex, what you said earlier about your siblings really resonated with me.] I am just really proud and [my family has] been really great through all of my coming out stages and my mom tells me I’m handsome and beautiful. She’ll use them interchangeably and she just used my preferred name for the first time two weeks ago. It’s sort of almost magical, the family role at this phase.”

Kyle described zir’s church,

“The church that I go to is a comfortable place, for the most part, to be at, for the most part. Since I started articulating a trans* identity it's been harder to be in that space and be comfortable in that space because there's such a lack of awareness of trans* identities there. And it's not because there isn't another trans* person at our church, there is, but they do not regard him as trans*, so he is constantly misgendered and he's been at the church for like 50 years!”
MW was also thinking about his church family, “I’m also on the same-gender loving ministry at my church and we meet once per month on a Saturday. We’re trying to improve the climate for LGBTQ folks at the church and we have a few projects going there.”

MW continued,

“[Hmmm, let me think.] I [also] run a support group for trans* people in town. That's only once a month…So I have been planning groups of people to come to my house. I’m having a trans* men of color sleep over in a couple of weeks.”

Kyle also described how zir’s understanding of zir’s identities has evolved through community,

“And I think that I've been doing a lot of, in the last eight, nine months, doing a lot of, investing a lot of discussion and being in communication with other trans* people and reading trans* literature and doing the things that have helped develop my cognitive understanding of the lived experience that I am having. And that, that works. There is value in self-education, there is value in reading, there is value in community, in being in community with others. And how necessary and important that is to developing and becoming resistant to the idea of developing a trans* identity, developing identity notion, to developing a sophisticated means of articulating that. Being in community with other trans* people is really important for that. Really, really important.”

Kyle was pulling it all together, “Sort of recognizing the power of being given language, you know, is awesome. And that happens through community. We become ourselves through community.”
Some of the educators facilitate support through numerous mechanisms, including holding space with and for others in a support, advocacy, and community group environment.

Institutions Haven’t Arrived Yet

From our conversation, I get the sense that we do not believe our institutions have arrived as places of inclusion, equity, and social justice for particular communities, including trans* and queer people of color. What do folks think about that?

Dean shared how ze sees campus,

“[My campus] feels so stuck to me, so stuck. I mean this is a campus that I mean really all campuses are steeped in all sorts of oppression, but this campus just seems so rooted and uninterested in making any kind of change. Like I said, I mean [the institution] is pretty set on this vision of themselves as a public ivy that I find to be really toxic. They continue to think about like creating pretty buildings and creating their facade of forward progress without actually thinking about being inclusive right, so we've built new residence hall, we have a new student center, all of them are very pretty. A lot of brick and white columns, like the Georgian architecture is very present on [institution] campus. A lot of like, opulent is the word I think of when I think about these new buildings. And yet there are students who continue to feel marginalized and ostracized and hurt by campus administrators, faculty members, and you know a president who is more interested in focusing on development [advancement] than on people. So the space itself feels very laden with that.”
Kody explained that, “[My] institution thinks it’s further than it is. It’s really ready to congratulate itself on the good progress that has happened. There are some really good things; however, a long way to go…”

Kyle interjected,

“[Yeah, I hear you Kody. My] institution is not there yet, and I think in a lot of ways it’s pretty far from being there. That it is saying all the right things mostly, particularly in terms of race and sex, but it is not, and it has done some things around sexual orientation recently to try to signal an open and accepting environment but the structural changes to actually support that, and not just in terms of sexuality but in terms of race and particularly in terms of gender, is not there…discussions of diversity, inclusion, and equity are pretty elementary still. So I think my department is interesting. It's evident when I teach one of our core doctoral classes versus when one of the White male cisgender heterosexual faculty teaches that same course, the dramatic difference in the curriculum that’s taught. The readings that are assigned, the discussions that are had in class, the activities, even just the illustrations that are being used, are completely different. And come with the excuse of ‘I don't know that content, I don't know that material.’ And because they are senior faculty, a resistance to taking the time to learn it at this point. So if it's not there and it's not already part of people's experience and understanding, then there seems to be little investment in bringing that up to, getting themselves up to speed, it's not there.”

Austin offered,
“[Yeah], I think I would say that you know here I think on paper there are a lot of great things… but there's a lot still being navigated on how to support students of all backgrounds and also how to support staff. Whether it be programmatically, whether it be just structurally, but there are definitely things on paper that allow for conversations to happen, allow for advocacy to happen.”

MW also agreed,

“I would say that we’re struggling in some ways with our campus climate regarding race and sexual orientation…even though the [diversity] committee [that I’m a part of] is struggling to define itself and its agenda; which I think sort of made it more difficult by the fact the president has met with us only once since she’s been there in the four years, which really speaks to the value she places on diversity, but that’s another story…. I think that sort of [intersectional] framework is lacking on campus. I think that’s one of the things I really struggle with. Everything is siloed. Furthermore, institutions and departments, particularly LGBT offices need to be doing intentionally intersectional work.”

Dean pondered about the role of these spaces today,

“I also think too I just don’t know why our LGBT center isn’t a radical space anymore. I don’t know why certain offices that were set up to be radical spaces to be these really great affinity groups are no longer radical.”

**Staying in Higher Education**

*I was the first to speak. I had been thinking about what we talked about all day, wondering how and why we continue doing the work through the persistent*
microaggressions and feelings of self-doubt, isolation and invisibility. I acknowledged that I understood that we were also expanding perspectives around gender and maintaining relationships and building communities in and outside of higher education. I wanted to hear more about that. What keeps us going in higher education?

MW commented,

“[You know?] When it’s just the students, it’s rewarding. I try to focus on that when I’m feeling frustrated, which is the other word I would use to describe some of the other things I’ve been feeling regarding my job…rewarding with students, frustrating with everything else…I have been feeling frustrated with the job and sort of ready to transition into something else.”

Sebastian agreed,

“I'm really re-energized by my students that I have in the classroom environment, and I'm really grateful that I'm teaching along with my Student Affairs job because organizationally my job right now has been evoking feelings of invisibility. I'm just feeling like no matter what initiatives I accomplish and what ground I break, it really doesn't matter. I really want to be in an environment where I don't feel like I should strive for anything less than amazing.”

Huixol shared,

“It's been a rough one in knowing for me how much of a rollercoaster it has been on this campus. There are many days I go into work, I go into the office, I put in anywhere from 8 to 12 hours of work, and I’m excited to be working with students who have a positive energy want to do great things and want to change these systems that
we've invested a lifelong commitment to for the better. Then there are other times if it's having to do with policies, if it's having to do with compensation and a number of other things that come into my current wellbeing conversation. I’ve had many nights where I’m in tears I’ve found it difficult to even connect with folks who know me and better understand me from other campuses because of that guilt of I don’t know how to explore and express what I’m going through being the first professional position. And being in a place that has so much positive energy and still have yet to meet the needs of me. I would imagine others like me would come in and experience similar things.”

With a sigh, Austin remarked,

“I’m in this work because, as someone who identifies as trans* person of color I find this is a field that in a lot of ways allows me to be who I am and explore who I am and I feel, in theory, I feel very safe in this field…I want to be in this field and I have great expectations.”

There are mixed feelings and some tensions about campus and how our campuses make us feel. For some, there were areas where they felt safer and comfortable, whereas other spaces not so much and maybe even unsafe. We also recognized how our experiences may differ from someone else with various similar and dissimilar identities. Some of us also find solace in relationships with different people, including students. We went on to share more specific examples of experiences we had on campus.

Sebastian was listening intently and reflecting on their job search process, they shared,
“This is for various institutions that I have been applying to for positions and there is not room for my preferred name. So when I get an email saying that they would either like to talk to you or we chose not to talk to you, then it will be with my given name. I just have a hard time. That's been a hard process, sending out multiple resumes and applications and what not and looking to the future.”

Sebastian added,

“This is higher ed related but more for my grad studies... When I publish, what name can I publish under? I don't even know who to talk to about that because it's just such a broad system. So just name is where I am at right now.”

Huixol also noted the ebb and flow of it all,

“It kind of comes and goes in some of the here’s some great support, here some people have been able to accept my name change to just the way people have been able to just kind of better stand behind me not stand next to me.”

Austin shared gratitude about how their position influenced their development,

“If I wasn’t in higher education I don’t know if I would have ever had the opportunity to kind of explore my identity… Gender identity has taken so much time and energy and trying to figure out how to navigate. I haven’t had a lot of time to think about my sexual orientation, but you know that’s one part of me that’s kind of finished. I feel like I came out a long time ago, I’ve been doing that for a while. I’ve got that, you know?”

Jace offered his perspective,
“I really love it here at the end of the day…it would take a lot for me to leave…I feel very comfortable in my home department in the space that we are in…[other side of campus] has engineering, computer science. I do not feel comfortable on that side of campus and students report not feeling comfortable on that side of campus. Any time that LGBTQ stuff is talked about, it’s talked about really negatively but often that’s just completely ignored. So that side of campus is definitely a place that feels different than the campus I’m on… I mean I feel very tied to this community. I have friends here. I’ve developed lots of really great relationships with folks. There is a sizeable trans* community in general as well. So I feel really warm feelings on campus. It feels good to be on this campus. It feels very affirming and it’s kind of like home.”

**Developing a Trans* Consciousness**

The trans* lens/consciousness connects to the idea that trans* people, and these trans* educators in particular, view the world through unique lenses that expand beyond binary thinking. Even if the educator identifies on a side of the traditional binary, they still recognize/acknowledge that binary perspectives and thinking limits individual and institutional potential. Additionally, their views, understandings, and perspectives of gender encourage a more critical appraisal of higher education and their campus contexts. They also recognize the different faces and performances that they enact in different spaces on and off campus.

Alex commented,

“I would say that [my trans* identity] helps me to see things in different lights than other people, more specifically looking at our Greek culture and seeing how highly
problematic a lot of those things are…and so when we’re having these conversations, I’m the only person who gets it, or gets it as much as you can get it but has experienced those types of things that have led me to feel and behave and experience the world in different ways than they have. So, you know, I think those fundamental differences and they’ve shaped my experience.”

Sebastian added,

“I am like an undercover gender investigator. I have sort of a…I am allowed to walk in many gendered spaces in many different ways, sometimes undetected and sometimes highly visible and uncomfortably so.”

