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Amplifying the Experiences of Trans and Non-Binary Graduate Students at a Canadian University: A Case Study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education

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Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of transgender and non-binary graduate students as they navigate campus spaces at one Canadian university. It contributes to the field by addressing the lack of studies that both center trans and non-binary students and utilize a trans-informed theoretical framework. I conducted a phenomenological case study through semi-structured interviews with five participants attending graduate studies at Sullivan University (a pseudonym) located in Ontario, Canada. By centering trans desubjugation, this study created a safe space for trans and non-binary graduate students to articulate their experiences navigating higher education. The findings revealed that trans and non-binary students experience feelings of precariousness, precarious situations, and barriers on campus due to their non-normative gender identity. Some participants highlight the conditions of growing anti-trans rhetoric as adding to their feelings of vulnerability on campus, despite a lack of physical protests occurring on main campus. Overall, the study seeks to highlight how different trans and non-binary students experience and navigate campus spaces and their relationships with their peers, professors, supervisors, and other university staff members. Ideally, this research advocates for university administrators and staff members to question whether their institution *actually* considers gender diverse students, or if their performative policies have enabled the institutionalized vulnerability of trans and non-binary students on campus.

Keywords

Trans/ non-binary students; trans desubjugation; precarity; higher education research; phenomenology; case study.

Summary for Lay Audience

The intention behind this study is to understand the experiences of transgender and non-binary graduate students at a Canadian University. Five trans and/or non-binary graduate students attending the same university in Ontario, Canada volunteered to talk about their experiences navigating Sullivan University's (a pseudonym) campus. The analysis found that trans students on campus had a lot of negative experiences that could be traced back to their gender identity. This study differs from previous Canadian scholarship which often discussed trans and non-binary people as an aggregated group within the 2SLGBTQ+ community to generate useful data. Instead, this study's focus was empowering the graduate students who chose to participate, allowing them to speak out against the anti-trans media that has been growing in popularity across both the United States and Canada. This study was completed in the hopes that more Canadian colleges and universities will consider the experiences of trans and non-binary students on their campuses. Part of this consideration also requires colleges and universities to reflect on the role they played in creating poor campus climates for trans and non-binary graduate students in Canada.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigates how transgender and non-binary students construct and articulate their gender identity within different spaces on university campuses such as washrooms, changerooms, administrative spaces, educational spaces, and 2SLGBTQ+ spaces. By examining how trans and non-binary students navigate these spaces, one can learn how transphobia and microaggressions can manifest in different ways. Part of understanding participants' experiences on campus requires considering the influence of growing anti-trans media within Canadian media and politics on their feelings of safety. Thus, my study considers how perceptions of inclusivity at an institutional level, when coupled with trans and non-binary students' prior personal experiences with transphobia and anti-trans media, inform how they embody their gender, as well as how they communicate their gender to others on campus.

This inquiry is characterized by three primary research questions:

1) How do transgender and non-binary students navigate different university spaces and communities on campus?

2) What is the climate on campus like for trans and non-binary students?

3) To what extent is the current context of resurgent transphobia and hate motivated by far-right extremism having an impact on trans and non-binary students' experiences on campus?

My own positionality, purpose and context of the study

Attending and graduating from a post-secondary institution in Canada is difficult for students from minoritized and disadvantaged communities. Specifically, transgender, and non-binary students must face their own set of unique challenges. Thriving during university is demanding enough without having to navigate hostile campus climates or higher rates of victimization compared to their cisgender peers (Woodford et al, 2019). In this context, victimization refers to varied interactions that compromise someone's safety. This includes being followed or stalked, experiences of sexual harassment and assault, as well as verbal threats and bullying (Woodford et al, 2019; 2022b). Even if students avoid these explicit acts of violence, they remain susceptible to microaggressions. Microaggressions are interpersonal interactions characterized by the 'othering' of somebody based on their marginalized identity (Nordmarken, 2014). For trans people, microaggressions can stem from a place of scrutiny or sexualization, often calling into question the validity of their gender identity and presenting them as sexual deviants (Serano, 2022). These subtle insults and "snubs" compound each other, leading to "persistent feelings of alienation, anxiety, anger, depression, fear, hypervigilance, fatigue, hopelessness and/or suicidality" (Nordmarken, 2014, p. 130). Within higher educational spaces, these acts of violence, whether intentional or not, result in many trans students either dropping out, or minimizing their presence on campus, leading to "greater disengagement with their studies, such as missing class, and greater academic stress" (Woodford et al, 2022b, p. 9). Despite the existing literature that outlines the harm of gender-based violence and microaggressions, trans students on Canadian university campuses remain at risk.

Before I accessed the prior sources highlighting the barriers present for trans and non-binary students in university, my personal experiences with cisnormativity in higher education motivated me to undertake this study. As a transgender student myself, I have my own history with microaggressions, victimization, and transphobia. I routinely navigate cisnormative systems in education that are both implicitly and explicitly hostile towards me. Cisnormativity "is the assumption that everyone is cis, that is, not trans, or should be" (Horton, 2023, p.74). Before I even fully understood my own gender identity, my parents, professors, and peers had all affirmed what I feared: that people ‘like me’—whatever that might mean—did not belong in society.

When I finally embraced my identity as a trans man during my bachelor’s degree, I found myself astray in foreign waters. I struggled to find supports within my school or community for trans university students. The temptation to collapse my identity into pristine, cisgender boxes was too great an obstacle for me to overcome, so, I remained closeted for the remainder of my undergraduate studies. When I graduated in the spring of 2022, I accepted my degree with a heavy heart. As I ran my fingers over the page, over letters to a name my body had outgrown, I wondered how I could feel so lonely in an auditorium full of other people. Even now, many years into both my social and medical transition, my mind considers how many other students who had fallen through the same cracks that I had.

My master’s thesis project focuses on the experiences of transgender and non-binary students within a university in southern Ontario, for which I use the pseudonym ‘Sullivan University’. The purpose of this inquiry is to better understand how transgender and non-binary university students navigate post-secondary education. Part of understanding the climate surrounding transgender and non-binary students requires consideration of growing far-right extremism and anti-trans sentiment within popular media (Johnstone, 2023; Serano, 2022).

During Fall 2023, an alt-right, anti-trans movement calling themselves the ‘1 Million March for Children’ began to gain public notoriety. They sought to “eliminate Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) curriculum and policies from Canadian schools” (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, Sept 15, 2023). Though the movement was initially a response to Canadian provinces adopting provisions that included sexual orientation and gender identity in their sexual education curriculum, the movement quickly grew to condemn all gender diverse people. ‘Hands Off Our Kids’ collective was one of the Canadian based groups responsible for circulating the dominant messaging and slogans relating to the ‘1 Million March for Children’ movement (Handsoffourkids.com, 2023). The approved slogans posted on the ‘Hands Off Our Kids’ website present an overview of the rhetoric at the center of the movement. These include statements like the following: “EDUCATION NOT SEXUALIZATION”, “HANDS OFF OUR KIDS”, and “I BELONG TO MY PARENTS” (Handsoffourkids.com, 2023). These signs imply that all gender diverse people are preying on innocent children, thus mobilizing rhetoric that conceives of trans and non-binary people as groomers, pedophiles, and sexually deviant (Serano, 2022; Tenbarge, 2023). Tensions reached a boiling point when the group orchestrated a nation-wide protest on September 20th, 2023 (Mason and Hamilton, 2023). From large metropolitan centers like Vancouver, British Columbia or Toronto, Ontario, to small towns and municipalities, the group’s call to action was felt across Canada; the city Sullivan University is situated in also had a ‘1 Million March for Children’ presence on September 20th.

The existence of these anti-trans discourses in Canadian politics became an important contextual backdrop to my research. Even before the emergence of the 1 Million March for Children, I began to question whether I was the only trans student who felt more vulnerable because of the growth of anti-trans rhetoric online and in the news. For this reason, I decided to assess whether participants’ impressions of media surrounding the trans community, particularly the growing panic surrounding trans people, has impacted how trans and non-binary students navigate their gender diversity in different spaces on campus. Serendipitously, the September 20th protests were only two weeks before I started data collection. The effect this event had on both me and the participants could not be dismissed; the 1 Million March for Children remained in our peripheral view even though there was no physical presence of such protests on campus.

These protests, and the anti-trans hate that motivated them, permeated and shaped my own life as well as the living conditions of my participants, despite the absence of any such protests on campus itself. For this reason, understanding the growing vitriol targeting trans and non-binary people served as a broader and necessary contextualization of trans and non-binary students' experiences of navigating campus spaces. With the research questions, significance, and context of this study outlined, I go on in the following chapter to outline the theoretical framework that informed my study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the scholarly works that I draw on as a basis for the theoretical framework of my study. First, I engage with trans studies as a field, as well as important concepts within the field, like cisnormativity and cissexism, that inform the context in which I gathered and analyze data (Rubin, 1998; Radi, 2019). Next, I introduce trans necropolitics (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013; Snorton, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2021) as another concept that informs the theoretical assumptions governing this study, especially as it relates to my third research question concerning the rise of alt-right extremism and anti-trans media. Finally, I discuss trans desubjugation (Stryker, 2006) and the role it plays in combatting the negative narratives present within the context of this study.

Trans Studies as a Field

Trans studies is an established interdisciplinary field in the academy. My engagement with trans studies provides a source for my understanding of foundational terminology and concepts that are central to the framing of my inquiry of the experiences and perspectives of trans and non-binary university students. Stryker (2006), often cited as a foundational scholar within trans studies, defines trans studies as an interdisciplinary field that is:

> concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural

> mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood (p. 3).

This definition from Stryker summarizes many of the foundational assumptions that characterize trans studies as a field. It begins by positioning trans studies as inherently critical and striving to question and challenge common assumptions society upholds about sex and gender. The first of these assumptions introduced in this quote from Stryker (2006) is the belief that gender is intrinsically linked to one's biological sex characteristics. This view of gender privileges cisgender peoples' perspectives and existence above all else by treating those who identify with their gender assigned at birth as the default, or the most 'natural' way of existing. This phenomenon is succinctly articulated through the term 'cisnormativity', expressing how society assumes everyone to be cisgender until told otherwise (Horton, 2022). Horton (2022) frames cisnormativity as "the assumption that everyone is cis, that is, not trans, or should be" (Horton, 2023, p.74). In this way, cisnormativity captures how the cisgender experience, or identifying with the gender assigned to one's sexed body, acts as a normative standard within society and how manhood and womanhood are broadly defined (Pyne, 2011). By treating cisgender people as the norm, society positions trans peoples' existence exclusively as a failure to meet this standard. Though cisnormativity is hardly ever explicitly communicated, "this assumption is so pervasive that it is rarely spoken" (Pyne, 2011, p. 131). Functioning as an ideology that informs a wide array of social systems, including "the domains of informational systems (informational erasure) and institutional policies (institutional erasure)", cisnormativity is a foundational aspect of Western life that erases the existence and possibility of transgender lives (Pyne, 2011, p. 131). It controls the ways that bodies move through different institutions, specifically those who confront normative standards of what men or women ought to look like, or those who resist the gender binary altogether.

Fully understanding the marginalization of trans people requires reflecting on the value society attributes to cisgender people over transgender individuals. Cissexism, or the social hierarchy that privileges cisgender perspectives and voices, functions as a pervasive system of oppression (Serano, 2016). Expanding on the dichotomy of cis man/cis woman, Radi (2019) argues that challenging cissexism requires accepting that “the map of oppressor/oppressed subjects can no longer be read exclusively in terms of (cis)men/(cis)women” (p. 54). To spell out this hierarchy, consider that while a cisgender woman would be placed below a cisgender man, for example, she enjoys privileges that transgender women do not. Her status as cisgender contributes positively to how she moves through the world, whereas a transgender woman, once ‘discovered’ to be trans, is negatively impacted by her identity as trans (Bettcher, 2007). As Bettcher (2007) explains, this ‘discovery’ of a trans woman’s identity is often followed by severe violence or even death. Under cissexism, transgender people are often “held responsible for this violence” when their genital status does not match their gender identity or expression (p. 50). These implicit hierarchies have tangible effects on the lives of trans people, highlighting “systems of power that operate on actual bodies, capable of producing pain and pleasure, health and sickness, punishment and reward” (Stryker, 2006, p. 3).

When utilizing a critical trans studies framework in higher education, one must consider how cisnormativity and cissexism materialize in different educational spaces for different trans people. To illustrate the impact of cissexist beliefs and pitfalls (Johnson, 2018), I return to earlier conflicts arising from essentializing gender to someone’s sexed body. When research focuses on a single trans identity, it ignores how different gendered social standards and shadows of cisnormativity exert power over trans people. Johnson (2018) explains how medical transition processes often project cisnormative standards onto trans patients to be deemed legitimate by the following explanation:

> Both with psychiatric and biomedical health professionals in the pursuit of accessing medical intervention and with family members and friends in the pursuit of understanding and acceptance, many participants recognized that contextualizing their gender within the diagnostic framework grants their experiences a higher level of legitimacy. (Johnson, 2018, p. 12).

In this way, trans people are expected to perform a narrow and cisnormative understanding of their gender to be taken seriously by medical practitioners and their cisgender family members. This approach obscures the nuanced differences of how different gender identities are affected by medicalized understandings of gender. A transgender woman is presumed to be a threat due to her naturally occurring testosterone, thus ‘justifying’ her exclusion from women’s washrooms or changerooms (Patel, 2017; Stryker, 2006). Conversely, a transgender man might face infantilization due to his lack of testosterone and presumed physical inferiority to cisgender males (Catalano, 2015; 2017). Part of honoring these differences requires education researchers such as myself to consider the historic sacrifices of trans women of colour like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera.

Once scholars commit themselves to honoring the sacrifices of trans women of colour, as well as other trans elders:

> It becomes imperative to honor that, while we are all trans* enough, we all experience our trans*ness differently… for example, although there is no doubt that I am trans*, my

> Whiteness acts as a buffer protecting me from the overt forms of violence and threat enacted on Black and brown trans* bodies. (Nicolazzo, 2021, p. 520)

All trans people face oppression as people transgressing cis hegemonic understandings of gender. However, trans peoples' experiences are influenced by their other intersectional identities (class, race, sexuality, ability etc.) (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013; Nicolazzo, 2021). Part of doing justice to the stories my participants trusts me with is not allowing my positionality or opinions to supersede theirs. To ensure that I do not overshadow my participants, I reflect on the role my own assumptions and perceptions play in how I frame and conduct my research.

My study is informed by my experiences due to the researcher's role as an interpreter and also *instrument* of the research that they are conducting and as Patton (2003) points out 'hinges' not only on the skills and competence of the researcher, but also their lived experience and "the things going on in a person's life" (p. 14). However, my experiences as a white, binary transgender male scholar must not supersede those of my participants. Washrooms, for example, are one of the primary sources of my own social dysphoria. However, to distill all trans activism on campus to a white, male's perspective is not appropriate. If universities exclusively frame trans liberation as an issue with a single solution, like washrooms or changerooms, they miss out on the rich critiques of cisnormativity happening within academia; this does a disservice to the trans people they claim to consider in their policies. By acknowledging the differences between trans men, women, as well as non-binary or gender diverse people, researchers preserve the diversity present within the trans community. This gives researchers such as myself access to more diverse epistemologies, while also upholding the ethical obligations of researchers dealing with vulnerable groups (Cohen et al, 2018; Patton, 2003).