Kyle connected that to an analogy,

“I think that [the] canary in a mine can apply [too], that metaphor can apply around gender and genderism, systemic genderism that non-binary identified trans* people have a greater sensitivity to the effects and the impacts of systemic genderism than cis folks, for sure, but also sometimes even over and above perhaps other trans* people and cisgender LGB people, who we constantly get lumped in with.”

Understandings of other isms from personal experience that connects and relates to trans* identity. For example, experiences may be filtered through one’s racial identity. For some of the people of color, race was the first identity they saw the world through and the world saw them through. Racial identity intersected in unique ways for people.

Kyle added,

“We had an understanding of who we were racially and about what racism was and what that meant far before, long before we understood that about our trans*
ness…And it remains important and it remains, I think, a very valuable – I'm glad I had it because it’s not work for me to, using an intersectional lens. It’s not work for me to see and recognize the parallels in how racism works and how genderism works and how sexism works and how these other systems of oppression. It’s not hard for me to see the parallels and draw connection lines.”

**Taking Care of Ourselves**

Austin wanted to know, [With all this shit going on what do folks do when they’re not educating, researching, and programming? How are we practicing self-care?]

Kody was processing what people were saying and stated,

“I would say one of the things that are really important to me is taking care of my body and feeling really good in my body. So I go to the gym at least two days a week. Often times I leave right from work and go to the gym. If I’m not going to the gym, sometimes I’ll go home and I’ll go for a jog or go to yoga, but I do spend a good amount of time trying to move my body. That just kind of helps me feel more balanced and better prepared to handle a lot of the shitty things that come through the day. Then I usually head home, and my partner and I have dinner together…I'm also an introvert so being able to retreat to home is…that’s where I reenergize and fill up. Sometimes that means reading, sometimes that means watching Netflix, that means like talking with my partner about our days or not talking. sometimes we both just go home and we just don’t want to talk.”

Austin came back to the after work time,
“Yeah my evenings are very important to me as much as I do have evening commitments, there's a time where I have to come home and just kind of decompress. So you know I’ll read, I’ll read blogs, I’ll make a meal, I’ll talk on the phone with friends or family. It's just critical, my evenings are critical. If I don’t have that, then I’m a mess. In the mornings I’ll get up early before work and that’s my me time. I'll read, I’ll journal, I’ll work out. I usually get up 6 o’clock in the morning and I’ll just do that for like two hours. But for me because my day is so busy and I’m such an introvert that’s my quiet time...I usually try to get one day of nothing, just like I’m going to sleep and binge watch Netflix and Hulu and can’t nobody tell me nothing…There’s a church I’m actually a member of... It’s an amazing church. I usually watch it on Sundays, and that's a really big deal for me. My spirituality has become a really big thing for me recently. I'll do that, and it’s a very affirming experience.”

Kody chimed in,

“I [also] try really hard to not do a lot of social things during the week because I get really tired by social outings as an introvert. So I tend to save my socializing for the weekends as much as possible.”

Sebastian recalled their weekends,

“Saturday night I might watch HULU, like the entire night and just veg out. Last weekend it was Empire and I watched every single episode. I don't have any more and I'm really sad. Let my brain go and enter the drama a little bit. Oh! And hang out with my partner. She is usually there hanging out with me on Saturday nights because she is burnt out too by then…I [also] do pilates.”
Huixol reflected,

“There will be things during the work week where sometimes I’ll come home and it feels great I can do creative things. I can work on some of my paintings. I can just do some writing; get some letters out to either my friends or some of the inmates that I connect with through a writing pen pal program. Or if it's just recognizing I’m so exhausted, I’m spent from the conversations that students are having and I just want to curl up on the couch and watch some Netflix or some television. There are a few nights I do that.”

*These educators are not spending all of their time in higher education. They acknowledge some of the life and identity affirming activities they participate in outside of higher education, activities that feed/fuel/energize. Additionally, they also engage in activities where they can be entertained through movies, reading, relax through writing and painting, and being affirmed with friends and partners. This trans* lens also lends itself to a way of visualizing gender in the abstract.*

Huixol says [Ok if you were to describe your gender as a visual representation, how might you describe it? I can start since I have something in mind.]

“There's a piece I have on my wall that has what I call unlisted. The reason I made it in the first place was at one point when reflecting on gender I had created an original painting of here is these lines, here are these diagonals and within them I’m going to create triangles. So the triangles will be colored to represent what I understood at the time as genders and here's a gender that is pink, here's a gender that is purple, here's a gender that's gold, here's a gender that's black, here's just recognition of all of it. When I
moved to Colorado looked at that same gender painting that I had made and said, this isn’t real! It doesn’t work when it did and I first made this. So I essentially took a number of colors to it, I started painting over it and this collage kind of piece that comes up now for anyone that looks at would say it’s a bunch of colors and stripes and they all go in some sort of direction but there’s no real point. It doesn’t look like there's a point to the colors you've put on here, but I know what it is. I know full well that I did my best to color over those expectations that I took and processed on that canvas just as a reminder to myself that it's okay that people don’t get it. It is okay that people don’t understand because it's just like you. There isn’t a best way to identify what it means so for now this is something beautiful.”

Jace quickly answered,

“I just keep thinking of colors. Like purple and pink and blue are the things that come to mind. Like a picture that has those colors in it, like a blending of things. I think blue would be a dominant color in this picture but there are certainly shades of pink and purple in there too. And just kind of an abstract art kind of thing. I don’t even know what it would look like.”

Sloane,

“I have a tattoo that is very specific to my gender identity, most people don’t take it that way but they also ask me about it a lot. So it is, it's on my, on the top of my wrist it's an upside down triangle. And that’s all it is, just an upside down triangle. When I got it it was, it partially symbolizes change which it does in algebra. It partly symbolized my sexual identity because you know people recognize upside triangles but okay. Then when
I was researching the symbol depending on the direction that it's viewed it's male energy and it's female energy. So the way that I have it because when I look at it it's male energy, the way other people if they knew anything about triangles and symbolism it would probably be viewed as more female energy because they’re looking at it upside down and I’m looking at it right side up. Yeah so that was very intentional, all of that was very intentional. I mean I have a lot of tattoos and they're all very symbolic but that was the one you know that I was like, how do I display this so that it's... it's my only way to symbolize or demonstrate how I view myself. But then you know people say, I don’t really understand your tattoo and I’m like oh it means change because that's simple and I’m not really interested in getting into it with you, you know? So it's that sort of simple but complex. I mean it's a simple symbol which I’d like this all to be simple to me. Okay so I’m not a very specific, traditional gender expectation, I don’t view my gender that way so certainly people who look at me and go okay simple, female. They don’t want to speak about it but really it's a lot more complicated and layered. So I don’t know if that, that’s what kind of comes to mind. I see this symbol every day and I’m like alright, yeah that’s me.”

Sebastian, gazing off elaborated,

“Lavender scented sandpaper. I think that I definitely have an affinity for scents like lavender, floral scents, aromatherapy, and herbal scents. I definitely love essential oils type of natural fragrances and I do feel a very practical nature towards my masculinity. I feel like sand paper is really functional, it's really effective, it's useful in a lot of different settings, and it comes in a lot of varying degrees of harshness to softness.
Sometimes it is just a very subtle tool to be used to polish the surface and sometimes it is
used to reshape and reform an object or a project. I definitely feel a functionality behind
it, a practical nature. It varies in degree, it's brown. That's important and the lavender is
like that I am very comfortable with my feminine giggle and the scents that I like and just
how soft that can be.”

MW continued with the colors and explanation,

“I would say a mixture of masculine and feminine. I would say dark bold colors. I
would say sturdy but vulnerable. I would say... yeah I’ll just stick with that. I realize that
I think my gender identity is something that I think about how I convey it as opposed to
how I describe it or visualize it. So that’s interesting.”

Austin had been pondering the whole time and inserted,

“It's kind of like I’m floating above sometimes in a space by myself just being
me. I’m kind of dancing on a cloud. One of the first things that came to mind was gender
blender. Which is kind of a term. But I don’t feel it’s true, I don’t like the idea of like, it’s
kind of true but I don’t like this idea of you pour it out and it's like smooth. Kind of yeah
on a cloud up there looking down, not looking down on people but kind of just putting
this transcending of my own gender, trans* gender that I have to be one thing or the
other. Kind of floating around figuring out where I land.”

Kyle could relate to this idea,

“I'm in this in-between, very liminal, fluid space... you know standing in the
river, in the center of the river and as the tide is coming in and out and resisting going
with the tide, you know, somehow managing to stand firm in that space, which is difficult.”

Kody, nodding in agreement,

“My gender also feels …I feel a very very strong connection to the earth. That has always been true for me and I have this really particular fascination with boundaries that have to do with the earth…. that's really salient for me around sort of like fluid borders and like kind of boundary shifting and fluidity in particular the symbolism of water and earth in astrology It's sort of like I feel like there's infinite possibility, where nothing is concrete or steady. It's constantly every single second shifting and changing. Those energies come together there in that really special powerful place…. I think of like a wild coming together of water and earth and like all of those energies mixing in and there's so much possibility and rawness there that’s kind of like how I think about my gender too.”

**Wrapping up and Departing**

*This part of dialogue had gone on for another 90 minutes and could certainly have gone longer. However, many of the educators had other business to attend at the conference. The conversation we had with one another sparked thoughts about how we navigate systems and institutions, build community, remain in higher education, and take care of ourselves. Additionally, through the conversation, we reflected on our campuses, where we saw the campuses, and the work that still needed to be done around social justice. Finally, as we continued our dialogue, an understanding of a sort of trans* lens emerged based in our lives and experiences. We said our goodbyes and promised to keep*
in touch. Again, we were reluctant to leave this space we had carved, and we hoped there would be more opportunities, more spaces, and more community building in the future.  

The answer is yes.

**Summary and Conclusions**

In the preceding semi-fictional fishbowl dialogue among trans* educators, the educators engaged in a conversation with others from across the country. Since they felt invisible and are often isolated on their own campus, the educators were hopeful and anticipating connections with others that they very much needed at the dialogue; they were also anxious about engaging with other trans* educators since they had not had many experiences before. In the moment, the “community” grew from the original panelists to include those educators sitting in the audience whose experiences also resonated. The space opened up and allowed for different voices to be shared and heard. They talked about their relationships and roles, successes and frustrations, and ultimately shared in their persistence and resistance. They connected around experiences with colleagues, peers, students, and others, their multiple identities and how they show up in/at work, and ultimately how they feel on their campuses. This access to community is invaluable.  

The final chapter of my dissertation presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on my findings and refrains. This final chapter is a culmination of my interpretations and the educators’ experiences which explore the complexities of gender identity and development, how the participants experience inclusion on their campus and my analysis and ideas about improving the campus experience for trans*
educators, trans* people, and other historically marginalized communities/groups within higher education. Together we imagined different campuses.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I take you through discussions, implications, and conclusions from the portrait of trans* postsecondary educators. After a brief introduction and reminder of the context of Chapters Four and Five, I brought my conceptual framework and analyses back into focus. Next, I made some connections between the educators’ portrait and literature, drawing conclusions from major refrains that emerged about the educators’ experiences and how they persisted and resisted in higher education. Refrains connected to various micro, meso, and macro-systems (Brofenbrenner, 1999) as well as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) that emerged among educators experiences were names and pronouns, co-constructing identity, relationships and communities, and identities and work. These refrains contributed to the construction of a trans* consciousness which aided the educators in persisting and resisting. I then drew research and practical implications based on the educators’ experiences. I wrapped up this chapter, and my dissertation with some final thoughts and reflections.

Through the aesthetic, scientific methodology portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997), and qualitative methods of interviewing and participant-observation, I constructed a semi-fictional dialogue among trans* postsecondary educators to explore and document their experiences. I constructed the results in this way for a couple reasons. First, the panel that inspired this depiction provided a context that mirrored higher education and
many of the educators’ campuses: White, cisgender, heteronormative, able-bodied, with disparate class representations. I also wanted the portrayal of the educators’ experiences to be more accessible both within and outside of higher education. Often fictional representations can help people connect, and the stories can be less technical. Through the semi-fictional dialogue, the educators communicated the complexities and nuances of their identities, lives, and interactions with their campuses, colleagues, students, and systems of oppression (e.g., genderism, racism, sexism) in community with one another. Moreover, through this depiction, I wanted to emphasize the importance of community among these educators for supporting, validating, and affirming their identities and experiences. My project is a research project, but it is much more than that. It is about building community, demanding space, giving voice, and showing up. To have a space for some self-love, healing, and resistance, the fishbowl dialogue is also an example of an intentional space to resist normative expectations (literally just outside the room, and inside) as well as mirror and witness (Devor, 2004) with one another. In some ways, the educators were carving out space that they maybe did not have on their campuses because “an individual in isolation cannot constitute the meaning of a political space” (Guinier & Guinier, 2009, p. 18).

Two main research questions guided me throughout the process:

1. What are the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators on the campuses in which they work, live, and/or learn?

2. What are the strategies trans* postsecondary educators use to persist and resist in higher education?
Framework and Analysis

To answer research question one, it was important for me to use the educators’ own words to introduce and describe them and their experiences because they have the right to name and explain their own lives. Their words and meaning making are critical in understanding their experiences. Too often people’s identities and experiences are collapsed or boiled down into “simplified” versions and I did not want to recreate a cycle of oppression against people not being able to name themselves and explain (if they wanted or were able to) (Chizik & Chizik, 2002; Tappen, 2006). I also included so many, and such lengthy quotations because I wanted to demonstrate, again, with the educators’ own ways of understanding and explaining the complexities and nuances of their experiences on their campus, with and beyond bathrooms and pronouns.

As I went through the interviews, panel, artifacts, and memories I was intentional in my search for goodness, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggested, in these educators’ experiences and strategies. To counter monolithic portrayals and deficit perspectives of trans* identities and experiences, I intentionally sought what was working in their lives and experiences. One result of that was my expansion on the idea of persistence through higher education and my thought about these educators also resisting structures that impact their ability to fully show up at work, in person, and sometimes, literally, on paper. Therefore, I came to see the second research question as one of persistence and resistance. I wanted to make this distinction and clarify the question in that I recognized their persistence as the educators’ continuing to move through educational and other systems, earning the necessary credentials, to get into their
positions. They were also resisting as they often “refuse[d] to accept, or comply with something” (google.com, emphasis added). The something(s) in this case were bias, misunderstanding, genderism, heterosexism, racism, classism, and structures within those same educational systems through which they persisted.

In addition to the above guiding questions, my study was also informed by a conceptual framework in which trans* educators are at the center of various systems (e.g., microsystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems). In addition to the bioecological framework (Brofrenbrenner, 1999), my conceptual model incorporates intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in an intentional way to understand the roles of interlocking systems of power, privilege, oppression, and liberation in the educators’ experiences. Applying an intersectional ecological perspective allowed me to explore a bi-directional relationship between trans* educators and their campus contexts, while also acknowledging the ways in which power, privilege, and marginalization show up and influence their experiences. Moreover, the literature that informed this study demonstrated emerging understandings of trans* identities and different experiences. Through reviewing relevant literature, I revealed some of the experiences of bias, discrimination, and violence that have been associated with trans* lives and bodies (Grant et al., 2011) as well as meaningful developmental and interpersonal experiences that contributed to a sense of belonging and self (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). The educators in my study validated these experiences as well as provided additional possibilities and experiences of trans*.

Through sitting with the recordings and then transcriptions, I have been an artist sequestered away to create my “masterpiece,” a portrait of trans* postsecondary
educators. Throughout the process, there was a constant negotiation of many tensions, including crafting one portrait versus 14, wanting to “get it right,” and being intentional about letting the educators’ voices lead the way. As the portraitist, I worked to construct something that closely resembled how the educators’ described their experiences. I want them, and you, to read these words and see the trans* educators and how they showed themselves to me, in all the contradictions, complexities, and love. My hope is that I have done them justice.

**Persisting and Resisting**

Considering Brofrenbrenner’s bioecological model (1999) and intersectionality, along with Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1987) notion of searching for goodness elevated the ways educators are navigating multiple systems, institutions, and environments laced with interlocking systems of racism, sexism, genderism, ableism, xenophobia, to name a few, yet trans* educators are thriving, in many ways, and changing institutions, and ultimately higher education. Through acts of radical self-love and care, such as Pilates and spending time with loved ones, trans* educators are acknowledging the need to care for ones body, mind, and soul to continue doing this work. This work of trans*forming higher education through personal narratives and experiences; through dialogues and discussions about gender and sexuality in their work; through using identities as educational tools to expand perspectives was both challenging and rewarding.

This may seem abstract and lofty so I wanted to provide another example of what I mean. I watched the recording of a google hangout between five young trans people who shared some of their experiences and talked about “provid[ing] space to engage in
healing, restoration, fellowship, and action” (Biko, 2014, October 11), a space similar to the Fishbowl. As the young people talked about what Black Trans Revolution is, I connected some of what they were saying to the persistence and resistance of the trans* educators. Some examples the young people shared included individual acts of resistance, being who you are, waking up every day, doing what you do, also serving as models and examples for others, and creating and carving out their own spaces. L’lerret, a college student on the hangout, talked about how she goes about her business everyday in her dresses, getting her hair done, living in her “boy” dorm, and being who she is in spite of “them” not wanting her there. Similarly, educators were showing up as who they were, even if they were not wanted or expected (Jourian et al., 2015).

Some of the educators talked about being on the verge of leaving, or wanting to leave higher education because of “exhaustion” and “weariness.” However, they also talked about the reasons they stay in the field, whether for what the field has done or can do in theirs and other’s development and experience or because of the connections they have with students. Sebastian and MW described relationships with students that encouraged them to stay. Austin’s experiences with being able to explore and develop their identities contributed to them staying.

A Sketch Portrait

Imagine being on the campus where you work and spend a significant amount of time and looking around and not seeing another person whom you would consider a peer or colleague who shares one of your salient identities; an identity that is presumed to only contain two choices and you are neither of them or have not always been perceived as
your identity. The only one. Trans*, meaning literally to move across and educators, folks invested in learning, growth, and development. Educators are supposed to have it figured out, their growth and development is done. Because they are older (not always), because they have had more education (not necessarily), because they are educators (ok?). That means trans* educators must have their lives together. However, trans* educators are still wrestling with identity, labels, and understandings.

Also imagine that you have multiple communities that provide support for you in your identity. There are places, sometimes on, oftentimes off campus where you can relate and connect to others. Trans* educators are building communities with and for students, and with and for themselves. The trans* educators in my study are not a monolithic group. Their experiences on campus vary and depend on a number of factors including their identified and perceived race, sex assigned, gender expression, gender identity, class, dis/abilities, roles and positions. They are carving out space with and for students and themselves. They are in positions addressing institutional policies and practices; incorporating marginalized perspectives into curriculum and theory; and challenging systems of power and privilege. All the while, experiencing microaggressions on campus. Nevertheless, they are supporting and modeling for others and working to take care of themselves. They expand trans* possibilities. They are trans* educators. They are trans*forming higher education across areas, disciplines, and departments.
Findings and Literature

It is widely believed that we do not have a choice in the sex we are assigned at birth and the implicated gender, nor the accompanying conditions, such as names, expectations, and experiences (Bilodeau, 2009; Spade, 2011a). However, what if we do? Trans* people, those who “cross” boundaries of gender, or transgress gender occupy many spheres in society. For example, the educators in my study are embedded in their institutional microsystem, and higher education.

Relationships and Communities

Within the microsystem, educators are also developing relationships and communities. One of the most significant refrains that emerged through my research with trans* educators was the theme of community. Whether seeking, building, or thriving in, community was a critical element in development and sense of belonging on and off campus. Thus, I took creative liberties to construct a semi-fictive space for community building among the educators that allowed their voices to amplify and support one another. In addition to community, other refrains emerged that have implications for research and practice.

When it came to building relationships and communities, identities were important, meaning developing relationships and communities on and off campus were often connected to shared identities, such as gender, race, and roles (Beemyn, 2005a; Devor, 2004). For example, befriending the only other Black gay male on campus as MW did, connecting with other queer people of color as Austin described, and convening with other masculine of center identified people as Sebastian shared. Many of the participants
also talked about being part of groups, organizations, and other communities in which there was one or more shared identities. For example, Austin, Alex, Dean, Kyle, and Jace talked about communities of support that included other trans* people and also other trans* educators.