Trans Necropolitics

A concept required to understand the transgender experience within my study of higher education is that of necropolitics. Necropolitics, as discussed by Snorton and Haritaworn (2013), is a "form of power that marks some fraction of a population for death even while it deems other fractions suitable for life enhancing investment" (p. 66). Building on this definition from writers like Achille Mbembe (2003), Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) focus on the ways racism has served to separate out different trans lives as more disposable than others. They highlight that white trans people who have medically transitioned, and who perform their gender in 'typical' or acceptable ways are often elevated or held up to represent a certain sort of trans normativity. From a historical perspective, Snorton (2018), for example, illuminates how Christine Jorgenson, a white transgender woman, gained celebratory visibility in the 1950s. She gained notoriety while decades previously, trans black women remained in the shadows and indeed were criminalized within the necropolitical justice system for their gender non-conformity (Snorton, 2018, p. 143). This newfound social currency was born out of the death and memorialization as well as the criminalization of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) trans people. BIPOC trans people 'pay the price' of freedom, all without reaping any of the social benefits that accrue to embodied whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Snorton, 2018; Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013). Under the current scheme of necropolitics, BIPOC trans lives are reduced to a question of endurance and survivability, whereas their white counterparts get to imagine a life worth living for, even in times of hardship.

Though Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) discuss necropolitics as a separation between white queer people and BIPOC transgender people, their paper still rings true for the relation between cisgender queer people and transgender people at large. BIPOC transgender people have predominately presented through violence and suffering, with their necro politization used to benefit the broader queer community. Marsha ‘Pay it no mind’ Johnston and Sylvia Rivera, the BIPOC trans women often credited with the political success of the 1969 Stonewall Rights, are only one example of transgender activists putting their lives on the line for the broader queer community (Goldberg and Beemyn, 2021). They demanded that society acknowledge the gay community, and devoted their lives to grassroots activism to help poor, unhoused, BIPOC trans youth (Goldberg and Beemyn, 2021). Despite this, white, cisgender, sexually-minoritized people are the primary benefactors of this activism, often circulating trans mythographies to further elevate cis LGBQ+ people, rather than critically reflecting on what can be done to help living trans people (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013, p.74). With every headline of a transgender person murdered due to their gender, cisgender society interprets trans identities as inherently attached to suffering and violence (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013). For this reason, not all visibility and representation are intrinsically beneficial to the lives of transgender people. Though well-meaning allies may depict the hardships of transgender people as a means of humanize their plights through storytelling, the issue arises when *all* media depicting trans lives relies on tragedy.

Understanding the necro politicization of trans people provides important theoretical foundations for my study within higher education. Since inclusivity efforts can ‘back-fire’, it is always important to reflect on how higher educational institutions choose to frame and present transgender people or simply to erase them epistemically. When every explicitly transgender event on campus is a vigil for remembrance, these somber undertones begin to colour trans lives as unlivable and burdensome. Since qualitative research envisages the researcher as a tool for observation and data collection, honing one’s ability to name and critique different depictions of trans people is imperative to studying their experiences in higher education (Patton, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2021). Understanding the impact of necropolitics on trans students also contributes to my analysis of alt-right media and its impact on campus environments. Since the trans community has become a central talking point within alt-right political movements, many cisgender people are learning about trans people for the first time (Johnstone, 2023; Serano, 2022). When progressive news outlets only present trans people through a necropolitical lens and conservative news outlets depict us as groomers or deceivers (Bettcher, 2007), trans identities are presented as only existing through negativity. What these popular narratives fail to acknowledge is that cisgender society constructs these negative experiences through systemic cisnormativity and cissexism.

While my study is informed by a deep awareness and understanding of the impact of these negative depictions in popular media, it is cognizant of the need to create a space for my trans and non-binary participants to narrate their own experiences of trans livability. At times, it can be comforting to defer to the intelligibility that necro politicization provides when discussing gender with cis people. When faced with a cisgender ally who has only made sense of transness through violence and dysphoria, unpacking the cis person’s misunderstandings of what it means to be trans may be a form of emotional labor they do not have space for. The precarity of these situations only intensifies when speaking with a classmate, professor, or administrator. Reclaiming space when your colleagues have spent time flattening you into a statistic is extremely challenging, especially in professional settings like graduate courses, research or teaching assistantships, or administrative offices (Goldberg et al, 2019). One is then faced with a moral dilemma. One could object, outing themselves while breaching fragile social structures of professionalism, or one could bite their tongue, and listen to misinformed and micro aggressive comments that pathologize and necrotize their flesh before their very eyes. My study provides a safe space for participants to explore and articulate their identity through euphoria or joy, rather than constantly framing themselves in terms of violence.

Trans Desubjugation

My study's goal of empowering trans students on university campuses prioritizes trans desubjugation as a response to trans necro politicization. Trans desubjugation draws on Michel Foucault's concept of subjugated knowledges, or knowledges that one can only be accessed through firsthand experience (Foucault, 2003, p.7-8). This is not to dispose of the knowledge gathered by cisgender scholars in other academic fields, but rather to make room for transgender people to 'speak back' to academic or official knowledges, which have often pathologized or discarded them. As described by Stryker (2006), trans desubjugation "is rather an assertion that no voice in the dialog should have the privilege of masking the particularities and specificities of its own speaking position, through which it may claim a false universality or authority" (p.13).

My study was committed to trans desubjugation by always returning to the experiences of my participants. Rather than anthropologists or psychologists having control over transgender discourse in academia, desubjugation calls for the equal consideration of the trans lived experience and other "previously marginalized forms of knowledge" (Stryker, 2006, p. 13). It challenges the framing of transgender and non-binary people as 'other' and embalmed in trauma. By embracing trans desubjugation, scholars finally embrace the unique knowledge offered through trans people's lived experiences. Since the emergence of these concepts in trans studies during the 1990s, many different disciplines, including education, have drawn on trans desubjugation (Nicolazzo, 2017b; Catalano, 2015; 2017; Jourian, 2017). Within higher education studies, trans desubjugation takes many forms, however Nicolazzo's (2021) understanding remains particularly important.

Trans Epistemologies

Nicolazzo's (2021) work centering trans students' experiences in higher education draws explicitly on trans epistemologies. Her theoretical foundation prioritizes community development and individualized infrastructure based on each school's unique environment (Nicolazzo, 2021). Though trans experiences are influenced by one's intersectional identities, Nicolazzo's community-based approach aims to create a set of shared, ameliorative values within trans communities in higher education. Her understanding of a unified trans epistemology is summarized by six governing tenets.

First, Nicolazzo (2021) affirms that trans people are not *of* oppression, or rather that suffering is not *required* to be transgender. Our shared experiences of suffering and loss are not all that bind us as a community; we are just as equally constituted by joy and love. Her second tenet is that every trans person experiences their transness differently "as a result of our varied, intersecting identities" (Nicolazzo, 2021, p. 520). This further emphasizes the need for intersectional and critical research within research centering trans people's experiences. My positionality as a white trans researcher is a central part of how I perceive the world. However, remaining mindful of this creates space for me to acknowledge my own assumptions so that I can center more fully the experiences of BIPOC trans students and to critically reflect on their viewpoints.

Her third and fourth tenets amplify the need for community building both in-person and online. This trans kinship, whether it be through social media forums or poetry circles, gives trans people “the power to heal and remake ourselves” through narratives of gratitude and expansion, further challenging the dominant narrative of trans necropolitics (Nicolazzo, 2021, p. 522). The fifth tenet of Nicolazzo’s (2021) trans epistemology advocates for “’trickle up activism’ and coalition-building” (p. 525). Not only is this approach historically significant within trans liberation movements globally, but it also encourages trans people to see themselves as conduits of change. Nicolazzo (2021) herself reflects on her own role in confronting white supremacy and ableism, framing herself as an active participant in the ongoing fight for all transgender people, from all positionalities.

Nicolazzo’s final tenet concerns discourses of visibility and invisibility, their role in how trans people understand themselves and their communities. Those who are ‘out and proud’ are often elevated within popular media, treating closeted people as self-hating or internally transphobic (Nicolazzo, 2021, p. 527). Embracing discourses of in/visibility allows us to reflect on the safety present in being ‘stealth’ or choosing not to disclose one’s trans identity in specific settings and consider how different trans bodies must act to prioritize their safety. It is not sufficient to project LGBQ+ narratives of ‘out and proud’ onto transgender people, especially when increased trans visibility has been met with historic rates of murder and violence.

Nicolazzo (2021) presents these tenets not as a dogmatic representation of a monolith trans community, but instead as stepping steps for scholars to consider how to construct unique epistemologies from within their own communities. This system of knowledge advanced by Nicolazzo (2021) lays the foundation for research that serves to desubjugate trans bodies on university campuses. Her six tenets inform both my research design, as well as the critical framework I utilize to analyze my data. Nicolazzo’s work (2021) helps me place subjectivity at the forefront of my study (Haraway, 1988), as well as affirming the power in preserving my participant's personal narratives as they understand them within my inquiry.

An important part of elevating these subjective knowledges is acknowledging the unforgiving spotlight trans people have been thrust into. Though scholars can be quick to assert that visibility is a necessary step toward normalization, Nicolazzo (2021) remains hesitant. As a trans scholar herself, she highlights the voyeuristic nature of the 'transgender panic' present in the media. As trans people become more visible, cisnormative society feels entitled to gawk at our bodies and what they imply about our genitals (Nicolazzo, 2021; Bettcher, 2007). This is an important contextual piece in evaluating trans experiences in cisnormative society. If society expects trans-women to navigate invasive questions concerning their genitals, to be objects of tragedy in the roles they depict on screen, or to have their existence condensed into headlines to be traded over the water cooler, then trans people experience commodification rather than visibility (Nicolazzo, 2021; Bettcher, 2007). By embracing Nicolazzo's understanding of trans epistemology, I challenge the cis-centric narratives surrounding trans students. This will allow me to consider my own insider knowledge of the social context trans and non-binary students navigate every single day on Canadian university campuses.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical framework that informs my study. To better understand how trans and non-binary people navigate different spaces on campus, I needed to first establish accepted definitions of terms like cisnormativity and cissexism. By drawing on understandings of these terms from scholars like Horton (2022), Pyne (2011), Radi (1998), and Bettcher (2007), I was able to better understand the significance of trans studies scholars such as Stryker (2006) who argue for the desubjugation of trans experience. The need for trans desubjugation requires an understanding of the necropolitical realities of trans people. As I have pointed out in this chapter, such a trans necropolitical framework provides context for the impact of popular media that circulates anti-trans rhetoric on trans and non-binary students. When I consider the application of these theoretical frameworks to my study of Canadian students in higher education, Nicolazzo (2021) provides important guiding principles for grounding of my research in trans epistemologies in higher education. Understanding the ethical, political and epistemological significance of trans desubjugation assists me in bridging the gap between the assumptions that inform my theoretical framework and the methodological choices I make as I explain and further elaborate on in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of existing literature concerning trans and non-binary students on Canadian university campuses. After evaluating its strengths and weakness, I go on to review the growth of trans-informed higher educational research that has been conducted within the United States. The latter research includes case studies covering the following topics: barriers to representing trans masculinities in higher education, creating spaces for trans students of colour (TSOC), and trans graduate students on campus. This research provides a basis for how campus attitudes can impact trans and non-binary students, as well as how their positionality in addition to their gender identity affects their feelings of safety on campus as gender diverse students.

2SLGBTQ+ Research in Canadian Higher Education

Assessing higher education (HE) scholarship that centers trans students in Canada allows me to consider where my study 'fits', or what sorts of knowledge have yet to be represented. Within Canada, 2SLGBTQ+ education research tends to emphasize the K-12 education system (Davies et al, 2017; Peter et al, 2021; Ingrey, 2018; Martino et al, 2020). Though there are studies that consider 2SLGBTQ+ students in HE, the limited number of these studies outlines the necessity of my inquiry. Research on the topic of trans students in HE in Canada specifically can be summarized by a collection of studies conducted by Woodford et al (2019; 2022). The first, published in 2019, titled *Querying Canadian Higher Education: A Snapshot of LGBT+ Students' Experiences and Mental Health*, reinterpreted previously existing data from the 2016 National

College Health Assessment (NCHA), which was administered to over 39,000 undergraduate students from 41 post-secondary institutions across Canada (Woodford et al, 2019, p.1). Though the homogenous treatment of the 2SLGBTQ+ students as a monolith of unified experiences is problematic, this was necessary for Woodford et al (2019) to establish the need for studies that use 2SLGBTQ+ specific data. They also broke down the data within the report to represent the diverse identities represented within 2SLGBTQ+ community. For example, when representing mental health challenges for 2SLGBTQ+ students on campus, Woodford et al (2019) separated trans students from cisgender LGB+ students (p. 2). This distinction presented significant findings, with the researchers highlighting that “trans students were more likely than cisgender LGB+ students to experience mental health challenges. Notably, compared to cisgender LGB+ students, trans students’ rates of attempted suicide were approximately 1.5 times higher” (Woodford et al, 2019, p. 2). This data was collected as part of the National College Assessment (NCHA), which surveyed over 39,000 post-secondary students from 41 different post-secondary institutions in Canada. Though this data was not focused specifically on 2SLGBTQ+ students explicitly, it showed troubling trends relating to 2SLGBTQ+ students’ safety and health on campus.

These findings from the 2019 report allowed the researchers to justify studies that centered on the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ students, rather than treating them as footnotes within larger data sets. The following study published in 2022, the *Thriving on Campus* study, used its own data set collected through survey data and focus group interviews with 2SLGBTQ+ students. Since it provides a specific focus on trans students as epistemically and ontologically distinct from their cisgender LGBQ+ peers, the later study is of more significance to my study of trans and non-binary students.

The Thriving on Campus Study

The Thriving on Campus study began during the winter of 2019, when Woodford et al (2022c) dispersed an online survey amongst 2SLGBTQ+ university students in Ontario. They received 3856 responses from all 21 public universities in Ontario, 29% of which self-identified as transgender or gender diverse (Woodford et al, 2022c, p.4). These participants were recruited using each university's 2SLGBTQ+ student networks' social media accounts, while each school also provided a professional staff member who was responsible for promoting the survey through ads, email campaigns, and posters on campus. To provide further detail, Woodford et al (2022c) also conducted interviews with 50 of the survey respondents, 25 of whom identified as transgender or gender diverse (p. 9). The result was not only a diverse group of respondents in all metrics, including socioeconomic status, ability, and racial identity, but also a participant pool that included the perspectives of transgender students (Woodford et al, 2022c).

Woodford et al (2022a) worked extensively to highlight the difference in experience between transgender students and their cisgender LGB peers. Not only do they explore the different feelings of inclusivity identified by either group, they also distinguish between trans masculine, trans feminine, and non-binary students. For example, 50% of trans students on the trans masculine spectrum encountered five or more different incidents of trans microaggressions on a weekly basis, compared to 43% for those on the trans feminine spectrum and 31% for non-binary students (Woodford et al, 2022a, p. 5); Catalano's (2015) study on trans masculine university students in the United States explores these themes in further depth, as I will discuss later in this review.