Though the educators had some places and communities that were supportive and affirming, they also experienced isolation, invisibility, and hypervisibility within their institutions. In this case, we can observe the influence and relationships between educators and their institutions and other contexts (e.g., families, communities) as bidirectional. This sense of isolation complicates the idea of relationships and communities by conveying the importance of such communities in multiple contexts. It is important to convey the isolation and invisibility because it is a major theme and something that many communities have experienced contributing to advocacy for more representation (at the least) in organizations and institutions, similar to when institutions sought women staff to support women students on campus (Nidiffer, 2000; Rhagitan, 2009; Schwartz, 2003). Moreover, for trans* people “learning about or meeting other transgender people serves as a catalyst for self-recognition and acceptance, as they see themselves in others and realize they are not alone in how they feel” (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 39) which also connects to mirroring and witnessing (Devor, 2004). Some of the educators believed that having other trans* people on campus, even if they disagreed as Hal said, would provide collegiality and camaraderie.
Co-Construction/Co-Authoring

We do not do gender alone (Butler, 1999; Hamlin et al., 2011; Lev, 2004). We may constantly consider external expectations when we perform gender. Even when we actively construct our story and narrative the way we want, there may be outside others trying to write over it. Too often, our “audience” and co-constructors are bound by binary expectations (Bilodeau, 2007; Gilbert, 2009; Wilchins, 2004). This co-construction contributes to behavior, professional experiences, and everyday life. Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) ecological perspective depicts this visually and describes the bi-directional relationship between people and their contexts. Now that some representations of trans* people such as Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, Caitlyn Jenner, and Chaz Bono are part of a national conversation, there are limited understandings of trans* people and how they are perceived. Within the current climate, trans* is recreated within the gender binary as transwomen and transmen. Therefore, even if you identify as non-binary as Kyle, Alex, and Dean, there are attempts to fit you into the binary. For example, not having a space to identify yourself on paperwork and forms. This co-construction and co-self-authorship speaks to the interconnectedness of lives and experiences while also consciously and intentionally challenging expectations. Co-construction is more than people authoring over your life. The educators were co-constructing and expanding gender with people, across contexts, and within systems with which they interacted. We co-authored many parts of this dissertation, weaving theirs and my voice.

In many ways mirroring and witnessing are about co-construction. Devor (2004) described witnessing as being seen by others for who we are, whereas mirroring means
having people who we see ourselves like also see us like them. The ideas of witnessing and mirroring demonstrate the influence of similar other’s perceptions and their impact on trans* identities. In this way, trans* educators’ words, identities, and experiences are reflected back, providing a mirror for others who read and are reflected. My interview questions also encouraged mirroring and witnessing. For example, I asked educators what they learned about themselves from participating in my study. This question allowed them to reflect in the moment, literally and figuratively.

There is also self-mirroring and witnessing that can happen through self-reflection, such as the interviews and participant-observation that constructed these portraits. For example, Kyle’s response to that question spoke to the evolution of zir’s ways of talking about zir’s gender. Kyle had participated in an interview prior to ours. During our interview, Kyle’s was able to articulate zem’s understandings in about half the time. Kyle recognized the [ease] with which ze could talk about it [their identities and experiences] in our interview. Other examples of self-mirroring may include things like journaling, blogging, selfies, youtube videos, tumblr pages, zines, among other ways. This self-mirroring acknowledges the individual’s role in the co-construction of their lives and experiences along with others, contexts, and systems (Brofrenbrenner, 1999, Crenshaw, 1989).

This portrait can be used, by many people including trans* educators, to understand their own story and the portrait can inform other administrators and educators as well as students with whom they work. Many of the educators described reflective and interactive evolution of identities and experiences. The portrait can also give students and
other trans* educators inspirational mentors, mentors who they may never meet but who can be inspiring through their stories.

**Names and pronouns.** At a certain point the educators came to a realization and decision that they could name themselves and, in some ways, initiate how they wanted others to interact with them. All of the participants, in some way, talked about being in spaces where names and pronouns were stated and negotiated, sometimes respected and validated, other times ignored and dismissed. There are also additional impacts associated with liberation from names and pronouns. Wayne (2005) commented on the implications of pronouns, “Trans-activists suggest that pronouns he/she and his/her linguistically enforce a normative two-sex system through assumptions that the trans subject does and out to fit into one side of this binary opposition” (p. 86) and if they do not conform they “are relegated to the discursive purgatory on non-signification” (p. 87). Names and pronouns are a concrete example of a larger negotiation of identity for trans* people, and in this case trans* postsecondary educators.

In terms of naming and pronouning oneself, there was sometimes a disclosure, meaning sharing with others how they identified and/or including pronouns. Disclosure is tricky because there are competing interests in disclosure, whereby in order for trans* educators to find one another, they need to know how each other identifies, yet, for various reasons some educators were choosing not to disclose their identities. When interacting with cisgender people, disclosure should not be an expectation, nor should it only work one way where it is on a trans* person to reveal something about themselves
and the listener does not need to do anything. On the contrary, there is an expectation that people will honor and respect identities and request(s) once they are known.

One of the ways trans* educators in my study perceived receiving support on campus was through the correct use of names and pronouns by individuals and institutions, as in interactions and introductions. There were also unsupportive experiences that have been named by other trans* educators, including struggling for legal protections, being viewed as a test case, misuse of pronouns, the pervasiveness of Whiteness, gender policing, and issues of disclosure (Jourian et al., 2015). The educators in my study were also aware of the role of genderism and intersectionality in their lives and experiences as trans* educators.

Yet still these educators can make various choices about disclosures because of the context of higher education; where identity and development are components of the college environment. In essence, being visibly trans* and experiences of oppression are different inside and outside of higher education. For the educators naming themselves and how they understood their genders contributed to expanding gender and identity possibilities. In many ways, their acts of defining their identities for themselves are also acts of resistance. They are resisting other’s expectations and assumptions and, in turn providing their own language and understandings.

Trans* enough. Even through resisting, reclaiming, and challenging gender norms and expectations, trans* educators are also still wrestling with their identities. The concept of trans* enough is connected to the larger theme of co-constructing lives (co-self-authorship). For the theme trans* enough, the trans* educator is at the center and
their beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives on their trans* identities. Trans* enough manifested in two different ways: feeling inauthentic and lacking. Feelings of fraud and self-doubt meant performing in a way that was not authentic, or did not feel authentic (Hines, 2006; Roen, 2002). For example, Martina connected to being a postsecondary educator whose role is to support and encourage women and students of color in particular, to be who they are and [do what they want] when she was not doing/could not do that for herself. Educators, including Sloane and Jace opted not to disclose their trans* identities in many ways, but that contributed to them feeling like a fraud or like they were not being authentic.

Simultaneously, educators did not believe they fit the definition of trans*. Educators wondered if they were doing enough, if they were presenting/expressing as trans* enough, which meant different things to the educators, if they could even call themselves trans* or expect others to perceive them as such. For instance, Sloane, Kyle, and Austin affirmed each other around these experiences. They did not necessarily want people to see them “as trans” rather as the gender they believed themselves to be and not the gender that was associated with their perceived sex assigned at birth. In many instances the educators acknowledged a trans* identity, and described experiences of grappling with how certain experiences such as being non-binary get absorbed into binary expectations. This is a different spin on the idea of trans* enough because the educators expressed internal feelings of not being trans* enough, whereas others have described the experience as other trans* people not viewing them as trans* enough (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Not everyone’s anxieties were the same.
Participants struggled with reconciling external expectations and assumptions about who they were (and who they were not) with internal understandings of themselves that may or may not align with dominant narratives of what it means to be trans*.

Specifically, some of the trans* educators understood and spoke to the fact that they were not “doing” their gender alone. Even through the naming and pronouncing of themselves, redefining their own identities, and educating others, they were still confronted with the binary, stigma, misunderstanding, and bias (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bilodeau, 2009; Grant et al., 2011).

As a result of this co-performance, some educators chose to live stealth. The idea of stealth is controversial. Living stealth comes out of necessity, out of desire, out of identity, out of survival, and other reasons. Some people think it is hiding or tricking people into believing something that is not true about an individual. However, others contend that is not living stealth, rather they are living their life. Because they pass, or are read as one of the genders within the binary, generally one that is different than expectations based on their sex assigned at birth, some of the educators were not assumed to be trans*. Stealth is complicated when it is considered apart from the concept of “coming out” for LGB people. Zimman (2009) conducted an analysis of transgender narratives from interviews, and identified two distinct experiences with disclosure; declaration and disclosure. Declaration referred to an initial claiming of transgender identity, and disclosure referring to sharing one’s transgender history (Zimman, 2009). For the educators in my study, there is a desire for part of their identity to be recognized, and yet the educators were also shielding themselves from the possibility of students...
disengaging or bias during a job search and interview process as Jace described. Cultural, societal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal circumstances influenced how they are able to move through the world, who they choose to disclose to, how they present and express. And sometimes, the decision is to listen to one’s self around place, time, and possible outcomes or consequences of disclosure.

**Identities at/in Work**

These experiences of disclosure and identity were complicated by the educators’ roles on campus. The campuses where the educators worked were predominantly White, cisgender, heteronormative spaces. Whether community colleges or large research institutions, in the Northeast, West, or Midwest the institutions espoused missions around equity and inclusion. However, from the educators’ perspectives, few, if any, lived them out. On campus, the educators had formal roles as faculty and staff, students and teachers. In their roles, the educators were sociology faculty, library faculty, and residence hall directors, working on various types of curricular and co-curricular experiences. In addition, many of them were also often serving as trans* or gender and sexuality educators, mentors and resources - sometimes as a part of their role, often in addition to it.

Moreover, the educators talked about how their identities influenced their roles and relationships with students. For some of the educators, they believed it was important to signal students in and out of class that different gender and sexuality identities were valid (Rankin, 2010). Examples of these signals included incorporating trans*, in some way, into the curriculum whether in a sociology or statistics course. They could sense
students were wanting and craving something that could provide some reassurance of being okay and validated. However, for some educators this awareness was juxtaposed with a choice to not disclose their personal identities in certain campus contexts such as the classroom as Martina described.

Relatedly, I have been working through my own bias about disclosure on and off campus, rather choosing to reframe the conversation as a choice: I am constantly disclosing my identities in/at my work. I question how there can be more visibility if educators are choosing not to disclose? Previously, I and others might have equated choosing not to disclose certain aspects of identity as somehow hiding, which can be seen as a bad thing. The way that I understood my perspective is that the binary was seeping in: I figured a person is either in or out. I have been working through this either/or thinking and believing in my personal and professional contexts. How it manifested in this project was that I was open to more possibilities of disclosure and understood the multifaceted, complexities of performance and disclosure in different contexts. I am still grappling with how to disclose to particular members of my family, especially my parents. My own lack of disclosure in every area of my life helped me be more empathetic, although I have been challenging my thoughts about this from the beginning.