By presenting the data in this way, Woodford et al (2022a) open discussion about how different transgender students navigate cisnormative spaces. They also reported on students' perceptions of campus climates generally and disaggregated data to distinguish between transgender and cisgender LGBQ+ students. In doing so, they opened a dialogue about the harms of homogenous research and whether LGBTQ+ inclusivity necessarily equates to trans inclusivity. For example, trans students were the only group who reported negative perceptions of inclusivity on campus in “pedagogical representation” and “feeling safe being about their 2SLGBTQ+ identity” (Woodford et al, 2022a, p. 7). Pedagogical representation referred to the way 2SLGBTQ+ people were represented within course curriculum, “such as portraying the respective community accurately and engaging in respectful classroom discussions about trans/LGBQ issues” (Woodford et al, 2022b, p. 8). Notably, participants were only asked about pedagogical representation if their courses included 2SLGBTQ+ topics; instances where 2SLGBTQ+ people were not included were not evaluated for the harm caused by rendering 2SLGBTQ+ people invisible.

Students’ responses were categorized as either positive, neutral, or negative, of which were aggregated to assess general trends between cisgender LGB+ students and transgender or non-binary students. Many negative reports came from trans students, with large negative spike concerning ‘pedagogical representation’ of trans people. This shows that trans and non-binary students are more often victimized by the curriculum on campus than their cisgender LGBQ+ peers. Ultimately, Woodford et al (2022a) advocate for creating campus programming relating to 2SLGBTQ+ microaggressions and the harm they cause, as well as a holistic review of campus initiatives to ensure that they accommodate transgender students (p. 11). These conclusions drawn from Woodford et al (2022a, b, c) showcase the need for further research such as mine with its more particularized case study focus on trans desubjugation, as well as other inquiries that privilege trans peoples' perspectives in developing inclusive policies on university campuses.

Limitations of Current Canadian Data

Though Woodford et al (2022) do provide some significant insights into what campus life is like for trans students, thus laying a scholastic foundation for Canadian HE research, there are some limitations to their study. The first limitation of Woodford et al's (2022a-c) study is their lack of a trans studies informed theoretical framework. Though they differentiate between the experiences of transgender university students and their cisgender LGBQ+ peers, there is little discussion of the historic erasure of transgender students within LGBTQ+ spaces and policies. Trans scholar Susan Stryker (2006) addresses these historical injustices throughout her works, citing both her own experiences of transphobia within queer spaces, as well as the political struggle of transgender people to be taken seriously in their "gender atypicality" (Stryker, 2006, p. 2). However, transgender scholarship is not simply the study *of* or *on* transgender people, it must *for* and *with* trans people.

Though Woodford et al (2022c) interviewed transgender students, thus shedding light on their lived experiences and individualized identities, most of their discussion is consumed by trans students' experience of microaggressions and victimization (Woodford et al, 2022a, p. 5). While explicit inclusion of trans voices is a step in the right direction, Woodford et al (2022b) neglect to interrogate cisnormative systems in higher education that create a hostile campus climate for trans students to begin with (Woodford et al 2022a). My study wants to advance the field by filling this epistemic gap, by outlining students' experiences with cissexism and cisnormative systems on campus. Trans scholars like Radi (2019), for example, utilize critical trans epistemological frameworks to articulate and examine systemic oppression present in systems like education. Radi (2019) argues for "trans epistemic agency" which allows for the refusal of cissexism, thereby creating an opportunity for trans people to talk back to their oppressors and reclaim control of their own narratives (p. 55). Without employing these conceptual tools from trans studies, Woodford et al (2022) miss an opportunity to investigate *how* universities enable violence and transphobia to exist on their campuses. This is not to say that Woodford at al's (2022a) study does not make an important contribution to the field; its findings are significant in establishing the need for trans inclusivity and generating knowledge about the reality of trans violence on campus. However, when one considers the wealth of trans higher education research taking place within the United States, Woodford et al's (2022a) represents the infancy of Canadian research in this field of study.

Trans Higher Education Research in the United States

Z Nicolazzo (2017a, b, c; 2021) is a leading scholar in the United States and internationally whose research has focused on the experiences of trans students in higher education. Not only is Nicolazzo transgender herself, thus imbuing her research with her own experiences, but she also conducts higher educational research using trans studies theoretical frameworks. Nicolazzo has explored the implications of trans epistemologies, providing a guide for other scholars who wish to conduct trans-inclusive research. She emphasizes the need for textured accounts of trans people and her own embodied experiences as a researcher conducting research that focuses on trans students' gender identities (Nicolazzo, 2021). Though these theoretical foundations are important to understanding to Nicolazzo's research, I will instead be focusing on her empirical inquiries and knowledge generated about the lives of transgender post-secondary students, as well as the implications of her findings for future studies on transgender students in higher education.

Nicolazzo’s book, titled *Trans* in College: Transgender students’ strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional politics of inclusion* (2017c), is centered around the lives of nine trans or non-binary undergraduate students attending City University (CU), a pseudonym for a university in the United States. What differentiates Nicolazzo’s (2017c) study is her commitment to trans desubjugation by questioning “how trans* college students navigate their gendered cultural context, paying particular attention to how these narratives align with notions of resilience” (p. 16). To accomplish this task, Nicolazzo (2017c) discusses five themes divided between commonalities and outliers, four of which are relevant to this study: (i) gender binary discourse; (ii) compulsory heterogenderism (iii) resilience as a verb; and (iv) the (tiring) labour of practicing trans*genders.

The first theme Nicolazzo (2017c) draws on is the way gender binaries were prescribed and enforced on campus. At City University, this involved tracing “a constellation of words, phrases, actions, rules (written and unwritten), and social realities that regulated ‘appropriate’ gender identities, expressions, and embodiments on campus” (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 63). Participants all experienced different mechanisms of enforcement on campus. Whether it was not complying with the ‘CU look’ for their assigned gender, being misgendered in supposedly gender-free spaces like campus eateries, or their peers sending them judgmental or confused glances, participants reported feeling the pressure of cisnormative gender standards; one participant named BC even “discussed changing her major because of her faculty member’s reliance on a binary (il)logic of gender” (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 65).

The second theme Nicolazzo (2017c) highlights is the use of compulsory heterogenderism to make sense of the participants’ gender identity. Nicolazzo (2017c) developed this term to explain “the ways participants’ gender identities and sexualities were constantly understood in and through each other" (p. 76). When people attempted to understand a participant's gender identity through compulsory heterogenderism, they often utilized stereotypes connected to different sexualities that intrinsically connected someone's sexuality to their gender presentation. In other words, people on campus would view one of the participants as a masculine presenting female and interpret them as a lesbian, rather than digging deeper to interact with their trans identity. The result was that "participants' gender identities often went unrecognized, rendering their trans* identities invisible" (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 77). The nuances of this concept in Nicolazzo's (2017c) study are seen when one questions how different participants were impacted by it. Adem, who identifies as genderqueer, explained that they had trouble discerning whether people were seeing them as trans, or if the vulnerabilities they experienced on campus at night were because people assumed they were queer:

> I don't necessarily feel comfortable walking around after dark, which is not necessarily because I am female-bodied [sic] and I think I'm gonna get raped, but mostly, I—I have a lot of issues with this because I never know which one it is—'cause there's not only that, but also what if somebody sees me and is like, "You're queer, and I wanna teach you a lesson." And I'm kind of perpetually afraid that I'm either going to be raped or get my ass beat. (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p.78)

This statement from Adem demonstrates the interweaving nature of gender binary discourses and compulsory heterogenderism. Whether they were seen as genderqueer or queer insofar of their sexuality, Adem's fears of violence reside within how others perceive and interpret their non-normative gender presentation. Nicolazzo (2017c) describes "both of these phenomena coexist as twin cultural realities, constantly reinforcing and propagating each other in deleterious ways" (p. 80). In this way, binary understandings of gender and sexuality converge on each other to provides tools of intelligibility to cisgender people, often resulting in the obscuring, invisibility, or refusal of trans gender identities.

The third theme, resilience as a verb, discusses what it means for trans and non-binary students to be resilient in the face of cisnormativity and transphobic microaggressions on campus. First, one must understand how resilience as a verb diverges from accepted understandings of resilience as a noun. Rather than framing it as a trait that individuals either do or do not possess, Nicolazzo (2017c) embraces a more fluid definition:

> However, I suggest that resilience might not necessarily be something that one has or does not have (e.g., an ability) but a practice. Thus, the notion of resilience becomes less of a noun, or a thing one possesses, and more of a verb, or an action one can practice. In this sense, even if one does not feel resilient or does not think of hirself as resilient, one may be able to practice resilience as a strategy to overcome individual enactments of trans* oppression as well as the cultural realities of the gender binary discourse. (p. 88)

Employing this definition is significant on a number of analytic levels and with respect to the empirical insights that Nicolazzo (2017c) generates. First, it gives rise to resilience as something that is practiced over time; this is not to say that employing resiliency practices more often will lead to ‘perfecting’ the process. Instead, it situates trans students’ resiliency “as a habitual action rather than a process of getting better” (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 89). Resiliency as a verb also allows Nicolazzo (2017c) to discuss how participants’ practice of resilience changed in different spaces on campus, often informed by their feelings of safety, or whether they were out in that particular space on campus (p. 92). For some, not being out felt bad because it rendered them invisible to other trans people on campus. And yet for others, not being out was an act of resiliency to protect their mental health.

The fourth and final theme presented by Nicolazzo (2017c) that is relevant to this study is the (tiring) labor of practicing trans*genders. Nicolazzo (2017c) focuses on the labor trans and non-binary students assume by educating ignorant cisgender people on campus about gender identity. She explains that by treating trans knowledge as a good to be traded, the neoliberal aspects of the academy participate in the "commodification of diverse genders as something one could acquire through participating in a training, educational session, in-service, or class experience" (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 108). Not only did participants report fatigue from fulfilling this educating role for their cisgender, heterosexual peers, but their choice to do so was contingent on their need to care for or protect themselves from shame or violence:

> By not bringing up gender, they were able to save their energy for people and situations that helped them feel refreshed, rejuvenated, and able to cope with the cultural realities of gender binary discourse and compulsory heterogenderism they experienced at CU. Therefore, participants' choices on whether to bring up gender were often a reflection of how best they could practice resilience in that situation and remain successful at CU. (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 110)

This quote from Nicolazzo (2017c) demonstrates the complex and competing priorities trans and non-binary students must balance when society assumes that they must educate the cisgender and heterosexual public. Not only are they judging whether bringing up gender will lead to fruitful discussion, they must consider whether they can do so while also conserving their mental energy to be academically successful. This study is very relevant and informs my own motivation to learn more about how trans and non-binary students are navigating campus life in the Canadian context and the extent to which their experiences align with those of their counterparts in the United States.

Barriers to Representing Trans Masculinities in Higher Education

Up until this point, trans research in Canada often includes a range of gender diverse people captured under the ‘transgender’ umbrella, including but not limited to: trans women and trans feminine people, trans men and trans masculine people, non-binary, agender, and pangender people, to name a few. As a result, the use of transgender as an umbrella term to represent the many ways that a trans person self-identifies their gender comes with limitations. A scholar who explores these complexities within higher educational contexts is D. Chase J. Catalano (2015). Conducting interviews with 25 different trans-male undergraduate students in the New England region of the United States during 2010, Catalano’s (2015) study fills an epistemic gap related to the experiences of trans men. Prior to the 1990s, little research exists that centers trans men’s perspectives on gender or their experiences of transphobia or cisnormativity. This is not to say that trans women’s perspectives are less important. Rather, as a transgender male researcher myself, filling this gap related to trans-male students experiences in higher education is of personal and academic importance. Catalano (2015) provides important insights into the experiences of trans men in university and identifies significant themes amongst his participants. These themes are important and relevant to interpreting the experiences of any trans-masculine participant.

Issues of Cisnormativity Amongst Trans Male Students

A persistent theme Catalano (2015) isolates amongst his participants is that of the ‘wrong-body’ model and the fixation on male transgender identities as rooted in medical transition. Participants expressed a tension between rejecting normative notions of ‘being a man’, like removing one’s breasts or feeling attraction towards women, while also striving to satisfy them (Catalano, 2015). Trans scholars such as Bettcher (2014) show how the ‘wrong body’ model emphasizes medical transition by presenting transgender people as requiring sexual reassignment surgery which is problematic for several reasons:

> So the problem is not the rigidity of the binary categories but rather the starting assumption that there is only one interpretation in the first place (the dominant one). Similarly, in the wrong-body model, to become a woman or a man requires genital reconstruction surgery as the correction of wrongness. But this is to accept a dominant understanding of what a man or a woman is. (p. 390)

However, not only does the wrong body model present trans men as inherently lesser than cisgender men, but it also assumes that all trans men wish to change their bodies as a basis for *authenticating* their self-definition as men (Catalano, 2015). Catalano's research shows that, though participants outwardly rejected the 'wrong body' model, some emphasized the importance of being seen as male to the point they avoided expressing themselves through fashion or makeup to appear more like cisgender men (Catalano, 2015, pg. 416). For some, this was in the search of a validation of their manhood, while others did so in search of safety in gendered spaces like washrooms (Catalano, 2015, p. 421). Others, however, opted to be visible in their transness, albeit citing the fear of being 'discovered' and any subsequent violence they could experience as a result (Catalano, 2015, p. 421; Bettcher, 2007). These observations only scratch the surface of the complexity of trans male students navigating their trans identities in postsecondary contexts vis-à-vis their own bodily ontological understandings of their identities and experiences (Rubin, 1998; 2003).

Framing Trans Masculinities within Existing Trans Higher Education Research

At first glance, Catalano's (2015) study closely mirrors Nicolazzo's (2017a) insofar that both advocate for intersectional research that resists the urge to summarize trans experience as a singular monolith. I contend that Catalano's (2015) narrower focus on trans masculinities demonstrates the turbulence for trans students in simultaneously navigating post-secondary education, as well as their own gender identity. Society often frames gender identity as an unchanging phenomenon, with little credit afforded to those who may still be exploring their gender. To present trans identities as intelligible, popular media often focuses on trans experiences that mirror the cisgender experience; this can involve narratives of 'always knowing' one was a different gender than one was assigned at birth or treating medical transition as the primary *telos* of transition (Eckstein, 2018. p. 44). As a result and as Catalano (2015) points out, students who are struggling to understand or articulate their gender diversity are framed as 'confused' and that their developing gender identity is "just a phase" (p. 418). However, his study stands in opposition to this narrative by resisting the pressure to frame the trans experience as adjacent to the cisgender experience. Catalano's (2015) research provides insight into how narratives of being 'trans enough' discourage trans students from discussing or expressing the fluidity and complexity of their gendered experience lest they face invalidation from their peers, which clearly impacts how the trans men in his study navigate postsecondary education contexts.

Like Nicolazzo (2017a), this focus on how students construct identity and navigate relationships with others distinguishes Catalano's (2015) study as *trans research*, rather than just research *on transgender people*. This inspired me to position my study from a similar standpoint; rather than acting as a documentarian of events, Catalano (2015) demonstrates how individuals cannot be separated from their experiences. Where Woodford et al's (2022c) study focuses on the negative experiences of trans people in gendered space, for example, Catalano (2015) interrogates the origins of this discomfort for each participant. He shines a light on how we construct male identity in terms of the cisgender male body, and the impact this has on trans-male students’ ability to inhabit their gender authentically and what this means for them as students in the postsecondary context. Not only are these desubjugated knowledges important to investigate as foundational to trans studies (Stryker, 2006), but a review of the literature demonstrates that such a phenomenological inquiry has yet to be conducted within Canadian higher education.