Disclosure is such a part of our lives, but there needs to be more nuanced conversation. In higher education there is awareness and context for disclosure, expectations of conversations around difference, and trans* is being talked about more. An example of this was central to *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2015) video, aptly named “Ask Me,” where LGBTQ students described their experiences on their campuses,
many of them identifying with trans*. Similar to the educators in my study, the students described experiences of disengagement and discomfort. There is also increased comfort disclosing in higher education settings, whereby more trust may be given to people in this setting than with one’s own family as Austin described more disclosure within the higher education context than with their family. Disclosure is so different in higher education.

The educators in my study demonstrated the ways in which they influence their campuses through their various roles. As such, they demonstrated the importance of their lenses and perspectives in conversations from curriculum to sexual assault prevention. With their experiences and perspectives on systems such as racism, sexism, heterogenderism, and intersectionality, they approached their teaching, practice, and research through these lenses and challenged the status quo, similar to bisexual and transgender individual’s negotiation and enactment of agency across multiple contexts (Cahore & Tuason, 2009).

**Trans* Consciousness**

Names and pronouns, relationships and communities, co-construction of identity, identities in/at work, and persisting and resisting all contribute to the development of trans* consciousness. Trans* consciousness is a way of seeing the world beyond binaries as well as intersectionally and creatively. The trans* educators in my study have different ways of understanding themselves and the world around them. This emerged as a sort of consciousness, meaning as a result of the educators’ experiences living in and moving along multiple social realities and contexts, their understandings of such concepts
and constructs as gender, identity, racism, heterosexism, and other systems, policies, and identities were nuanced, complicated, and connected.

Dubois (1994) wrote about a double-consciousness of Black men who existed in a society of tense racial discourse. Double-consciousness described the experience of living in multiple social worlds, one Black and the other American. However, given the cultural climate at the time, there were policies and attitudes that perpetuated negative perceptions and limited access for Black people. Likewise, the current cultural context for trans* people is binary and polices, harms, and ignores us. There are discriminations against groups and also recognition of power that connects people to other identities. Layla knew all to well experiences of sexism that women experience in higher education, as well as the privilege she experienced when people perceived her as a man. Thus, because of the widely understood and accepted construction of trans* as experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and bias, trans* educators are not expected to make it in and through higher education, a requirement for becoming a formal educator in roles of faculty and staff (Jourian et al., 2015).

When Crenshaw (1989) wrote about intersectionality, Crenshaw described the experiences of Black women who were not considered or valued and their rights and privileges as women were restricted and prohibited. Crenshaw’s writings demonstrated understanding and incorporation of characteristics of interlocking systems Trans* educators also described systems that disempowered and then blamed them, leaving them to devise creative strategies for engaging with/in the systems. Again, Layla’s voice and story rises when her mentor told her, “you wanted to be a woman. Welcome to being a
woman,” referring to experiences of men touching her or saying inappropriate things. DuBois (1994) argued that, “The burden belongs to the nation, but has sometimes been placed on the groups that are marginalized” (p. 23). However, marginalized groups have consistently counteracted and resisted systems of oppression. My portrait reveals how trans* educators exhibit new and creative ways to counteract and resist oppressive structures and systems - actually SEEING these things through different lenses (Crenshaw, 1989; Dubois, 1994).

Among their other identities and experiences, the educators’ racial, gender expressions, able-bodiedness, and class contributed to how they viewed their campuses (and the world). Expanding and navigating these intersecting identities and experiences that are so entrenched in the fabric of our society while picking away and noticing all of these tacit/invisible elements, and they cannot help but view the rest of the world in this way. They had a nuanced understanding of the binary and how interlocking systems of oppression operate.

**Research Implications**

Two significant research implications that emerged through my study with trans* educators are the role of the researcher and language and labels. In this section, I elaborate on these implications and discuss future research.

**Being the Portraitist**

As a member of the trans* educator community, I had certain access and privileges in conducting this research that connect to research implications. Not only did the educators believe in the project, and that there should be more research focused on
trans* identities and experiences, they also believe in me and wanted to see me do well as another trans* educator, and one who is adding trans* research. Additionally, I had prior relationships with some of the educators who were maybe more open with me than they would have been otherwise. We could dive right into the nitty gritty and they would provide elaboration on what they meant, often commenting that they hoped they were providing what I needed and answering my questions.

I also wanted to “accurately” reflect our experiences. Although I have not had written accounts of my experiences or stories constructed (to my knowledge), similar to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), I have had a few portraits drawn of myself in the past. They were not portraits that required me to sit for more than one hour for an artist; however, the experiences were a good reminder to me of the importance of relationship building with the subject. From my one-hour sessions with the artists, their portraits of me revealed the artists perceptions of me. The artist highlighted aspects of me that I was intentionally trying to conceal or alter and nailed some of the physical features: it was complex. If we had more time, maybe we would have constructed something different, which brings us back to co-construction of identity.

The artists had conceptions and perspectives that they construct on the canvas. Recently there was story circulating on Facebook about different photographers shooting (taking photos of) the same subject and the differences in their photographs depending on the cover story they were told. To one photographer the subject was a former inmate to another a business person. The photographer’s perception of the subject influenced how they portrayed the subject, in light, from below, or central to the shot. Similarly, there
were also differences in the how educators with whom I had a previous relationship and those I knew peripherally were showing up in the portrait, and those I met for the first time when they responded to my email call for participants. In conducting research, constant reflexivity allowed me to recognize this and address it in whatever way I thought appropriate. My hope and goal with this project was to capture snapshots, moments in time, that could contribute to expanded understanding trans* educators experiences and gender.

I had a conception and perspective that I had been constructing and re-constructing throughout my life. Nevertheless, I could “see” myself in the portrait and thought they captured many of my external features quite well. Similarly, the educators I sat with and interviewed had been constructing and making meaning of their experiences and identities long before they talked with me and will continue long after. Yet, the consistent feedback I received after sending a draft portrait and analysis was that they saw themselves (Devor, 2004). I was singing their lives with [my] words.

The Possibilities and Limits of Labels

Among the educators, there were many different ways that they described their identities and labels they used: masculine of center, Black, able-bodied, genderqueer, parents (kids and fur babies). As mentioned in Chapter Three when discussing how participants were recruited and selected, I described one educator I was encouraged to contact, who ultimately decided not to participate because they did not think the call for participants, and labels included in the call, included them and the way they understood and described their identity. Another participant who chose to participate in an interview
also asked about whether or not they were eligible given that their identity was only known to themselves and maybe a couple close others. In addition, how the educators ultimately named and described their identities demonstrated not only different labels, but also different reasons people use certain labels and how they understand them.

Allowing participants to name and define themselves also created tension in how to present them as a community. Though I allowed educators to define themselves, I am ultimately lumping them into a trans* umbrella for brevity. I collapsed the educators’ identities in many ways; however, whenever possible and/or necessary I used their language for their identities, names, and pronouns.

These nuances and differences in understanding and describing identities means that researchers need to be clear in their language about identity and who they mean while also leaving room for identities they had not considered and/or do not even know about. In addition to being an implication for research, this is also an implication for practice, as some participants described their feelings of invisibility when their identities were not acknowledged on forms and in other ways that demographic information is collected on campus. Campus administration are constantly collecting demographic and other information about people from application to exiting which are not reflective of people’s own conceptions of their identities (Johnston et al., 2014). They can use this to create policies and practices that include and consider the needs of trans* people. However, these collections are limited at best and biased and discriminatory at worst. Campuses need to also find ways to collect information about who is actually on campus, otherwise people will continue to feel and be invisible and marginalized.
Labels are connected to names and pronouns because names and pronouns are another version of labels. The educators described naming and pronouncing themselves and naming and describing their own gender identities. Recognizing and honoring the importance of naming oneself connects to how researchers call for participants and collect demographic information. In an effort to “define” what I meant by trans*, I listed possible identities which deterred some. Considering how to construct the call as inclusive as possible, comes down to acknowledging that some identities may not be listed, but not because they are not welcome, but rather for practical reasons, and possibly not knowing about them. Therefore it may be critical to consult various communities. In particular, the ways that POCs label and describe their genders needs to be intentionally sought and included so as to get more perspectives than the usual White transmasculine voices. Additionally, whenever possible, participants should be able to provide their own labels for their identities. As scholars construct research projects and consider participants, they need to be aware of the various ways people with different gender identities name and describe their genders.

**Future Research**

Considering future research, there are a few directions I want to encourage. First, I think it goes without saying, but I am going to say it, scholars need to conduct more research on the experiences of trans* people, educators in particular. My study uncovered new and nuanced understandings about trans* educators such as expanded gender possibilities which contributes to them being possibility models (similar to Obama being a possibility model for Black people to become president) on and off campus,
research, curriculum, and practice that challenges trans*phobia and other systems of oppression, and building communities on campus that contribute to the field, but I just scratched the surface with 14 educators. In addition, trans* educators’ scholarship needs to be visible and valued, whether it focuses on trans* identities or not. These perspectives and experiences are definitely critical as researcher and researched and need continued exploration. In Chapter Two, I provided a literature review that explored experiences of trans* people and presented a bleak picture because there is not much research and the findings described primarily bias and discrimination. Searching for goodness allowed me to also highlight counterstories (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). As Degaldo and Stefancic described, counterstories are critical to marginalized communities because they “attak[ing] embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity” (p. 42) and name issues marginalized communities’ experience. “Once it is named, it can be combated” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 43). Scholars should also conduct research that sheds light on the ways in which trans* people, such as educators, are challenging a monolithic narrative of homelessness, joblessness, and despair (Grant et al., 2011).

Another consideration for future endeavors is to continue conducting creative and critical research projects that allow researchers to dig into the complexities and nuances of lived experiences because this type of research, like my study, increase awareness beyond binaries. An example of this is conducting an ethnographic, longitudinal project that delves into the impact of trans* educators on their campuses over an extended period of time. Some questions researchers might ask are, How are diversity and social justice
impacted by trans* educators? How are spaces and policies impacted over time because of the work and roles of trans* educators on campuses? Furthermore, exploring trans* postsecondary educators’ experiences in and outside of institutional contexts allows for a more nuanced and holistic perspective of the ways in which gender and genderism/bigenderism are operating within higher education contexts. This perspective allows educators to address these issues in the curriculum and co-curriculum. Furthermore, trans* educators’ movement across genders can expand our understandings of gender and contribute to more inclusive policies and practices.

Trans* educators can expand our thinking of the world, not just gender but moving all things out of binaries and either/or. Including trans* educators is queering higher education because they help move conversations beyond binary of men and women educators (Renn, 2010; Wilchins, 2004). Also because educators are often ignored in the literature except when recommendations and implications are discussed, they are supposed to apply the information and skills to work with students. In their work with students, trans* educators are bringing themselves into the work. It is important to understand their development and experiences as well as their influence and impact on campus.

Another endeavor that scholars should continue is focusing on trans* educators of color and their transfer of awareness and understanding of issues around race to issues of gender and intersectionality. From my study, trans* educators of color connected and understood identities and oppressions as intertwined. By being exposed to and recognizing racism early, they also applied that to issues of sexism, genderism, and
compulsory heterogenderism (Nicolazzo, in press-b) to actively acknowledge, challenge, and resist these systems. Moreover, expanding beyond higher education to explore relationships and experiences with partners, friends, and families of origin, to which some educators alluded, will also contribute meaningfully to the literature.

**Practical Implications**

Together with the educators, after reflecting on our experiences, we imagined how we might enhance our campuses, if we had the power. These imaginings also serve as practical implications for my study. In *Freedom Dreams*, Robin D. G. Kelley (2002) encouraged readers to imagine “how society should and could be” by putting dreams into action. So that is what we did. I asked the educators to dream and imagine if they could change their campuses in any ways they wanted, how would they do it? They responded with concrete and abstract proposals for improving theirs and others’ experiences through changes on campus. The educators in my study used their lenses as educators, as trans* people; as people of color and White people; as parents, siblings, and partners; and as artists and activists to examine their campuses and imagine what could make them better. The ideas they had fell into a few categories, including representation of trans* people on campus, particularly faculty and/or staff, more inclusive spaces from locker rooms to faculty lounges, and being intersectional and social justice minded. The educators’ thoughts and ideas for improving their campuses are presented next.

**Representation and More**

One of the main ways that the educators wanted to trans* form their campuses was through having more representation of different identities - trans*, people of color,
and LGBQ in particular - in positions of power and influence within administrative offices rather than just students. The idea of a Chief Diversity Officer came up as a possible solution and Austin challenged “don’t just bring them for an interview, hire them.” There was also a desire for there to be more “out” faculty and staff, whether they were already on campus or prospective candidates. They contended that it was important to create opportunities for community building for faculty and staff to meet, engage with, and possibly work with other trans* educators on campus.

In addition to more diverse faculty and staff on campus, it is also critical for institutions to provide more diversity and inclusion training as well as spaces and programming that focus on discussions of issues of class, power, privilege, and oppression and the impacts on real lives. Communities within schools, in this case, faculty and staff, are critically important (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011).

Providing opportunities to learn about other experiences and identities, in such programs as Safe Zone or in sociology courses, is a central role of universities - maybe not understand them all, but rather open people’s minds to possibilities, which trans* experiences certainly do. They provide examples of changing identity, of affirming identity, of hiding identity, of working to integrate identities. Without this expansion, individuals and institutions will continue to exclude trans* and other people with their biases, discrimination, violence, and exclusion (Grant et al., 2011).

**Addressing Policies and Facilities**

In addition to thinking about the people who were (and were not) on campus, there were also specific recommendations of policies and facilities to enhance campus
(Byrne, 2000; Kasper, 2004). In general, more centralized and accessible spaces were needed, as well as more funding. Sebastian provided one way to address some of the space issues on campus, “I just need a sledge hammer and some putty.” Some examples of spaces and facilities were things like all gender locker rooms and bathrooms. However, our imaginations expanded beyond bathrooms and locker rooms to include things like a yoga studio, zen garden, and labyrinth. Huixol elaborated on how these spaces might be used “for mindfulness and to remind oneself that they are part of something larger than themselves.” Others advocated for murals on campus as well as dedicated spaces for LGBT staff and faculty to meet and build community and places to report bias incidents. Moreover, having a preferred name policy was desired. Educators benefitted from some of the gender inclusive policies implemented on their own campuses such as gender inclusive facilities, protections based on gender identity/expression, affirming people and spaces, and relationships. However, faculty and staff did not have access to certain policies and practices implemented to help trans* students feel welcome on campus, such as gender inclusive housing, student spaces, and in some cases, healthcare.

Educators also wanted institutions and individuals to signal their commitment to social justice and diversity with things like putting their pronouns in their email signatures, capturing more than just two gender options on demographic forms, and providing mentor programs for staff and faculty. Taking it further, institutions could provide information and resources about affirming doctors as well as providing additional mental health days for queer staff of color because of some of the additional burdens and
stresses they encounter and carry, moving more towards social justice, beyond diversity (Davis & Harrison, 2013). As Kody put it “…more actual like difficult social justice work. Not the easy marketable social justice work.” Kyle explained what this would require, “It’s such an underlying systemic tacit assumption paradigm shift that needs to happen, I think, in any organization to really be trans* inclusive.”

Huixol sums up what trans* educators want on campus Huixol wants to walk around campus and feel/know everyone is ok with everyone; Z said “it’s not I know your life story, it’s I get that we’re a part of this community…everyone’s welcome, everyone’s appreciated and accepted and everyone is loved for who they are because they help us become a better community.” The consensus was that they just want institutions to walk their talk about social justice, diversity, and inclusion on campus. And sometimes there was not even talk where there should be. Jace acknowledged that the Chancellor of his institution does not recognize LGBT on campus, “I don’t think he has ever said those words, at least in a public address.”

Summary

Trans* educators are traversing rocky terrain just trying to be, work, and live. It is clear that the educators care about the students on their campuses and the students with whom they work. They also care about their campuses, higher education, and their areas and disciplines. They have faith in the field, a field that has and continues to contribute to their life and development. There is a lot of resilience, empowerment, and self-determination that these educators are describing and living. Trans* educators have as varied experiences as any “group” or “community” of people. And they share
experiences that overlap and may directly connect them to one another. The educators described experiences and perspectives that demonstrated they were acutely aware of how power infiltrated their interactions. Across those experiences and perspectives were different levels of understanding.

The ideas that these trans* educators have for improving their campuses include diversity-specific initiatives and practices such as hiring more trans* and people of color to positions of power on campus, as well as changes that impact the holistic experiences of everyone on campus. Ultimately, the goals of higher education should be to create and maintain spaces, policies, and practices that allow everyone on campus to reach their fullest potentials, feel safe, and contribute to an environment of learning, development, and growth. These educators wanted to work together, wanted more collaboration, and recognized that the way the university is structured in siloes and hierarchically literally inhibits such collaboration and community building. Some educators believed the institution should be serving and providing resources to the community in which it was located, with such things as open access technology and just an open access campus. Though their universities were in the community they were not of the community (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). These educators are models on their campuses for other trans* educators and students. In particular, educators are in a unique position within educational systems and structures (Calhoun, 1996). In classrooms, they are presenting, encouraging, and requesting/inviting different perspectives from their students, colleagues, supervisors, and advisors.
Final Thoughts and Reflections

The reason I chose to conduct this research and present the data as a conversation among the educators was to bring together and be together with what I call my trans* network, some of them being trans* kin, the T* Circle. At the conference that inspired this construction, we carved out our own space. We sat together and cried together and stood together and cussed together and loved on each other. There was a roller coaster of emotion over the course of the three days of the conference. We were heard by one another and at the same time shunned by the organization, which represents higher education and institutions, organizations whose missions and values around equity and inclusion are not lived out fully during the conference.

This is demonstrative of the experiences of trans* educators in higher education: invisibility and isolation, affirmation and support, contradictions and inconsistencies. Engaging in this conversation together, bringing together our experiences and stories was powerful because it validated a reality, their reality, our reality. Each educator brought their own experiences into our interviews and the panel. They brought shared and intersecting experiences/understandings and identities of marginalization and privilege. They named and described their experiences, how the experiences manifested, and the feelings associated with awareness of their role within these institutions and systems of privilege and oppression.

In work that was so personal and also connected to my career and passions, I wanted to be intentional about incorporating the learning and insights gained into my work in a variety of ways, such as communication with new colleagues, interaction with
known colleagues, constructions of presentations, everything. Over the course of this process I have become energized, deflated, depressed, and hopeful by the stories I read, watch, and hear every day about the fate of trans* people in this country. This is likely parallel to the educators’ feelings. The truth is, it is not all bad. The stories of these educators remind us of the complexities of the human experience. My own complexities have also continued revealing themselves to me throughout my writing of this dissertation. Many times I doubted my ability to complete such a task. I hid myself from others in order not to show the fear I was feeling. At the same time that I am writing this dissertation, I am also at a critical moment in my own life and identity as a trans* educator.

Researcher as instrument has been extremely difficult for me as I navigate my own trans* identity as well as trying to tell stories with others, similarly situated and otherwise. Writing a dissertation is hard enough, but add to it an extremely intimate exploration into myself and, it became overwhelming to say the least. I felt like “how can I say anything about this topic as I am still grappling with and trying to understand myself as it relates to my identity and role as a trans* educator?” Writing about myself and others is an extremely vulnerable position. I had to be prepared to not only hold up a mirror to myself, but also to acknowledge what I saw and what it meant. I have recounted numerous stories and memories from my past that I believe connect to my trans* educator journey.

Throughout this process, I also got caught up in this notion of being able to tell a full story through this project, but as with anything in life, this story will inevitably be
incomplete, sporadic, and tangled. Such is life. If I am reflecting life, it cannot be neatly packaged. It is messy. It is confusing. It is incomplete. However, it is said and done, and I have constructed my portrait of trans* educators in higher education. I hope you can see the multi-layered, complex, simply beautiful tapestry that connects and portrays these experiences. As I wrap up this experience, I am reminded of a philosophy Kyle shared with me in our interview, “I am because we are.”
APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET
Name:  
Pseudonym:  
Pronoun(s) (if any):  
Age:  
Sex assigned at birth:  
Highest level of education (degree and major):  
Institution:  
Institution Pseudonym:  

How would/do you describe your gender? What does that mean to you?

How would/do you describe yourself? What aspects of your identity are important to you?

How long have you worked in higher education? How long have you been in your current position?

What is your current position on campus? What are your primary responsibilities?