Creating Spaces for Trans Students of Colour

Part of desubjugating trans identities on campus requires acknowledgement of trans students of colour (TSOC) and how they navigate higher education as both a cisnormative and white space. Within their study, Simms et al (2023) discuss how TSOC are left underserviced due to their intersectional positionality as both people of colour *and* trans people. When they attempt to access 2SLGBTQ+ spaces on campus, the whiteness of these groups often meant their racialized experiences went unacknowledged. In a similar way, when accessing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) spaces, participants reported a lack of safety due to their gender identity. Simms et al (2023) articulate this tension through the term ‘racial melancholy’, which refers to “the multi layered process through which queer people of colour navigate the loss of racial group membership because of their sexuality, coupled with the loss of queer community based on their racial identity” (p. 303). The existence of these competing identities left TSOC suspended between two different communities, and higher education inclusivity policies had failed to catch the TSOC who had fallen through the cracks.

With a lack of physical spaces created for them, TSOC resorted to creating these spaces online. Though TSOC still had to navigate racism and whiteness online, these online kinship networks offered an opportunity for trans students of colour to carve out space for them to exist as their most authentic selves. Simms et al (2023) outlines this phenomenon through the term ‘disidentification’. Disidentification refers to “methods of survival where queer and trans people of color can flexibly assume (i.e., identify with) those structures that recognize them, while at the same time resisting (i.e., disidentifying with) those that seek their erasure and/or death” (Simms et al, 2023, p. 299). In online spaces, this allowed TSOC to discern which structures represented them and their experience, without the pressure to adopt those that did not serve them: “In other words, disidentifying is not only a practice of survival, but a way for trans students’ of color to build their own elsewhere, their own undercommons” (Simms et al, 2023, p. 304). After discovering this online spaces, Simms et al (2023) conclude that more needs to be done to create safe campus conditions for TSOC in higher education. They highlight the role of student affairs workers in this process, emphasizing the importance of “un/learning how these violent onto-epistemic structures continue to haunt university life” (Simms et al, 2023, p. 305).

Trans Graduate Students On Campus

Having considered undergraduate trans students’ experiences extensively, I shift my focus to Goldberg et al (2019) and their inquiry into the experiences of trans and non-binary graduate students. They created a survey tool using Qualtrics that asked students about:

> their gender identities and expressions; (b) their perceptions of emotional and physical safety on campus, and whether and how such perceptions impact their gender expression; and (c) their perceptions of trans-affirming versus trans-negative reactions among fellow students and faculty and their experiences and responses to misgendering (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 41).

Of the 340 students who took this survey, 93 were identified as graduate students. After data cleaning, like evaluating responses to ensure that only legitimate responses were included, 2 responses were removed; this left Goldberg et al (2019) with 91 responses to evaluate during data analysis. After reviewing these responses from participants, Goldberg et al (2019) identified three relevant themes for this study: (i) campus climate and its impact on trans and non-binary students' gender presentation; (ii) the impact of misgendering in graduate programs, and; (iii) the impact of misgendering from the supervisor.

Goldberg et al (2019) start by considering the impact campus climate has on trans and non-binary students' gender presentation. In assessing campus climate, participants often related climates on campus to their feeling s of safety as a trans or non-binary person. Of those surveyed, 67% of participants worried that their gender identity would "invite rejection, ridicule, and possibly violence" (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 44). These safety concerns inspired trans graduate students to change their gender expression on campus, some citing the "academic and professional risks of dressing in a way that was less clearly gendered and/or that deviated from the gender they were assigned at birth" (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 44). These concerns were also, at times, exacerbated by the existence of prevailing religious or political beliefs within their educational institution. This "'passing' balancing act" led some trans and non-binary graduate students to enact inauthentic gender presentations on campus for their own safety.

The second prevailing theme — that is, being misgendered within graduate programs — had specific effects on non-binary graduate students. Where their binary trans peers could dress in stereotypically masculine or feminine ways to ensure they were correctly gendered, non-binary and gender diverse students almost expected to be misgendered. Goldberg et al (2019) explained that "Non-binary students were aware of their complicated situation when it came to misgendering by faculty, staff, and other students in that "nobody knows non-binary is a thing" (p. 45). Even if the person they were speaking to was educated on trans identity, participants felt that they only cited binary trans identities that affirm the ‘wrong body model’ of transition (Goldberg et al, 2019). As outlined by Bettcher (2014), the ‘wrong body model’ emphasizes medical transition by presenting transgender people as physically deformed and requiring sexual reassignment. While this framework might help make binary trans people intelligible to cisgender readers, Bettcher (2014) explains that

> Once we recognize trans subcultures with alternate gender practices—practices in which gender presentation does not mean genitalia and in which bodies are encoded with intimacy boundaries in alternative ways—we can see how, in the wrong-body narrative, gender terms are largely interpreted via the mainstream practice of representing genital status through gender presentation. (p. 401)

For the participants in Goldberg et al’s (2019) study, the prevalence of the wrong body model made communicating their non-binary identity to other students, staff, and faculty more difficult. Rather than disrupting the conversation to correct someone on their pronouns, non-binary respondents explained that it was often easier and safer to stay silent than face “rejection, ridicule, and possibly violence” (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 44).

The fear trans and non-binary graduate students felt when considering correcting someone on their pronouns increased when that person was an immediate advisor or supervisor. Many explained that the risk was greater when speaking with an immediate supervisor due to the power they hold over a graduate student’s academic and professional future. As a result, participants’ “status as both trans and graduate students rendered them vulnerable at the hands of interlocking systems of power and privilege” (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 47). Even when misgendering was done with positive intention, through positive phrases like ‘you go, girl!’, for participants “It always felt like a kick to the gut, like they didn’t care about or respect me, and like they do not care about trans students despite their vocal assurance that they do" (Goldberg, 2019, p. 47).

However, these negative experiences were not ubiquitous amongst all participants. On the contrary, three participants explained that the support of their supervisor explicitly relating to their trans identity was crucial to them surviving and completing their graduate degree. This latter point not only highlights the diversity of experience present amongst trans and non-binary graduate students, but it also shows the importance of reflexivity when cisgender allies try to support trans and non-binary people. Even when supervisors might be new to gender diverse language or the linguistic mechanics of gender-neutral pronouns, students within this study point to tangible actions supervisors took part in to support their trans identity; things like apologizing and correcting themselves when they had misgendered their student "demonstrated a commitment to learning and 'doing better'" (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 47). Rather than expecting perfection, trans and non-binary graduate students were more focused on whether their supervisor was willing to extend and revise their understandings of sex and gender to show respect for their student's trans identity. In cases where supervisors did so, trans and non-binary students reported their support as an invaluable asset to their academic flourishing.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of existing Canadian 2SLGBTQ+ education research, as well as the development of trans-informed higher education research taking place in the United States. Trans-inclusive higher education research conducted in the United States demonstrates the lower and vulnerable social position of trans and non-binary students on American university campuses. The studies reviewed employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to report on both populations of trans students across a university or country, as well as particular experiences as articulated through one-on-one interviewing or open-ended survey responses. The diverse data produced amongst the American studies demonstrates the wealth of knowledge to be accessed through empowering and amplifying the voices of transgender and non-binary students. The emerging research also emphasizes the infancy of Canadian scholarship, in which the majority of transgender higher education research exists as disaggregated data within the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community. My own study makes a contribution to the field in that it provides case study analysis and contextual specificity of trans students in one particular university in Ontario given current conditions of insurgent anti-LGBT hate.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a justification for my qualitative study considering my purpose in conducting this research. The study's purpose was to provide insight into trans and nonbinary students' own lived experience of navigating university as gender minorities. As such, this study treats transgender and non-binary students' phenomenological perspectives on their own embodied experiences as a vital resource in generating knowledge and deepening our understanding of trans inclusive practices and climates on Canadian campuses. This sort of knowledge is best addressed through employing qualitative inquiry with its focus on employing methods that permit researchers to learn about the complexity of lived experience and being in the world. As explained by Patton (2003), qualitative inquiries are best suited to understand people's lived experiences. Where previous studies in the field have sought to highlight shared experiences of victimization or microaggressions, my study seeks to center gender expression and gender identity as rooted in students' subjective experiences as they navigate campus spaces in a predominantly settler colonial, cishet institution (Woodford et al, 2019, 2022a; Cohen et al, 2018; Stein and de Andreotti, 2016; Tuck and Yang, 2012).

I begin this chapter by considering the nature of qualitative inquiry and explaining why qualitative methods were best suited for this study. Next, I discuss my choice to conduct a phenomenological case study (Stake, 2005). I specifically reflect on what a phenomenological epistemology within trans studies meant for my study, broadly drawing on what Rubin (1998) refers to as "phenomenology as method in trans studies" (p. 263). I also articulate my initial consideration of autoethnography, ultimately explaining why I chose not to implement it as part of this study. I then go on to explain my justification for employing interviews, the recruitment of my participants and approach to analyzing my research data which included third-party coding software called ‘NVivo14’ for thematic analysis and my use of theory in the analysis of the data.

The Nature of Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry is characterized by a person-oriented interest in understanding a particular perspective or point of view that is grounded in one’s experience of living and being in the world. Such an inquiry is aligned with the people-oriented focus of my study. Patton (2015), for example, explains that qualitative inquiry “documents, analyzes, and interprets how human beings construct and attach meanings to their experiences” (p. 13). Catalano’s (2015) study of trans men’s relationship with masculinity is an excellent example of this. His use of direct quotations from participants, explaining their ontological rejection of cisnormativity while also striving to ‘pass’ as cis for safety reasons, vividly displays the precarity in navigating the world as a trans person. This depiction of his participants’ experiences shows the pain present when ‘passing’ as cis serves to erase one’s trans identity, while also acknowledging that many strive for the social acceptance that passing provides in male-gendered spaces (Catalano, 2015, p. 420). In this sense, the people-oriented nature of qualitative inquiry means that it is uniquely equipped to enable researchers to better understand marginalized or under-represented groups.

Patton (2003) states that qualitative inquiry is governed by four foundational principles with the following three needing to orient the researcher at the outset: (i) the researcher must ensure adequate proximity to the participants and the world in which they live; (ii) the researcher needs to communicate the nuances of the participants’ lived experience which cannot be accomplished without gaining a well-developed understanding of their environment; (iii) the researcher must attend to a careful consideration “of what actually takes place and what people actually say: the perceived facts” (Patton, 2003, p. 28). The use of the term ‘perceived’ is important to note since Patton (2003) argues that qualitative methodologies privilege and value subjective experience, rather than defending a form of ‘objective’ truth (p. 13). Part of representing these ‘perceived truths’ requires a great deal of description of people, their environments, and their interactions with others. Patton further explains that after those three prior principles are considered and appropriately applied, researchers must return to their data to highlight direct quotes in their participants’ own words. This exemplifies “a significant commitment to represent the participants in their own terms”, one of the foundational values present in qualitative methodologies (Patton, 2003, p.28). With the core values of people-oriented inquiries outlined, I can now consider the case study design and particular phenomenological approach and commitment to qualitative inquiry that characterized my own study as it is informed by trans studies.

Case Study Design and Phenomenological Approach

A foundational aspect of my study design was the use of a case study methodological approach. Case study is a methodological approach “in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Since the study examined the experiences of trans and non-binary students on a single university campus, outlining a unified case provided important insights into the campus environment of the participants. Within the study, the ‘case’ was how trans and non-binary students navigate different spaces in Higher Education. However, to ensure the inquiry did not grow too broad and difficult to manage, I followed the recommendations of seminal scholars such as Stake (2005) and Baxter (2008). They advise researchers to treat cases as “bounded systems” (Stake, 2005, p. 444). By imposing limitations like time and activity, or definition and context, Baxter (2008) argues that researchers can control the scope of their study.

By questioning how trans and non-binary students navigate different spaces on campus, the study began by focusing on a single university campus located in Ontario named Sullivan University.[1] Like many universities in Canada, Sullivan University has multiple sites across the city and province; to ensure that participants were all commenting on the same climate, study enrollment was restricted to students enrolled at Sullivan's main campus. As a result, all the participants are trans and non-binary people enrolled as full-time students at this university. Though the initial intention of the study was to include both undergraduate and graduate level students, eligible volunteers all identified as graduate students, which served to further bind the 'case' at the center of this study. By imposing these geographic and demographic limitations, I was able to better ascertain how microaggressions, transphobia, cisnormativity, and cissexism manifest for different trans and non-binary graduate students at Sullivan University.

According to Stake (2005), this sort of inquiry is best served by 'intrinsic case study', because the nature of the inquiry is characterized by a desire to better understand the case. This is distinct from an instrumental case study, which utilizes cases to "redraw generalization" (Stake, 205, p. 445); the intrinsic case study emphasizes the value of individualized experiences instead. As previously discussed, given that trans studies as a field resists the temptation of universals, an intrinsic case study was best suited to the purpose of my study which was to generate knowledge and insight into the particularized and lived experiences of trans and nonbinary students on campus (Stryker, 2006; Rubin, 1998; Jourian, 2017). The diversity of experiences present within trans communities is one of the assets that a trans desubjugated approach to qualitative inquiry has to offer in enhancing our understanding of gender identity and gender expression that challenge cultural cisgenderism (Kennedy, 2018). Though this inquiry embraces the inherent fluidity of trans experiences, the case study method provided important structure to both organize findings and highlight areas for further investigation. By binding the case I was able to focus on the participants as sources of individualized knowledge.

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[1] All identifying information (place names, participant names, regional organizations etc.) has be replaced with pseudonyms.

By committing to upholding my participants subjectivity, I also commit to remaining reflexive as to my role as the researching guiding this inquiry. However, as Patton (2003) points out, researcher cannot necessarily completely remove their perspective from their research:

> The perspective that the researcher brings to a qualitative inquiry is part of the context for the findings. A human being is the instrument of qualitative methods. A real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions, and interprets responses. Self-awareness, then, can be an asset in both fieldwork and analysis. Developing appropriate self-awareness can be a form of 'sharpening the instrument' (Brown 1996: 42).

Balancing my positionality as a trans graduate student with my obligations as a researcher was an ongoing consideration throughout the research process. Though novice researchers are often encouraged to immerse themselves in the context of their case study to foster rapport with their participants, remaining self-aware ensured that my personal experiences did not supersede or overshadow the experiences of my participants. I considered how I framed my follow-up questions for participants, as whether I was imposing my own understanding or definitions for terms participants were engaging with. For guidance on combining a case study methodological approach with phenomenology, I considered Creswell (2007) and their definition of phenomenology.

Phenomenology “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Rather than arriving at generalization or solutions to problems, phenomenological studies are concerned with articulating the very essence of a concept or phenomenon. In this respect the focus of my study was on the phenomenon of the trans and non-binary student moving through different spaces on campus. However, Creswell (2007) states that researchers must identify what type of phenomenology they are employing, choosing between hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. After considering both, I decided that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was best suited to my study which I explain below.

Hermeneutic phenomenology’s strengths lie in its ability to help researchers pursue an “abiding concern” that captures their attention (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). As a result of these concerns, the research searches for answers through “lived experience (phenomenology) and interpreting the ‘texts’ of life (hermeneutics)” (p. 59). However, what characterizes the hermeneutic phenomenologist is their commitment to the interpretive process. Rather than taking the phenomenon at face value, the researcher turns to the phenomena in making “an interpretation… of the meaning of the lived experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Conversely, in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher ‘brackets’ themselves off from the phenomenon in question. The primary concern of the researcher is providing an adequate description of the phenomenon in and of itself without external influence: “Hence, ‘transcendental’ means ‘in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time’” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). My inquiry was more hermeneutic than transcendental.

Although I treated my participants’ comments and experiences as unique sources of knowledge, the intelligibility of the themes that I generated rested on my interpretation of the participants’ experiences. In other words, it was not possible to bracket out and to deny my own positionality and indeed situatedness as a trans researcher in the interpretations that I made of the interview data. Practically speaking, hermeneutic phenomenology best captures why I chose to study this phenomenon; as a trans graduate student myself, my interest began with an ‘abiding concern’ in my own safety as a trans person on university campuses. After outlining this concern, I began reading through relevant literature and familiarizing myself with policies on Sullivan University’s campus, as well as studies with similar goals as my own. These processes lend themselves to a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. In a similar vein, I remain unsure whether I would have been capable of the ‘bracketing’ and separation that defines transcendental phenomenology. Though I was aware of my closeness to the topic and remained reflexive throughout to not overshadow my participants, I contend that part of the strength of my study was an acknowledgement of own investment and subjectivity in conducting this research study. In fact, Haraway (1988) rejects the need for “a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations” (p. 579). In fact, she argues that

> The standpoints of the subjugated are not “innocent positions”. On the contrary they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow the denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge. They are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting and disappearing acts – ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively. The subjugated have a decent chance to be onto the god trick and all its dazzling – and therefore, blinding – illuminations. “Subjugated” standpoints are

> preferred because they seem to promise more adequate sustained, objective, transformative accounts of the world. (p. 584).

Here ‘god trick’ refers to the belief in objectivity and some sort of unmediated universal accepted truth which translates into denying the situatedness of the researcher’s own positionality and belief systems that inevitably come to affect how they see and view the world. It is in this sense that I conceived of my study as a hermeneutic phenomenological case study in its situated interpretive focus on the lived experience of the trans subject with the view to investigating trans students’ accounts of navigating cisnormative spaces and interactions with others on campus. My own positionality and situatedness of my embodied trans subjectivity could not somehow be bracketed out in the transcendental phenomenological sense to generate knowledge about the trans and nonbinary graduate students who shared accounts about their lives with me.

Phenomenology and Trans Studies

Given the above issues regarding the political and ethical significance of trans desubjugation, it is important to note that a phenomenological approach to the study of transgender phenomena has been established as a as a foundational basis for undertaking scholarly investigation and conducting research within trans studies. Trans studies is itself a response to previous inquiries that centered trans identity as a pathology requiring treatment, rather than a respected identity (Stryker, 2006; Rubin, 1998; Bettcher, 2014). Rather than focusing on “the productive, creative work of the subject struggling to articulate itself within received categories”, academia’s relationship with gender non-conformity was one of recording people’s medical transition (Rubin, 1998, p. 266). This alienated trans people who could not access medical transition, as well as those who did not want to undergo medical transition. Instead of assuming surgical intervention to be the penultimate concern for all trans people's happiness, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to conducting research asks individuals how their life and experiences inform their gender identity and expression, and vice versa.

Rubin (1998) explains that

> A phenomenological method works to return agency to us as subjects and to return authority to our narratives. It justifies a turn to the self-reports of transsexual subjects as a place to find counterdiscursive knowledge. (p. 271)

Rubin (1998) articulates how centering trans and non-binary people's voices empowers, and uplifts marginalized and subjugated standpoints on gender identity and gender expressions. Within the context of this study, the phenomenon under investigation was trans and non-binary students moving through campus at Sullivan University. As discussed, in the literature review, educational institutions are cisnormative places (Martino et al, 2020; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2021; Goldberg et al, 2019). By interviewing trans and non-binary students about their experiences navigating campus spaces, this study becomes the sort of generative, liberatory space envisioned by trans scholars like Rubin (1998).

Rather than articulating universal definitions, this study centres on trans subjectivity and the particular knowledge that trans students' experiences have of their own lives in one specific university. As such a phenomenological case study aligns well with a commitment to focus on trans desubjugation, as articulated by Stryker (2006). It enabled me to provide a context-specific focus on students' embodied understandings of gender identity as they navigate campus life, while attending to how cisgenderism, cisnormativity and cissexism impact on the day-to-day lives of trans people. Part of this study required me to set aside my assumptions of which spaces would be deemed safe. As Nicolazzo (2017c) observed within her own study, “the gender binary discourse seeped into not just hetero- and cisnormative spaces on campus (e.g., dining halls) but also was present in trans*-specific spaces” (p. 66-67). By utilizing a trans phenomenological approach and setting aside my own assumptions to uphold my participants as sources of knowledge that have been previously dismissed, I was able to uncover the hidden forces of cisnormativity and cisgenderism at play in students’ everyday lives in campus spaces much the same way as Nicolazzo (2017c) did.

In addition, phenomenology offers tools to understand both the internal and external aspects of trans identity. This allowed me to consider how peoples’ material existence informs their lives and movements through different spaces on campus. As Rubin explains:

> Phenomenology provides a framework for making sense of transsexualism. With its emphasis on the body as a point of view on the world, phenomenology accommodates a transsexual awareness that bodies significantly shape experience of the world. (p. 270)

It is in this sense that embodiment is a foundational concept within trans studies, and therefore this study. Central to a phenomenological approach in trans studies is the whole question of embodiment and what Rubin (1998) refers to explicitly as bodily ontology, or “the necessity of being a body in order for the world to exist for oneself” (p. 270). As Rubin (1998) establishes, to say that gender is ‘embodied’ is not to say that it resides within the cells, or other medicalized understandings of gender in that biologist’s material sense (Bettcher, 2014; Rubin, 1998). Rather, embodied ontologies express how transgender and non-binary people experience their identity as “contingent upon an embodied location” and indeed as existing in a body in the ontological sense of that means shaping one’s experience of the world (Rubin, 1998, p. 267). This perspective provides a framework to both evaluate a singular person’s experiences, while also critically assessing how their positionality and identity interacts with their environment, and vice versa. This is not to say that one's embodied experience is fixed. As one moves through the world, facing both love and hardship, trans and non-binary peoples' understanding of themselves continues to grow. As Rubin (1998) asserts, a phenomenological approach calls for "a version of identity that is always unfolding and embodied for these more naive and unexamined notions of identity" (p. 279). In this sense I wanted to provide a magnifying glass into trans students' embodied existence in navigating campus life as they confront cisnormativity, cissexism and indeed, outright transphobia. Part of doing justice to the nuances of their experiences involved considering the characteristics that bind the participants together, while also allowing their dissonant qualities to exist (Aboim, 2016).

Reflexivity and Autoethnography

Initially, I had intended to incorporate my own autoethnographic accounts as a graduate student navigating gender diversity throughout the thesis. Since I am also a transgender student actively navigating higher education, I thought it made sense to include my own autoethnographic reflections on my experiences especially after reading Ellis et al (2011). They define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis et al, 2011, p.1). However, once I began to interact with and interview participants, I questioned whether integrating an autoethnographic approach into my empirical investigation of other trans students' experiences was appropriate. Throughout the interviewing process, participants' stories began to unfurl in all their vibrant complexities with some considering ideas or sharing experiences which they claimed they had only entertained through internal contemplation. Though I understood my ethical obligations as a researcher at all phases of the research process, seeing their trust in my work and their excitement in being represented deepened this obligation. While autoethnography would allow me to showcase the knowledge I have gained through my own lived experience, I was concerned that doing so would absorb space my participants' knowledge would have filled. I also did not want to risk my own experiences overshadowing those of my participants in the form of taking away from unravelling the full significance of the insights that they shared with me about campus life.

Despite the fact that autoethnography would have added another dimension and layer to the analysis regarding how my experiences either converged or diverged from those of my participants, ultimately, I had to contend with the pragmatic constraints of a master's thesis which I believed would not allow me to do justice to simultaneously undertaking an autoethnographic study, which is a thesis in its own right, and an empirical investigation of other trans students' university experiences. I agree with Ellis et al (2011) when they explain that "research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena" (p. 283) and this study was definitely a source of transformation for both me and the participants. However, autoethnography is not the only way to reconcile my positionality as a trans academic conducting research about trans people. Though my understanding of the data will always be informed by positionality, I ultimately decided that my participant's observations ought to take precedent. However, as I navigated the data collection and analysis process, I continued to reflect on how my observations were informed by my in-group status as a member of the trans community.

Data Collection: Interviews

Interviews are a common method within both educational research (Cohen et al, 2018), as well as transgender studies within higher education (Nicolazzo, 2017a, 2017b; Catalano, 2015;

Woodford et al, 2019, 2022a, 2022b; Jourian, 2017). Many of these studies also emphasize their efficacy in amplifying marginalized voices within larger systems such as education (Cohen et al, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2021). One-on-one interviews were best suited for my study since my inquiry focused on the lives and subjective experiences of trans and non-binary students in university. I employed open-ended interviews as they "yield not only deeper understanding but also political action as the depth of participants' feelings is revealed" (Patton, 2003, p. 17). The interviews lasted one hour and were semi-structured in nature, starting from the same set of pre-approved questions outlined in the Interview Protocol (Appendix A).

The construction of interview questions was undertaken with constant consideration of the three research questions guiding this inquiry. The first, which asks how different university spaces and communities on campus, is addressed through questions like 'Are there any spaces where you feel safer than others on campus?' and 'Have you attended 2SLGBTQ+ club events or accessed 2SLGBTQ+ supports on campus before?'. These questions address both the physical and psychological aspects of trans and non-binary students' navigation of Sullivan University's campus. By asking participants to identify specific spaces where they feel safe, the interview questions expose which spaces trans and non-binary students frequent, as well as which ones they avoid. In addition, by asking about whether they participate in 2SLGBTQ+ clubs on campus, I was able assess whether trans and non-binary students were accessing these spaces and how trans-inclusive they found them to be. Trans-inclusivity in 2SLGBTQ+ spaces is of particular importance due to the history of trans people becoming homogenized under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella. Renn (2010) explains the origin of this conflation, stating that "Political, social, and sometimes intellectual alliances of LGBT people have led to conflation of these distinct groups in campus contexts, where they are frequently treated as a monolithic community for the purposes of providing programs and services” (p. 135). Given trans and non-binary peoples’ existence as a minority group within a minority, relying on homogenized data elicits concerns that trans and non-binary peoples’ voices will be overshadowed by their cis, gay peers. To assess the safety and trans-inclusivity of all campus spaces, follow-up questions were used to ascertain the origin of their feelings about safety in specific spaces on campus.

For largely compulsory or unavoidable spaces, like classrooms or seminars, the interview protocol introduced different questions, like ‘Do you choose to identify as transgender or non-binary within classroom settings?’ and ‘Do you experience deadnaming/ misgendering from your professors, administrators, or classmates?’. Rather than accessing if students were in physical attendance, these questions call on participants to reflect on how they navigate their identities in these pedagogical spaces. These questions also utilized follow-up questions based on participant responses, which included questions like: ‘How did [being misgendered/deadnamed/not being ‘out’ in class] make you feel?’ and ‘How do your professor, teaching assistants (TAs), and peers interact with you?’. These questions were formulated to engage participants in deeper reflection, as well as to expose the nature of their relationships and interactions with others. These and other questions were also constructed to be open-ended, to “offer the persons being interviewed the opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their own perspectives” (Patton, 2003, p. 348). I did so both to ensure I was recording participants’ authentic experiences, as well as to avoid inserting my own opinion. Given my closeness to this research as a trans graduate student myself, I wanted to ensure that this inquiry was a space for participants to “express their own understandings in their own terms” (Patton, 2003, p. 348).

These interview questions also address the second research question within my study, which asks what the on-campus climate is like for trans and non-binary students. This research question is also addressed through explicit questions in the interview protocol, such as ‘How do you feel about your current experience on campus? What are your classes like?’ and ‘How would you describe the climate and attitudes on campus towards trans people?’. By asking participants directly about campus climate, the interview questions ensured that participants were directly addressing the climate on campus.

The third research question considers whether the current context of resurgent transphobia and hate motivated by far-right extremism has had an impact on trans and nonbinary students’ experiences on campus. This focus was covered by the following sequence of interview questions: ‘Do you read news articles/ other media relating to transgender and non-binary people?’, ‘If so, do you feel the news impacts how you navigate campus as a trans person or how you feel as a trans person on campus?’, and ‘If you do not consume news media relating to trans and non-binary people, do you intentionally avoid it? If so, why?’. Such questions provided students with the opportunity to reflect on whether the broader context of anti-trans rhetoric was impacting on or evident in their lives as students on campus.

Returning to Patton (2003) throughout this process ensured that the interview questions were constructed thoughtfully and in a way that upheld my commitments as a researcher to my participants’ experiences. It also ensured that I made an effective use of the one-hour timeslot I had with participants (Patton, 2003, p. 343). While I knew that utilizing an interview guide would provide necessary structure to the interviews, the semi-structured nature of how I conceived of the interview protocol offered me additional flexibility “to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview instrument’s development” (Patton, 2003, p. 347). For example, the participants were given an opportunity to discuss any thoughts they wanted to include, or to return to any previous questions. If they had no additional thoughts to add, or if we still had time outstanding, I did one of two things – I either redirected to an earlier question or posed a new follow-up question based on the discussion. This approach enabled me to attend to two important considerations throughout the interview process: first, it ensured that most of the participants' discussion focused on the purpose of my study by preparing focused questions; and second, it provided structural flexibility for my participants to express themselves authentically.

As a trans person myself, I understand how complex gendered embodiment can be. Discussing one's identity could lead to discussions of one's upbringing, romantic relationships, and even how changes to one's understanding of gender and gender presentation lead to one's current position of bodily reflexive self-awareness and becoming (Aboim, 2016; Rubin, 1998). However, despite sharing an aspect of identity as trans students, I was very conscious that it would not in and of itself guarantee rapport. Rather than relying on my trans identity to do so, the comfort, safety, and concerns of the participants was prioritized throughout the interview process. Participants were given the ability to choose an interview setting and time that suited them best, and participants were given the power to pause or end the interview at any time (see Appendix C). A certain degree of reflexivity was exercised to ensure the participants' viewpoints and perspectives were preserved in their most authentic state. In this respect, I conceived of the interviews as a safe space for participants to reflect on their experiences in ways they may not have in the past. The possibility of developing new themes is one of the reasons open-ended interviews were selected as the primary interview method. Though they can present a challenge to draw themes across interviews, preserving the individual voices of the participants is just as, if not more, important (Patton, 2003, p.28).

In addition, the existence of these complexities surrounding one's embodied gendered subjectivity further confirmed my choice to evaluate my participants as individual cases in an embedded study committed to a phenomenological examination of trans students' experiences, which are bound by their shared geographic context on the same university campus, as well as their common status as graduate students at the said institution.