Email address:  
Date:  
Location:
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
The title of the session in which I will conduct the participant-observation is *T* Circle 2015: *Trans* and Gender Non-Conforming Educators on Intersectionality. The session will focus on intersectionalities along social identities, such as gender identity, race, dis/ability, and class, among others, as well as our various positionalities within and outside of higher education. Some of the questions this session will seek to explore include:

- What does intersectionality mean to you?
- What are the intersections of identity that you think about and impacts you specifically within higher ed?
- What does the invisibility of trans* women of color in higher education signal?
- How does Whiteness, masculine/male privilege, and other forms of dominance impact our community?
- How are our institutions and our associations, such as ACPA, preparing or hindering the radical potential of trans* leadership?
- What does trans*formative pedagogy, scholarship, and practice look like?

**Date:**

**Description of panel discussion location (e.g. room layout, audience, # of participants):**

**Description of my feelings:**

**Questions**
1. What were the main issues or themes that stood from the T* Circle panel discussion?
2. Summarize the information gathered from the T* Circle panel that connects to the research questions
3. What else struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating or important from the panel?
4. What new, or remaining, questions do I have in considering my interviews?
Interview Session:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. **Before we begin, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the consent form.** As we discussed, this interview is part of my dissertation study at Loyola University Chicago. My faculty advisor, Dr. Bridget Turner Kelly, can be reached by email at bkelly4@luc.edu. The interview will be used for the purpose of informing my work as a doctoral student in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. During the interview, we will talk about your experiences as a trans* postsecondary educator.

This conversation is strictly confidential and care will be taken to exclude all names and identifying characteristics from the data. I would like your permission to audio-record our conversation so that I can more accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences. We are going to begin the interview. The interview should last about 60-90 minutes. Do you have questions before we begin?

**Campus Life**

Lets talk about your campus and experiences.

- How would you describe your campus?
  - Department?
  - Unit? /Office?
  - Policies?
  - Programs?
  - People?
- What feelings does your campus evoke in you? Is there a time you can recall having a strong feeling about being on campus?
- What are your relationships like with students? Colleagues? Administrators?
- Where do you feel comfortable on campus? With whom?
- What spaces and/or circumstances, on campus, cause anxiety for you? Can you think of a story where you were anxious about an interaction on campus?
- In what ways, if any, does your gender identity impact your perceptions of campus? Is there a time when your gender was particularly salient to you on campus?
- Can you talk me through a “typical” day on campus?
- In general, do you feel welcomed or unwelcomed on campus?
- Are there any specific spaces on campus that make you feel unwelcomed? If so, how?
- Are there any specific spaces missing on campus that would make you feel more welcomed?
- If you could change anything about your campus what would they be?
  - Department?
  - Unit?/Office?
• Policies?
  ○ Programs?
  ○ People?
• How would you change them?

Conclusion

• If you could capture your gender identity in one word, phrase, or image, what would it be? What about your gender identity on campus?
• What, if anything, have you learned about yourself from participating in this interview?
• Is there anything you thought we would talk about today that we did not? Would you like to share about this?
• Do you have anything else to add?

Thank you so much for participating. I will email a copy of your transcript for you to review, please make revisions and send it back to me by [discuss specific date about two weeks after receipt].
APPENDIX D

DISSERTATION MEMO PROTOCOL
Reflexivity of Researcher/Portraitist

Date of Memo:

Location:

Subject of Memo (Circle all that apply)
Coding Portrait  Gender Journeying  Researcher/Portraitist  Participant(s)
Searching for Goodness  Participant-Observation  Queer Theory  Context
Member Checks

Questions to Consider in Memo
1. What questions were raised?
2. What just happened during the research?
3. What did I experience?
4. How am I feeling right now?
5. Is my reaction based on my own gender journey? Literature?
6. How does that impact my study of trans* postsecondary educators?
7. How might it inform the portrait of trans* postsecondary educators?
8. What are the methodological issues that are concerning me at this moment?
9. What can be done to address these issues, if anything?
10. What new, or remaining, questions do you have in considering this concern?
11. What theoretical concerns/connections/disconnections are you are seeing?
12. What does this imply for understanding the experiences of trans* postsecondary educators?
13. How might this connect to bioecological perspective?
14. What implications does this have for intersectionality?
15. How might this be incorporated into the portrait of trans* postsecondary educators?
16. What reflexive notes must be written immediately to capture the experience?
17. How is the portrait emerging? (Searching for goodness)
APPENDIX E

SYMONE’S GENDER JOURNEYING
“The researcher brings [their] own history – familial, cultural, ideological, and educational – to the inquiry” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). As such, my perspectives, questions, and insights are drawn through my life and experiences. In order to build on voice as autobiography (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I have included parts of my own biography; stories, experiences, and insights from my own life that are connected to my gender identity development and interest in this topic. My research is truly me-search (Nash & Bradley, 2011). Also, in doing this, I want to situate myself and at the same time set myself aside. Many feminist and trans* activists find situating oneself as a researcher to be one of the most important parts of making positive change through academic endeavors (Feinberg, 1996; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004; Zimmerman, 2005). By revealing myself, and my experiences, I hope to further promote the need for trans* lives to be respected, known, and valued. As a postsecondary trans* educator, there are key moments in my gender journeying that have led me to firmly believe that a crucial way for us to realize our full potential is to be and be known, mirrored and witnessed (Devor, 2004).

Today I identify as genderqueer. Usually when I tell people that they look confused and unsure, and sometimes they ask questions. Questions like, “what is that?” Once I start explaining that, for me, it means that, I do not identify as a man or woman. I use this language to try to put it in terms they know first. Then I build on that and describe my feelings. Like, how I feel like I embody aspects and reject other aspects of gender as an organizing construct. The confusion does not dissipate; they still do not understand, partly because of genderism - larger cultural and social beliefs, expectations, and assumptions of gender. The truth is I still do not fully understand what it all means. I just know how I feel and I try, with the limited language and success, to describe and express it. I see my gender journeying as times of constant negotiation with myself and others, tempered exploration, brave decisions, uncertainty, and self-determination. The goodness of my story represents challenges to a monolithic trans* narrative and contributes to understandings of gender.

Beginnings

I was born a girl. As soon as I wrote these words something did not feel right. Was I born a girl or was I encouraged to be a girl because of what was (not) between my legs? I was born May 28, 1983 in Chicago Heights, IL. My mom says I did not give her much trouble coming through the birth canal. Although I am not able to recall from my own memory, I imagine the doctor pulled me out, took one look between my legs, and proclaimed "it's a girl." I was named Symone. I was a chocolate round baby with lots of jet black hair. Looking back at pictures of my childhood, I am reminded of some of the ways in which my parents presented me to the world as their child.

Old pictures of me include a head full of hair, whether in one or more ponytails or curls or afro all over my head. Seeing the ponytails reminded me of the time I spent with my dad while he combed my hair. I enjoyed spending time with him. I was also in various outfits, some pink, dresses and bows, jeans and sweatshirts, frilly socks and shiny
shoes, earrings, and other adornments that signaled to onlookers that I was a girl, their
daughter. As a kid, I did not mind the clothing and adornments. I was also spoiled, an
only child for seven years, so I often got anything I wanted, and surely had everything I
needed.

**Tomboy**

As I grew older and started making decisions for myself around my clothes,
activities, and friends, I started hearing the label tomboy. The question or accusation as it
were, or at least that's what it felt like, usually came up because of an activity in which I
was engaged (e.g., basketball, football, hanging with the “boys”) or something I was
wearing or not wearing. Initially I did not want to accept tomboy as a descriptor for me.
However, because of the label and identity, I was able to participate in those activities I
loved and wear the clothes I wanted. So I guess over time I embraced the identity, to
some degree.

**Chocolate Skin**

Smooth black, chocolate drop, dark and lovely were all names that I heard from
people close to me growing up. I am considered dark skinned, which sometimes has
negative connotations. In fact, there is a cultural phenomenon around skin color. In many
communities of color, and specifically in communities of Black or African American
women, light skin is preferred and dark skin may be perceived as ugly and undesirable
(Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). However, my family made me feel beautiful in my
chocolate skin. As a result of this, I have great pride and love in my Black identity.

However, regardless of my pride, I have still encountered situations that posed a
threat to me because I was Black. When I was around six, my dad’s job relocated him,
and subsequently, our family to Lancaster, PA. Lancaster, PA had and has a large Amish
community; not only Amish, but majority White population. When we moved there, I
was one of two Black kids in the elementary school. I noticed this fact, but I am not sure I
made much meaning of it. However, one day when I came home from school, as I got off
the bus at my stop, an older White kid spit on me out of the window. My grandmother,
who was visiting us at that time, tells me that when I returned home that day
I was particularly quiet. This was not necessarily unusual, but she picked up on
something else. After much persuasion, I told my family what happened. I have always
viewed my mother, aunts, and grandmother as protective, independent, smart, funny, no
nonsense, and strong Black women. So when my grandmother told me she would walk
me to the bus stop the next morning, I felt safe. I do not remember all of the details, but
my grandmother asked me to point him out. She approached him and asked about the
incident. No matter what his side, she told him if anything like that happened again she
would be back from Chicago Heights. I did not have any more problems with him.

**Kids**

We only lived in Pennsylvania for two years. After that, we moved back to
Chicago Heights, back home. But the impacts of that time in Lancaster lingered. In
addition to memories of the bus incident, I also brought back with me a different dialect; being told by cousins things like “you talk White.” I knew what they meant and I did not at the same time. I noticed that we talked different, but I am Black, how could I “talk White?” I have grappled with this idea of talking White, which has gone beyond talk to things like dancing, activities, education, and perspectives. I think labeling these things as White has significant impacts on people’s choices. For example, what if I had severely rejected what folks said and went to an extreme? How might my life look different?

Growing up in Chicago Heights, I remember diverse schools and experiences. I have interacted with all kinds of people and places. We shared classroom time and let loose on the playground at recess. However, I do not remember many other genderqueer kids around me, with the exception of a few, including my cousin. He was male assigned at birth, but it seemed that he and I did the activities that people thought the other should do. While he perfected his double Dutch moves, I was called double-handed (which essentially means I do not turn the rope correctly) and preferred basketball.

My perspective of trans* today is much different than my conception of it as a kid. I thought of trans* as confusion and binary in the sense that one wanted to change from one sex/gender to the other. So, at the time, I did not think I knew any open trans* people. Yet, I did know people who were same sex attracted and/or presented in gender non-conforming ways. Although I was learning more about trans*, I was still sorting through what it meant for my life. I went through periods of extreme dissatisfaction and frustration around being assigned female at birth and the physical and social implications. I hated my body, especially the parts I thought made me a girl/woman. I tried to suppress any femininity; I did not want it.