Recruitment

Data collection through interviews started during Fall semester of 2023. Volunteers were recruited using Recruitment Posters (Appendix B). These posters were distributed through different 2SLGBTQ+ student groups on campus for both undergraduate and graduate students at Sullivan University. Four student groups were approached to distribute these posters on Instagram; two agreed to do so: one was a graduate student affiliated group, and the other was undergraduate focused. Posters called for eligible participants to reach out to the researcher directly through their institutional email to schedule their interview at a time and space that worked best for them. For more information regarding participant recruitment posters, please see the Appendices of this study (Appendix B).

For three participants, maintaining their comfort meant utilizing private study rooms off-campus at the public library; for two others, this meant accessing a quiet, private study room on Sullivan University's campus. I was asking participants to explore difficult topics, like anti-trans media and their experiences with misgendering, deadnaming, and transphobia. So, offering participants the autonomy to choose the space that made them feel safe was especially important. Once I began conducting my interviews with the participants, time between other research tasks was spent converting the audio files into transcripts. In doing so, word choice and inflection indications were used to preserve their natural inflections within their transcripts. This ensured credibility in my analysis, since the participants' comments are preserved in their entirety (Cohen et al, 2018). Noting their expression of sarcasm, deep breaths to collect themselves, or occasional chuckles were indicated to preserve the original context and intent behind participants' comments. These decisions during transcription both fulfilled research ethics' obligations, while also integrating the study's trans studies informed theoretical framework. Rather than creating a unified lexicon, or summarizing participants in my own words, participants' verbatim transcripts became a means for them to articulate their individual experiences navigating gender diversity as they understood them. Rather removing quotations from their contexts to outline a unified understanding, which risks losing the richness of participants' positionalities, participants opinions are highlighted as uniquely situationed in their particular experiences. This individualized approach differs from studies without a trans studies informed approach, which can flatten the diverse student experiences present under the 'trans' umbrella (Stryker, 2006; Nicolazzo, 2017b, 2021).

Participants

Five participants were interviewed as a part of this study. Four identified as non-binary, using they/them pronouns, and one identified as a trans man, using he/him pronouns. All participants were graduate level students enrolled in full-time studies at Sullivan University (pseudonym); two were PhD students, and the remaining three were Master's students. Each participant was at a different point in the timeline of their studies. Some were acting as Teaching Assistants and course instructors, others were not. Some were still completing coursework, while others had completed their course requirements and were navigating the thesis/dissertation requirements relevant to their specific faculty. The three Master's students were enrolled in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) fields, while the other two participants were enrolled in the Social Sciences (two PhD students). Below I include details of each participant by their assigned pseudonym, as well as other identifying characteristics they volunteered throughout the research process. In instances where participants were enrolled in hyper-specific programs that risked exposing their identity, a similar broad category was used. A table representing these descriptions can be found below, followed by more expansive textual descriptions for each participant.

Participant Pseudonym	**Gender Identity**	**Pronouns**	**Age**	**Racial/Ethnic Identity**	**Area of Study**	**Level of Study**	**Year of Study**
Taylor	Non-binary	They/them	25 years	White	Psychology/Health Sciences	Master’s	2nd year
Samuel	Trans man	He/him	22 years	White and Latin American	Health Sciences	Master’s	1st year
Quinn	Non-binary	They/them	25 years	Japanese-European	Education	PhD	1st year
Morgan	Non-binary	They/them	22 years	Chinese	Health Sciences	Master’s	1st year
Steph	Non-binary	They/them	38 years	White	Education	PhD	6th/7th year

Taylor is a white, 25-year-old, non-binary person attending Sullivan University as a Master’s student. They are in their second year of study there, and their area of study is Psychology. They were raised in a conservative household growing up and despite identifying as non-binary for the past three years, they are not out to their immediate or extended family. In addition to their role as a student, Taylor shares a lab with other students who share the same supervisor. They have also functioned as a Teaching Assistant throughout their time at Sullivan University.

Samuel is a 22-year-old, trans man attending Sullivan University as a Master's student. He is in his first year of study in Health Sciences. Samuel identifies as white and Latin American and had completed his legal and medical transition before starting his studies at Sullivan. He has also run workshops in the past that focus on creating trans-inclusive practices within Health Science fields.

Quinn is a 25-year-old, non-binary person attending Sullivan University as a PhD student. They are in their first year of study in Education. Their area of study also considers trans and non-binary people in education, and their positionality is informed by their previous identity as a gay man. Quinn also identifies as Japanese-European.

Morgan is a 22-year-old, non-binary person attending Sullivan University as a master's student. They are in their first year of study in Health Sciences. At the time of their interview, Morgan expressed that they were in a committed relationship, and that their girlfriend identified as lesbian. They also identified themselves as Chinese.

Steph is a white, 38-year-old, non-binary person attending Sullivan University as a PhD candidate. They are in their sixth or seventh year of study in Education. Their area of study also considers trans and non-binary people in education. Given their existence as a later-year PhD candidate, Steph also functions in their faculty as a course instructor. Prior to their current program, Steph attended Sullivan University throughout both their Bachelor's and Master of Education as well.

A Note about Pseudonyms and the Politics of Naming

Given the sensitivity of naming practices in trans spaces, many factors were considered when selecting pseudonyms for places, people, and on-campus initiatives or student-led groups. Pseudonyms had to retain the utility of their original name, that being to reflect their personal gender identity, while also not compromising the identity of the participants. Participants were also given the choice to choose their pseudonyms, but most were happy to have me as the researcher select a pseudonym on their behalf. In this case, I followed up with participants to ensure they were comfortable with the pseudonym I selected.

The first pseudonym considered was the name of the university. Sullivan University was selected for a couple different reasons. First, the use of a name plus the ending ‘University’ allowed for participants to name the university either as just ‘Sullivan’, which is common on-campus, or as ‘Sullivan University’. Secondly, the name was selected due to goals for this study as an exploratory project. Sullivan University is a reference to historic trans activist, Lou Sullivan. Born in 1951, Sullivan was an early trans activists based out of the USA. In 1976, six years after moving to San Franscisco, Sullivan would face a large barrier to living as his truest self:

> Sullivan first sought sex-reassignment surgery in 1976 but was denied on the basis of his openly declared homosexual orientation. As a result of his own frustrations, Sullivan led an eventually successful campaign to remove homosexual orientation from the contraindications for sex reassignment. (Stryker, 2004, p. 165)

Sullivan’s work surrounding trans masculinities informed my understanding not only of my own identity as a transgender man, but also the need for systems that are continually revisited and renegotiated. Rather than waiting for more to be done, Sullivan spoke out against his oppressors and mobilized the community to create necessary change. Had it not been for activists like Lou Sullivan, my existence as a queer trans man would be more contested than it already is. When I considered how university names are used to memorialize significant figures in history, specifically those with traits becoming of a scholar, using Sullivan University as the pseudonym for the university my study is situated in made a lot of sense. I want my study to constitute a response to the larger institutions that wish to stifle or silence trans and non-binary people. When I consider these values, I cannot help but think of Lou Sullivan.

I also wanted to support the autonomy of my trans participants vis-a-vis supporting their self-determining right to choose their own pseudonym**.** To say that that transgender and non-binary people often have complex feelings surrounding their names would border on oversimplification. Individuals may consider and reconsider many names before they settle on one that feels authentically ‘them’. For this reason, pseudonym choice within this study provided another opportunity to respect the autonomy of participants. Most participants were happy to have the researcher select a name for them. In this case, names were chosen based on their gendered or gender-neutral aspects so that pseudonyms were still representative of the participant’s individual identity. However, where participants refer to their deadnames or legal names, multiple pseudonyms were required. For example, Quinn discussed their legal name multiple times throughout their interview. They discussed its use in their institutional email address, as well as how they still use it as a nickname with close friends and family members. For this reason, I used a pseudonym for their preferred name (Quinn) as well as their legal name (William/Billy). In this instance, the study had to track multiple pseudonyms at once. However, this only scratches the surface of the intricacies of naming practices within this study.

Shortly after their interview had been conducted, when the participants had been notified that their interview transcript was ready for review, a participant reached out asking if they could use their actual name as a part of the study. Quinn, a non-binary, 1st year PhD student, requested that their actual name be used within the research; however, they understood that this might not be feasible due to requirements with the university ethics board. After discussing this with them, I asked if they would write down their rationale for this request so that it could be included in the completed thesis. They agreed, and supplied the following quote as a part of their confirmation of their transcript:

> I would prefer to be referred to as [redacted], instead of a pseudonym, because the experiences that I am sharing are my own; they belong to me. I am comfortable sharing my name in here because I feel empowered to be open and honest with my experiences. As a queer non-binary person, being open and honest with my experiences has not always been easy or accessible to me, and it is a practice in becoming more comfortable with my own identity that I would like my experiences to be ascribed to my name. (Quinn)

As one may have noticed, Quinn’s real name was not included as part of this study. When considering their request, it called for a consideration of the ethical obligations I had to them, as well as the other participants within the study. Though Quinn was content assuming the possibility of being identified, this was not a boundary shared by other participants. If someone were able to identify Quinn within the study due to their actual name being included, it would be easy for someone to search through the identified school’s website until they found the other participants within this study. This is especially relevant due to the small cohort often found in graduate-level of study, and that some departments chose to post their current graduate students’ profiles along with their area of study and pronouns on their department website. Information like pronouns and area of study were mentioned by participants, including Quinn. All these details could be used to identify the other participants within this study, especially if Quinn were identified because their real name was used. Though Quinn understood the risk of being identified and was ready to accept that, I did not want to risk the possibility of Quinn being identified leading to others within the study to be identified as well. Since allowing Quinn to identify with their actual name could lead to others being identified, I decided that they would not be allowed to identify under their real name within the study. These considerations were communicated to Quinn, and they understood that the decision was made not out of intention to silence them, but out of deference for the privacy and security of all participants within the study.

Though this expands outside the scope of this study, the use of pseudonyms within trans-informed research paradigms requires further inquiry. Given the role of ethical research boards to preserve the dignity of marginalized groups and to protect them from exploitation, extracting trans people from their identity through their selected name could be contrary to these intended affects. However, as a novice researcher conducting research as part of a master's thesis, appropriately covering and exploring these ethical questions falls outside the scope of this study.

Data Analysis

The use of theory as tool was central to my analysis of the data. Throughout the analysis process, research choices and deductions always return to the study's trans studies informed theoretical framework. The current and on-going harm caused by cisnormativity in higher education is something that informs my understandings of the case, as well as the participants who volunteer to share their experiences. It is not that transgender and non-binary students are just outnumbered. Higher education as an institution treats cisgender people as the default, casting trans and non-binary students in the shadow of defect (Goldberg et al, 2019; Catalano, 2015;

Nicolazzo, 2017b). Part of my analytical approach also included what Anyon (2009) calls ‘an analysis of exogeny’ or considering everything outside of your focus to learn more about your focus. Anyon (2009) calls on researchers to consider more than just the subject of their inquiry, and instead consider “the context and social forces in which the object of study is embedded” (Anyon, 2009, p. 3). Rather than viewing my research project as a collection of check points, separated by theory, data collection, and interpretation, the process of collecting and analyzing my interview data resembled a “process of ‘kneading’” (Anyon, 2009, p. 13). This is a powerful metaphor from Anyon (2009), since it reflects the complex and evolving nature of qualitative research. This process of kneading for Anyon (2009) represents “the importance of thinking through how we think with theory, as we undertake the analytical labors of research and writing questions, methods, data and analysis, and explanation. It can also lead the way in efforts by researchers, participants, and others to render this society more just” (Anyon, 2009, p. 8). By revisiting my trans informed theoretical frameworks in interpreting the data, the theory served as a hermeneutic resource that helped me to make sense of and to deepen my understanding of the realities and lived experiences of the participants.

NVivo14 as a Categorization Tool

After member-checking, ensuring that my final transcripts accurately represented the participants, I uploaded the transcript files to NVivo14 (Cohen et al, 2018). In conducting my thematic analysis with NVivo, I often referred to the procedures articulated by Braun and Clarke (2012) as explained below. A note on the language used throughout data analysis: in this study, themes refer to common experiences amongst my participants in this study, whereas ‘codes’ refers to the label I used to organize different themes in NVivo14. In this way, NVivo14 functioned as a categorization tool for me to keep track of participants' comments and which of the pre-determined themes they drew from (University of Huddersfield, n.d).

Before I began data collection, the preliminary themes I planned to address were the following: manifestations of trans necropolitics and how they burden trans students (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013; Goldberg et al, 2019, 2021); encounters with cisnormativity (Nicolazzo, 2017a, 2021; Stryker, 2006); as well as compulsory heterogenderism present in 2SLGBTQ+ spaces on campus (Nicolazzo, 2021). Ultimately, the themes I used within NVivo14 differed from these initial themes. During phase 1, as explained by Braun and Clarke (2012), I began to dig into my data source, reviewing my interview transcripts for which themes were present. This ensured I was "intimately familiar with [my] dataset's content, and to begin to notice things that might be relevant to [my] research question" (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p. 6). Though these three themes do correlate to the final codes I used, adjusting them was necessary to capture the thoughts and ideas of the participants. The final codes I utilized were as follows: conditions of precarity and vulnerability on campus (Bonner-Thompson, 2021; Jenkins, 2020), and anti-trans protests and rhetoric in popular media. These slight adaptations were necessary to appropriately reflect the themes discussed by participants. After these two primary themes were identified and coded, a second level of inductive codes were employed to further refine these primary themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) highlight the importance of this secondary review to ensure one's analysis

> will have themes which: (i) don't try to do too much, as themes should ideally have a singular focus; (ii) are related but don't overlap, so they aren't repetitive, although they may build on previous themes; and (iii) directly address your research question. (p. 9)

Coding and Thematic Analysis

Once working in NVivo14, extensive time was spent reading and rereading the participants' thoughts, dreams, and experiences. It is through this handling of that data that I began to understand how much each participant's experiences differed. Though the participants were all trans and non-binary graduate students attending the same Ontario university, the lives they led were distinct; this was palpable in the ways they spoke, their views on the university, and even the words they used to articulate their gender. While initially data analysis of the interviews was going to rely solely on identifying themes using NVivo14, the most important aspects of the participants' comments resided within their particularized subjectivities and experiences on campus (Catalano, 2017; Rubin, 1998; Radi, 2019; Stryker, 2006). For this reason, data analysis began with the rephrased deductive codes in NVivo14.

After refining the codes through a second round of inductive coding, I noticed that powerful stories from participants were going to be excluded because they were not representative of the sample, which thematic analysis requires (Braun and Clarke, 2012). For this reason, I decided to undertake a more detailed and extended analysis of the particularized experiences of three participants' experiences at Sullivan University. These participants were selected because they each discussed specific incidents that connected to how they navigated campus spaces, and which warranted further extended analysis beyond what NVivo 14 could provide. These three participants are also at different points within their transition, as well as academic trajectories; highlighting these differences and their contextual specificity and particularities allowed for further explication of distinctive dimensions of trans livability and precarity in navigating campus life. The selected participants all identified a specific event, or course of events, that impacted their experiences on campus broadly; doing justice to their subjugated experiences required exploring the details of their lives. The participants who were not selected, however, discussed the everyday occurrences that contributed to their feelings of precariousness on campus. This is not to say that the stories of the other two participants are not without epistemic importance. Their stories and ideas are integrated within the thematic analysis to provide an overview of the central concerns and issues that the participants identified. Finally, due to the nature of research within a Master's thesis, stories that presented areas for further inquiry, while still uncovering unknown knowledge about the phenomena of trans and non-binary students on Canadian university campuses, were also prioritized for this second level of case study analysis.

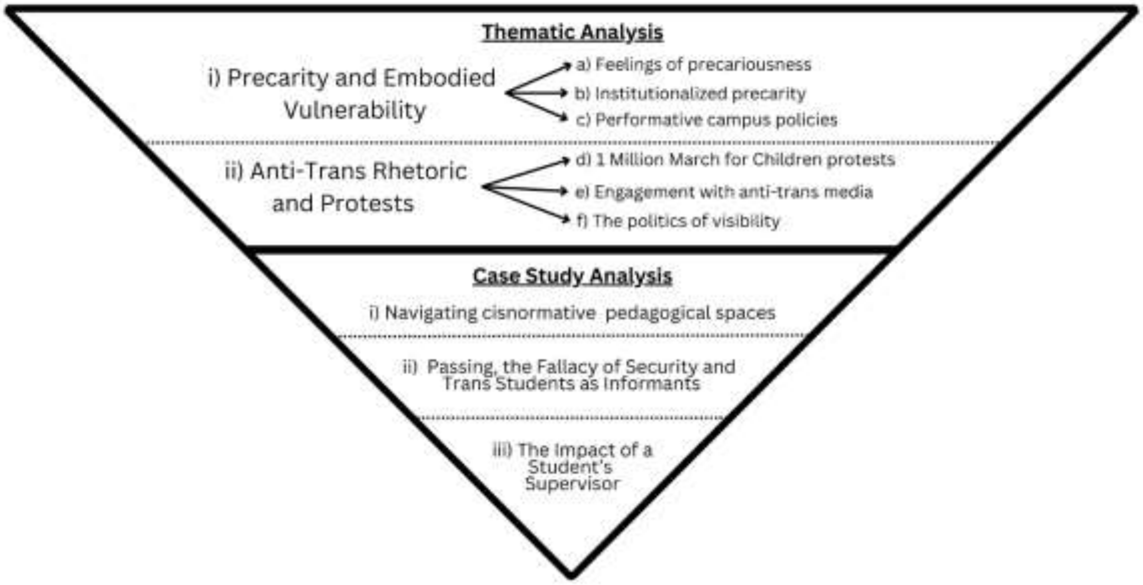
Conclusion

The intention of this study was to learn more about the experiences and lives of trans and non-binary students on campus. This focus was carried through every step of the methodological process. Evidence of this reflexivity is evident in my consideration and ultimate decision not to incorporate an autoethnography within this inquiry. Employing phenomenological case study ensured that the standpoints of the participants remained at the center of this study. This privileged focus on trans desubjugation was both practically and ethically important and as a trans person myself, I took my role as researcher seriously in this regard. Making decisions around sensitive topics like participant pseudonyms or interview protocols was difficult, however I kept returning to the obligation I had to represent and protect the participants within my study. In the following chapter an analysis of the data is provided and is informed by both the methodological and theoretical foundations of my study.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a detailed analysis of the research findings. The analysis is organized around two thematic categories, (i) Precarity and Vulnerability in navigating on campus life and pedagogical spaces and (ii) Anti-Trans Rhetoric and protests, and how it exacerbates the politics of vulnerability that students experience on campus. This draws attention to the impact of boarder societal transphobia. In the second part of the chapter, I provide a more in-depth examination of three participant's experiences at Sullivan University which enabled me to undertake a particularized analysis of (i) navigating cisnormative pedagogical spaces; (ii) the political significance of 'passing' as a strategy of survivability and livability and (iii) navigating trans vulnerability within the context of a supervisory pedagogical relationship. Through undertaking a more specific and detailed case analysis I illuminate how systemic forces of cisnormativity and transphobia affect trans and non-binary graduate students' ability to thrive on campus. A visual representation of this multi-layered analysis approach can be found below.


Thematic Analysis
i) Precarity and Embodied Vulnerability
a) Feelings of precariousness
b) Institutionalized precarity
c) Performative campus policies
ii) Anti-Trans Rhetoric and Protests
d) 1 Million March for Children protests
e) Engagement with anti-trans media
f) The politics of visibility
Case Study Analysis
i) Navigating cisnormative pedagogical spaces
ii) Passing, the Fallacy of Security and Trans Students as Informants
iii) The Impact of a Student's Supervisor

This diagram offers an overview of how the analysis was organized, as well as showing how larger discursive themes provided important scaffolding to inform the analysis of individualized case studies. Finally, I conclude the chapter by considering what these themes and stories from participants reveal about life on campus for trans and non-binary students. This analysis prompts discussion surrounding the efficacy of Sullivan University's equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies to provide a safe campus climate for trans and non-binary students on campus.

Thematic Analysis

(i) Precarity and Embodied Vulnerability

Within this study, 'precarity' or 'precariousness' refers to trans and non-binary students' experiences of vulnerability, specifically within different spaces on Sullivan University's campus. Bonner-Thompson (2021) highlights the different situations and operational tools that put trans and non-binary students in uniquely vulnerable positions not experienced by their cisgender peers. Matters such as washroom access, choosing what to wear to class, or running into a colleague who is less than affirmative without notice are only a few of the instances reported by the participants in Bonner-Thompson et al's (2021) study where trans students felt vulnerable on campus. What is most prevalent to this study, however, is how Bonner-Thompson et al (2021) differentiate between precariousness and precarity.

(a) Feelings of Precariousness

Precariousness refers to "an embodied feeling and social condition that emerges through experiences of marginalization and injustice, always being reshaped by shifting identity positions, spaces, and institutions" (Bonner-Thompson et al., 2021, p. 229). Through this definition, precariousness is a feeling intrinsically linked to one's embodied experiences with the world. Morgan discusses the precariousness of their life on campus through the gendered politics of professional dress codes:

> In London, England, we all referred to this group as ‘the finance bros’. But they represent all these rules kind of, like dressing etiquette. You’re expected to wear make up, expected to wear suits – you can express yourself, but the rules are there, and you get left out if you don’t fit yourself into them. (Morgan)

Though their faculty does not have an enforced dress code per se, Morgan’s experience shows how their peers would implicitly enforce normative gender expression at career-based events. By avoiding those with non-normative gender expressions, friendship and networking opportunities were used as a sort of bargaining chip; non-binary students like Morgan are therefore incentivized to express their gender in cisnormative ways that render their non-binary gender identity invisible in networking spaces. The incentive to downplay one’s gender identity increases when one considers Morgan’s positionality as a graduate student. Since networking and general professionalism are often emphasized for graduate students throughout their studies, as discussed by Goldberg et al (2019), there is extra pressure on graduate level students to make a lasting, positive impression. Like Morgan says, while trans and non-binary students are free to express themselves, they just might be ‘left out’ as a result.

I asked Morgan how they have been navigating these gendered expectations on campus, and they articulated the nuances of their gendered expression and what they felt was available to them as a non-binary graduate student:

> I go to formal career events, and I have two choices. I either do the female version and wear make up and speak in the socially-expected cheerful tone – but that also all comes

> with an accent as well, and where I am and however the person is speaking, I try and match them as best I can. Or I can do the more masculine version, I do suit and ties – that's how I dressed for my graduation. Otherwise, as long as you're not 'being weird' and mixing up gender norms, people are happy to be seen with you. (Morgan)

The 'permissible' clothing options Morgan outlines here reflect cisnormative and binary gendered expressions. The cisnormative aspects of this situation really jump out from the phrase "as long as you're 'not being weird' and mixing up gender norms" (Morgan). The use of the term 'weird' implies that to be 'normal' is to fit neatly into the rigid confines of gendered expression. And, in Morgan's experience, to not dress 'normal' is to be cast aside by your peers in networking situations.

Gendered dress standards were only the beginning of Morgan's feelings of precariousness in networking spaces, however. As a racialized non-binary person, Morgan explained that it often felt like too much for them to also communicate their gender identity to others:

> I'm out on my conference name tags on any paperwork. I don't really go and meet people and say my pronouns are they/them. I feel like it's too much, and it's making a big deal of it. Because when most people introduce themselves, they say 'Hi, my name is – I don't know – Jessica Brant, I'm from this place, I use they/them pronouns' – end of story, it's very simple. I can do that. But I have to say my name multiple times for people to understand it. Then they ask where I'm from; at first, I say that I lived in England, but I'm not 'from there'; I'm Chinese. But [I grew up in Canada] – people just get confused. Here I feel like everyone is very lovely – they're the very nice, chill townspeople and I don't want to bombard them with unnecessary information *chuckles*. I just try to give

> what I can. Also, I normally refer to 'my girlfriend' in conversation, then people think you're a lesbian. So, at this point, if I go and say my pronouns are they/them? That's just too much. (Morgan)

There are a couple different forces impacting Morgan's experiences here. First, one can see how their intersecting identities both as Chinese and non-binary begin to collide. Their peers at conferences first confront their Chinese identity, asking invasive questions as to 'where they are from', which for Morgan is a complex story in and of itself. After navigating through that discussion, Morgan assumes that clarifying their gender identity would only confuse their cishet peers. This connects to points discussed by Nicolazzo (2017c), in which she explains that "choices about whether, when, how, and with whom to bring up gender were a mode of self-care and self-protection" (p. 110). From Morgan's comment, I felt a sense of exhaustion around having to narrate their experiences to make their life intelligible to their peers. Since their race was an apparent feature the moment someone approached them, Morgan had little control over where they were racialized. Unlike their race, Morgan's gender identity was less apparent to those who neglected to read their name tag. As a result, their choice to not engage in discussions around their gender identity in networking or conference spaces could have been a choice to preserve their own mental health.

Another theme presented by Morgan's comment is that of compulsory heterogenderism, and the role it plays in how others make sense of trans and non-binary students' gender identity. As Nicolazzo (2017c) highlights, compulsory heterogenderism describes how "participants' gender identities and sexualities were constantly understood in and through each other" (p. 76). For Morgan, they highlight that most people make sense of their gender identity through their relationship with their girlfriend and infer that they identify as a lesbian. Since compulsory heterogenderism relies on gender stereotypes that connect gender presentation to sexual orientation, no matter how Morgan chose to dress, their non-binary identity is rendered invisible. If they dress more masculine, their masculine presentation correlates with people's assumptions of what a lesbian must look like, and they are viewed as a woman (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 77). If they dress more feminine, their femininity is mistaken for womanhood and once again leaves their non-binary identity unacknowledged. These overlapping forces of cisnormativity, resiliency, and compulsory heterogenderism only scratch the surface of the politics that inform how Morgan, and other non-binary students, chose to express their gender through clothing. These feelings of vulnerability, or what Bonner-Thompson et al (2023) identifies as feelings of precariousness, impact the gender presentations that trans and non-binary students feel are available for them to safely inhabit.

Quinn mentioned similar feelings of vulnerability regarding how they dressed. At their previous post secondary institution, they explained that they often felt 'hyper visible':

> At [the institution I attended for my master's] – that's when I started I guess 'presenting more non-binary', whatever that means, since it's complex and could be a thesis in and of itself – it was more that I didn't have any negative interactions, but I felt a lot more visible. I felt a lot more stares as people walked by me and just feeling hyper visible, I'd say. I don't know how much of it was in my head and how much was actual, purposeful hyper visibility. But the general ideas within the campus climate had been pretty supportive. (Quinn)

Though Quinn's experience lacks the explicit peer-enforcement that Morgan's did, the discomfort their gender expression caused others on campus was definitely palpable. The stares, or what Nicolazzo (2017c) calls 'mean mugs', that being negative facial expressions directed at trans or non-binary people, are in an of themselves an attempt to shame Quinn into dressing ‘normally’ as defined through cisnormative standards. In this way, peers’ judgement functions as a representation of the “pernicious effects of the gender binary discourse on an affective level” on campus (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 65). However, discourses on what constitutes appropriate attire on campus was on the tip of the iceberg of participants’ feelings of vulnerability on Sullivan University’s campus.

Participants had varied feelings as to the safety of Sullivan University’s campus. Some were content to conduct their interviews on-campus in private study rooms, where others were not. Not all participants who requested off-campus interviews reported feeling especially vulnerable on-campus. Taylor, however, explained that they would not feel comfortable opening up to someone about their gender while on Sullivan University’s campus. In their own words, “when I’m on-campus, the idea of sharing anything personal with someone – even in a private area – feels really uncomfortable. There’s just this weird thing where I can’t do it" (Taylor). Taylor’s discomfort discussing their gender on campus affirms the decision to allow participants to choose where their interview was conducted. The participants’ feelings of vulnerability on-campus, however, are only the beginning. To truly understand the hurdles trans and non-binary graduate students are faced with, one must consider precarity as a force of institutionalized vulnerability.

(b) Institutionalized Vulnerability

Differing slightly from precariousness and the feelings of marginalized people, precarity exists as an extension of institutions within society. As a result of their functioning, these institutions construct precarious conditions for marginalized people, particularly trans and non-binary students. In this way, precarity as produced by institutions is an expression of a “social condition that emerges through experiences of marginalization and injustice, always being reshaped by shifting identity positions, spaces, and institutions" (Bonner-Thompson et al, 2021, p. 228).

The participants mention gendered washroom/locker room spaces at Sullivan University and highlighted the material and embodied effects in navigating such spaces (Davies et al, 2017; Ingrey, 2018; Martino et al, 2020; Patel, 2017), often referencing the discomfort or anxiety that they themselves, or other trans and non-binary students, felt while accessing them. In response to these expressed tensions in gendered, multi-user washrooms, trans and non-binary students who express discomfort with existing gendered washrooms are diverted to single-user washrooms when available (Ingrey, 2018). In the situation where single-user washrooms are not available, "many trans students are forced to weigh the risks and choose a binary washroom that they feel is the safer option, despite the fact that it may not align with their self-identified gender" (Laidlaw, 2020, p. 278). Ingrey (2018) specifically articulates the issues with this cis-centric approach, explaining that sending trans and non-binary students to a gender neutral, single-user washroom "does not address the ongoing gender policing and homophobia in the sex-segregated washrooms" (p. 786). Though trans students can utilize the washroom that applies to their gender identity *in theory,* the existence of violence in these spaces urges trans students to segregate themselves from cisgender peers.

For these reasons, public washrooms and change rooms on campus are anxiety-ridden spaces characterized by different negotiations between authenticity and safety. Quinn mentioned their complicated relationship with changerooms, explaining that:

> especially because I came out as a gay man before – they had always just been sites of tension for me around other men. You see it in media portrayed as an unsafe space, especially just with the politics of where you look, how much you undress and all that.

> So, I’ve really taken it upon myself to kind of reclaim that space. One of the big things for me was showering there – I’ve never showered publicly before. But to go into those spaces and say “Hey, let’s try this out”. I wouldn’t say locker rooms are ‘unsafe’, but it’s the politics of the men’s changeroom that make it more tentative for me. I’m very hyper-aware of my surroundings, I take out my headphones the whole time I’m in there. So, I’d say that’s the most unsafe space, although I don’t know if I would consider it ‘unsafe’, if that makes sense. (Quinn)

Even though Quinn says they navigate washrooms and changerooms with little problem, their comment still indicates a level of vigilance in those spaces. Scholars like Cavanagh (2010) and Laidlaw (2020) discuss the role of washrooms as a cisnormative space, viewing them as “sites of surveillance and disciplinary power which work to regulate individuals’ behaviour in alignment with cis- and heterosexist norms, thereby encouraging the policing of gender minorities” (Laidlaw, 2020, p. 273). In response to the presence of regulatory gender forces in campus changerooms, Quinn takes out their earbuds to ensure they are acutely aware of their surroundings. In the absence of experiences of physical violence, what they call ‘the politics of the men’s room’ constitutes psychological violence by creating conditions of paranoia and anxiety for them.