Exploring Sexuality, or Gender, or Both?

Once I got to high school, I picked, and sometimes bought my own clothes and shoes. As such, I only shopped in the boys/men's section, except for things like bras and panties, although I had started wearing boxer shorts around this time. Though I wore men's clothes and presented in masculine ways, people did not question my sexuality; At least not to my face; nor did I. Early on, I assumed I was heterosexual and behaved accordingly. As far back as I can remember, I “went with” (dated) boys. At one point, I even called myself “strictly dickly” meaning I only wanted to be with boys/men, which I equated with a penis. For a long time, I dated boys and men and did not think much about it. I liked them enough. However, when it came to intimacy, I just did not like it. It did not feel right to me. At the time, I just thought that is the way it was supposed to feel and I would get used to it. I did not get used to it.

As I was sorting all this out, I also remember seeing Michelle. Around this time, I spent most weekends at the skating rink. Michelle was a great skater. Michelle was also gender nonconforming and very intriguing to me. On any given day, Michelle might have cornrows going straight back with oversized jeans and shirt, and long fake nails and make-up. Michelle was female assigned, but presented and had the presence that
transcended gendered limits. Michelle was well respected and regarded. I could not figure out if I wanted to date Michelle or be (like) Michelle. However, I believe Michelle’s confidence helped me find my own.

College was a time of curiosity and exploration for me. Being five hours from home, in an unfamiliar place, allowed me to try different things including gender presentations and sexual orientations. Prior to going to college, I had disclosed to my mom that I was bisexual. This disclosure was not completely voluntary, or accurate, but it was safer. I thought it was safer because, I could offer my mom hope in the possibility of me being with a man in the future. My mom was pretty distraught when she found out I liked and dated women. Grappling with all this, I also remember vivid desires to change my gender. I wanted to be a man. In order to express this, I presented myself through clothing and accessories in hyper masculine ways, sagging pants and hats; walking with a lean/dip; and sitting with my legs wide open. I also continued stifling femininity because I thought it did not match who I was. To be a man, meant not embracing femininity. In my mind, men were masculine and masculine only.

This belief influenced my relationships with women. With them, I subscribed to and reinforced heteronormative expectations about what relationships were supposed to be like. I thought there needed to be a masculine and feminine partner, and in most cases I was playing the masculine part. That meant, I opened doors, drove us around, and took out the trash and she was supposed to cook and clean. As I was playing this out, I was assuming an inherent link between gender roles, gender presentation, and sexual orientation. I embraced a masculine role because masculinity was already part of who I wanted to be and how I presented myself. I felt comfortable. I felt like myself. At different points along the way, my desires also meant possessing certain physical attributes I equated with men, namely a penis, no breasts, and in charge.

**Growing as an Educator**

Throughout graduate school and into my professional journey, I continued exploring and expanding my understandings and conceptualizations of myself and challenging assumptions. For example, as an admissions counselor, we had matching shirts. However, there were men’s and women’s versions. On more than one occasion, I challenged biases in apparel ordering when I requested men’s shirts. I would hear things like the cut of the women’s would fit better or the men’s shirts were too big. They were making an assumption about how my shirt should fit. Regardless of these biases, I knew what I wanted and ordered accordingly. This is another example of me determining my gender presentation. Early in my professional career, though I was sometimes uncertain and afraid around expressing who I was to people I did not know, in most instances, I made my own choices. However, I can remember my interview process at GSU was a little different.

I had been on a professional interview before. The difference being it was at an institution where I spent over six years as an undergraduate and graduate student. The
previous interview was also in the department where I had completed a graduate assistantship. I was comfortable there. They knew me and I knew them. We had negotiated through some of the expectations. They knew I was dating a woman and that I performed my gender in nonconforming ways. I did not worry about whether to wear a shirt and tie, but instead what color and type. However, this time I was interviewing at an unfamiliar place, several hundred miles away. I was anxious about how my gender presentation would be received and perceived. The person who would be my supervisor already knew I was queer. I talked to different folks, including Facebook friends, colleagues, and mentors, about whether I should disclose my queer identity in the interview. I mean my wife was the reason we were even moving to Atlanta, to complete her pre-doctoral internship. The overwhelming sentiment was I should not disclose because it did not matter. One of my mentors strongly discouraged it. What is interesting is, I see this mentor as gender nonconforming and queer. I also see them as conservative and discreet about gender and sexual orientation regardless of context. I did not listen to their reservations. I could not. It would not have been me. I was becoming more and more comfortable in my queer identity and did not want to enter the position withholding parts of me that were central to who I was. So in my first conversation with my future supervisor, I told him about my wife. He paused and asked me to repeat myself. I did and we moved on with the interview.

For the on-campus interview, I wanted to be professional, clean, and I wanted my masculinity to be apparent. Sometimes genderqueer or trans* people are told they are not professional because of societal expectations around gender presentation. It also meant I wanted them to know that I would be wearing slacks, button downs, ties, suits, and polos to work. Although someone could easily have a fluid style of dress and presentation, I wanted them to know this was a part of me. So I went back and forth about the tie I purchased for the interview. I put it on. I took it off. I put it on again. I even bound my breasts, for the first time the day of my interview. I am not sure what I was trying to convey by doing that, or why I wanted a flatter chest that day. To say that I was uncomfortable, bound in the Georgia heat is an understatement. I was hot, sweating, and since it was my first time I was not familiar with the feeling. I was not accustomed to something being wrapped around me restricting my movements. That day I was wrestling with how I wanted to show up in the interview, and wrestling with my garments. Though I bound that day, I chose not to wear the tie. In the end, my interviews went well and I was offered the position. In this instance, I showed up as me and my education, experience, and skills demonstrated my qualifications.

Impacts
Throughout my career, I have disclosed my queer identities to varying degrees. However, I was able to see some direct influences and impacts at GSU. From my interview and once I arrived to campus, I disclosed my queer identity to pretty much everyone I worked with, including the students in the program. Since my wife and I both worked on campus, she would come to the program. We were very open about our relationship. I believe our openness and disclosures allowed others to explore,
understand, and disclose parts of themselves. I gave away one of my scholars to another recently at their wedding in Atlanta. They are Black, Muslim, queer, womyn. They met and their relationship blossomed in the program and I know our modeling contributed to that.

Today, as I write this, identifying as a Black genderqueer educator is something of which I am proud. I am open about it and use it in my work in a gender and sexuality center providing education to students, faculty, staff, and community members about identities and issues connected to gender and sexuality, with specific focus on LGBTQ identities. Throughout my time with faculty, staff, and students, I often share parts of my journey to connect some of the abstract concepts of binary constructions of gender to real people and bodies. An example might be how I was presented to the world by my parents or an experience at a Macy’s. I would also encourage them to think about how these apply to their lives. These constructions impact us all.

One of the biggest impacts on my life and experience is pronouns. But pronouns mean so much more to me than they, she, he, hir, ze, and others. Calling me by my first initial (S), first name (Symone), or they, them, their makes me feel like you recognize me. Even if you do not quite see what I see, you recognize how important it is to me. Out in the world, it takes great effort and persistence to gain the recognition I seek. This is particularly challenging in relationships. My wife has been journeying with me and we still have challenges with my identity, including pronouns.

Married Life

I have been married several years and my wife and I have been through a lot: three moves, three (soon to be four) degrees, a dog, different jobs and roles, vacations, and other things associated with friendship, marriage, fun, love, and life. We love one another truly and deeply so she wants to get it. She tries to get it. It is a struggle for us both. She is also a psychologist and has received particular training regarding gender which influences her perspective. I am a living challenge to the medicalized nature and mental health folks as gatekeepers. We help one another hear and know another perspective as ours continue to evolve. She has questioned her own identity if I am genderqueer. Lesbian has been a large part of her life. But lesbian implies my female assignment, which is sometimes unsettling for me. My journeying is her journeying; our journeying.

Journeying

My gender journey has not been mine alone, and it has not only been about gender. This relational, intersectional process has helped me get comfortable with me and allowed me to open and share spaces with others on their journeys. I was assumed to be a girl at birth, but I, like so many others, have challenged that designation and associated implications. Although I am still negotiating and I still struggle, that is the point. Development is complex, ongoing, and challenging. I believe it is important for me to share parts of myself to situate myself in my study, and if I am asking others to share
themselves with me through interviews and observations, I believe this is crucial in building rapport and sharing vulnerabilities.

Throughout my story are themes of validation, curiosity, insights, relationships, choices, and presentation has been a big part of my gender identity development because I have wanted to portray on the outside how I feel or see myself. I have been impacted interpersonally, however, I also am aware of folks who are impacted differently by systems and laws and policies. I have been fortunate, maybe privileged in some ways, to be in positions to be affirmed, validated, and celebrated in my identities. Moreover, even identifying as genderqueer, I have cisgender privilege in a lot of ways, which is hard to admit, but so easy to see once I reflected on it.

In terms of societal expectations of someone who is assigned female at birth, I still portray and embrace certain aspects of myself and often do not challenge people’s physical visual understandings of woman, even if my presentation and identity do challenge them. In the past, like I mentioned, I tried my hardest to reject femininity. However, that was not necessarily me being me. That was me trying to be who I thought I should be because of my rigid perspectives of gender. I have constantly had to negotiate with my microsystems such as home, school, and work environments, as well as interlocking systems of constraining, biased, and empowering ideologies to construct myself the way I want to be and the way I see myself (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989; DuBois, 1994). Additionally, my identities and experiences are wrapped up in and intersect with each other. Although I pulled out experiences and stories and connected them to specific identities, I recognize that there are many more identities, experiences, and stories I did not share here that contribute to my life. In my own autobiography, I recognize an on-going process of multiple identities’, such as gender, race, and sexual orientation developing, influenced by interactions within and across various contexts and environments, such as with family and in school.

Mine is but one in wide-ranging and diverse stories of trans* educators. I hope that by reflecting on my own stories and experiences, I am able to set them aside, while also recognizing their influence, to allow the stories and experiences of the trans* educators in my study to emerge. For example, my experiences in marriage and work in the center assist me in being open to stories different from mine—I will not judge participants harshly or at all for their identities, choices, ideas, beliefs and actions that may still conform to binaries of sex and gender.
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VITA

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