In response to these tensions, Quinn highlights their commitments to ‘swim against the stream’ so to speak. Rather than allowing themselves to be intimidated out of these spaces, they gain empowerment from reclaiming male-dominated spaces that used to alienate them:

> I feel a weird sense of power when I go into a men’s locker room – that power and fear – and it makes me want to reclaim that space that I was so focused on when I was younger. So, part of me likes that. (Quinn)

This comment from Quinn demonstrates the varied nature of trans and non-binary students' resiliency on campus. As Nicolazzo (2017c) understands it, resilience exists as more than a trait one does or does not have; instead, she posits resiliency to be a practice to be adopted, as well "as a strategy to overcome individual enactments of trans* oppression as well as cultural realities of the gender binary discourse" (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 88). For Quinn, though men's changerooms were once only a source of tension and alienation, they have been able to cultivate and enact resiliency by consciously reclaiming the space for themselves.

Quinn was not the only participant who highlighted their relationship with washrooms and changerooms. Morgan mentions that they use the gender-neutral 'family changeroom' at the campus recreation center, ultimately questioning whether these spaces are an adequate solution:

> I guess they can do a bit more with changing rooms in [the campus gym]. It's pretty good, like it leads to the pool and has all the facilities, but you're sharing the changing room with families. That's okay, I understand there's not a lot of non-binary people, or trans people – or in general people who don't want to show their naked body in that way. But rather than just lumping us in with the families, maybe something could be done better. (Morgan)

Morgan's comment brings to the forefront questions of how Sullivan University as an institution constructs trans and non-binary students' experiences. Implementing inclusive systems for trans students, like gender neutral washroom policies, cannot undo the systemic cisnormativity without "addressing the cisnormative regulatory regimes" that characterize these spaces (Martino and Ingrey, 2020, p. 78). Rather than considering trans and non-binary students in all their complexities, it is easier for Sullivan University to revert to their preexisting architecture and refer trans and non-binary students like Morgan to the family changeroom. Not only does this fall short of addressing the *actual* problems that make changerooms unsafe, like gender surveillance, it treats trans and non-binary students as an afterthought. Though Morgan acknowledges the pragmatic limitations Sullivan University faces to creating inclusive washrooms and changerooms, like cost or the lack of trans people who would use a dedicated changing facility, this does not resolve the vulnerabilities they feel in changerooms on campus. Nor do this pragmatic limitations free Sullivan University from the role it plays in enforcing structures of institutionalized vulnerability for trans and non-binary students on campus.

Another participant who discussed washroom or changeroom use was Samuel. For Samuel, he mentions that his comfort in washrooms has increased as he feels that he was able to 'pass'. For more information on Samuel's feelings surrounding 'passing' and others assuming he is cisgender, please refer to the section 'Passing and the Fallacy of Security'. Before he started his Master's at Sullivan University, Samuel highlights that finding a washroom at his previous institution that he could comfortably use was difficult:

> Bathrooms were a big thing for me on campus. [Gender-neutral bathrooms] were few and far between, so I would have to search for them at my last school. Sometimes I'd have to go to different floors and different buildings. The building I had class in didn't always have a gender-neutral washroom and I didn't feel safe using the men's washroom, so I'd have to go somewhere separate. (Samuel)

The fact that his previous institution failed to provide access to gender neutral washrooms early in his transition was responsible for creating conditions of having navigate physically his movement on campus in being forced to search for "a safe place to pee" (Coyote, 2015). A lack of gender-neutral washrooms is not only a failure to consider trans and non-binary students on campus, but it is also indicative of whom the university deems worthy of consideration. This constitutes a form of institutional cisgenderism, “which refers to the way in which policy and procedure disadvantages or limits the opportunities provided to trans individuals” (Laidlaw, 2020, p. 270). Even when gender neutral washrooms were available, Samuel was left in the precarious position of locating them, which involved walking to a separate building just to access the same facilities as his cisgender peers (Laidlaw, 2020, p. 278). His cisgender peers, who easily accessed gender-affirmative washrooms without facing judgement or violence, may have been gone for five minutes and did not miss much of their lecture. However, for Samuel, using the washroom meant hiking to a different building during class, which meant missing out on course material his peers did not. He also explained that in his search for an appropriate bathroom early in his transition, he often found himself acting covertly:

> In terms of navigating campus, it’s very different. Before, I would really keep my head down and just move through campus as quietly as possible to try to be invisible. I felt like I always had to sneak off to the bathroom when I needed to go somewhere else. (Samuel)

For Samuel, rendering himself invisible was a survival tactic early in transition. Rather than face the scrutiny of others, his comment explains that it was easier for him to recede into the background to avoid judgment or violence. It was not until he felt his gender presentation aligned with cisnormative understandings of what a ‘man’ looks like that he was able to comfortably navigate campus, with some exceptions:

> In general, I’m pretty comfortable in most spaces because I have the privilege of passing most of the time. People don’t know that I’m trans, so there’s only a few circumstances where I either am explicitly identifying or showing that I’m trans, or that someone might pick up on scars or things like that. (Samuel)

Even though Samuel ‘passes’ as a cisgender person in most places on campus, changerooms are still a space of tension for him. The existence of his top surgery scars still acts as a way to ‘other’ him from his cis-male peers, causing him to still feel tension in those spaces. This precarity for Samuel highlights the need for nuanced consideration of uniquely trans epistemologies within higher education. Samuel’s vulnerability is tied to embodied trans visibility, and his feelings of exposure in these spaces speaks to why it is so important to include a trans desubjugated perspective on navigating campus spaces. It also speaks to why narratives in research that centre trans bodily ontological and epistemological accounts of lived experience are so vital. Rather than crafting policies as “a singular point of liberation”, Nicolazzo (2017c) encourages embracing “the very real power of what knowledge can mean when we center trans*ness in all its possibilities” (p. 531). Rather than framing inclusive washroom as the single site of which trans and non-binary students experience vulnerabilities, universities need to consider how they can confront and dispel the cisgender binary discourses that govern these spaces.

(c) Performative Campus Policies

To integrate my theoretical framework informed by trans desubjugation, I wanted to give participants the ability to ‘speak back’ at Sullivan University as an institution. Not only did this empower participants, but it also gave them the ability to name the institutional structures that enabled their negative experiences on campus. To do so, at the end of our interviews I asked participants the question, “If you could tell the university administration one thing about our experiences on campus, what would it be?”. In response, participants were quick to assert the necessity of ameliorating and examining the values of Sullivan University as an institution. For example, Steph suggests this:

> Create opportunities to *critically* [emphasis placed on this word] reflect on what people are saying to you about your program. Not just ‘We need to stick some rainbows up’, but to actually do a deep dive into the underlying causes of why people are feeling unsafe in your program. (Steph)

Steph’s request for critical reflection from Sullivan University’s administration highlights the performativity of university inclusion policies, as discussed by Ahmed (2012). Ahmed (2012) highlights a shift toward ‘performance culture’ in universities, in which inclusive polices function as labels of inclusivity, rather than a commitment to the deep work needed to fix higher education as an institution (Ahmed, 2012). Though Ahmed’s (2012) work deals primarily with race, her perspectives on neoliberal university’s approaches to diversity help connect Steph’s experiences to systemic problems on university campuses broadly. When Steph highlights the school’s tendency to ‘just stick up some rainbows’, they are calling out the performativity of their inclusivity action. Even though Sullivan University participates in Pride Events every year, and ‘sticks up some rainbows’ for the month of June, these initiatives do little to discuss the erasure, microaggressions, and violence Steph experienced as both a queer student and a non-binary student.

When asked “If you could tell the university administration one thing about our experiences on campus, what would it be?”, Taylor also responded by questioning the motivations behind Sullivan University’s inclusive messaging:

> I personally haven’t seen the university itself take a stand and create initiatives to say, ‘we support you’. I haven’t seen or felt the effort on their part to make campus safer, besides a heavily scripted letter from PR that was only circulated internally. I understand that I don’t have solutions to provide as far as this is concerned. A lot of it is smaller

> steps over months and years to really ensure that people feel campus is safe for trans and non-binary people. I know they don't realize because they're not part of the community, but I just need them to know that when I think of safe spaces, campus isn't the first place that comes to mind. (Taylor)

This message from Taylor is a powerful one. Like Steph, they mention the stiff and performative nature of past inclusivity efforts on campus. Referring to an internally circulated letter affirming that 2SLGBTQ+ students belong on campus, Taylor highlights that these 'PR' moves do little to positively impact the campus climate for trans and non-binary students. However, the most powerful aspect of their comment is when they shine a light on campus as an unsafe place for trans and non-binary students. Though Taylor acknowledges that Sullivan University may not know of the harm their ignorance causes to trans and non-binary students, their final statement seeks to hold them accountable. By asserting that the university *needs* to know that campus is not a safe space for all students, Taylor is 'speaking back' at the institution that has caused them harm throughout their master's degree. This moment in their interview was especially important given Taylor's other comments.

Throughout their interview, they discussed feeling worried or anxious about being out or discussing their gender identity with anyone on campus:

> Like, I understand how I present to people who don't know me. I know their conclusion is that I'm feminine presenting or whatever. So, it's like it won't feel as bad when they do misgender me. But then it just feeds back to reinforce that I shouldn't identify and come-out as that. But if I do, others will shame me or something bad might happen, perpetuating the feeling of shame I shouldn't be sharing. It just reinforces that I shouldn't

> be open about who I am. Not being out also just makes it harder to be open about my gender – it feels like I'm caught in a feedback loop of anxiety and worry. (Taylor)

This 'feedback loop of anxiety and worry' that Taylor describes colours their comments throughout their interview. Though I will explore these themes later in this chapter, I mention them here to show the true impact of their final comment to the university. Taylor had been nervous throughout the interview, but as they opened up, I saw the light come back to their eyes. Rather than carrying the burden of their negative experiences at Sullivan University with them, participating in the interview and questioning the role of the university in what had happened to them gave them space to reclaim their agency as a trans student. This is not to say that Taylor had not previously considered the role of the university; instead, I highlight this to show their cognitive shift from blaming or shaming themselves, to shaming the university for it's performativity and inaction.

The third participant who critiqued the performativity of Sullivan University's commitment to equity and inclusion was Quinn. Having attended two other universities, Quinn's final comment to the university drew equally on their previous experiences at other institutions in light of their current experiences at Sullivan University:

> It can't just be words; it needs to be action. I've experienced a whole lot of words in my previous university experiences that have not translated into action. I have not experienced that yet at [Sullivan] – granted, I have only been here for 2 months and I'm sure if I go digging, there will be something [like my previous experiences] there. (Quinn)

Quinn’s comment draws directly from Ahmed (2012) and her critique of performativity in higher education policy. Rather than creating lasting changes that positively impact campus climate, Ahmed (2012) argues that most universities’ inclusion policies function by “generating the right kinds of appearance” that projects the image of inclusivity rather than doing the deep work needed to improve the living conditions of trans students (p. 85).

Higher educational inclusion has an issue with enacting tangible change that is felt for trans and non-binary students. Woodford et al (2022b) discusses this explicitly, highlighting that despite universities are increasing the number and types of services addressing 2SLGBTQ+ students, “across all services, the lowest percentage of respondents tended to agree that staff were knowledgeable about 2SLGBTQ+ students’ needs and were skilled in providing them services” (p. 8). By connecting to their previous experience at other universities, Quinn’s comment also highlights the ubiquity of these issues amongst Canadian higher education broadly. For this reason, Quinn does not need to witness this performativity to assume that it is there. Instead, they engage with the reality of Sullivan University as a cisgender, heterosexual, and colonial institution and from there they can extrapolate the values on which the university rests (Brunette-Debassige, 2022). Quinn’s awareness of these implicit structures of oppression could be due to Quinn’s position as a PhD student studying trans higher education; with that area of study comes a depth of knowledge about both one’s own identity, as well as the negative forces that inform one’s experience.

Before universities in Canada can improve the campus conditions surrounding trans and non-binary students, they cannot expect students to rejoice when they raise a Pride flag on-campus during Pride month. These critical insights that the trans and non-binary students provide into the performativity of equity policy, as well as its failure to address trans inclusion on campus, speaks to Nicolazzo's (2021) concern that post secondary institutions "similar to the broader society in which they are embedded, are steeped in and further trans oppression" (p. 511). The nature of this failure to enact such policies speaks to the reality of endemic cisgenderism in universities, as well as the need for a trans epistemological focus in research within these policy discussions. By centering the perspectives of trans students and placing them front and centre within this discourse, universities would be able to interrupt and challenge "the perspective of the gazing cisgender eye" (Nicolazzo, 2021, p. 513). Indeed, Nicolazzo argues that

> Because of the way the cisgender public continues to dominate the shaping of the discourse on trans* people, there has been a lack of conversation about a truly transgender epistemology that is for us and by us (Dunn, 1999; Richards, 2016). (p. 514)

By failing to do the deep work to investigate the issues that underpin their institution, while signaling inclusion to current and perspective students, they not only fail to take seriously the needs of their current trans and non-binary students; they are attracting more trans and non-binary students to the institutionalized precarity they chose to ignore.

(ii) Anti-Trans Rhetoric and Protests

Within this study, anti-trans rhetoric refers to commonly circulated misconceptions, trivializations, or demonization of transgender people and their experiences in the world. All participants were asked to consider how much media they consumed that centered transgender or non-binary people and whether these media sources were predominantly negative. These interview questions focusing on their engagement with media allowed participants to consider and explain the role media, specifically alt-right and anti-trans media, played in their navigation of Sullivan University's campus.

Though they could have accessed this media anywhere (online, off campus, on campus), trans and non-binary students do not live within a bubble when on campus. When navigating different spaces on campus, trans and non-binary students must discern where they are safe to be 'out'; in doing so, they draw on their past experiences of transphobia, as well as stories from other trans and non-binary people. Johnston (2015) demonstrates the complexity of these considerations, explaining that was constitutes a 'safe' environment can vary from person to person. Instead of gesturing to vague terms like 'safe spaces', Johnston (2015) implores researchers and policy makers to consider the nuance of what makes spaces safe, as well as "exploring how [students] construct campus space as a source of gender inequality and marginalization" as a way of bringing specificity to the term (p. 144). An example Johnston (2015) explores is participants' differing opinions on gender neutral washrooms; some mention their positive impact on life, while other participants are concerned that multi-gender washroom facilities "may ignite social barriers and resentments between the cis and transgender communities" (p. 152). The existence of conflicting opinions amongst trans community members not only demonstrates the complexity of trans students' concerns on campus, but it also shows how one approach to inclusion maybe empowering to some, as well as anxiety inducing to others.

In response to these complex negotiations of safety by trans and non-binary students, this study was concerned to provide students with the space to reflect on whether alt-right media sources informed students' interpretation of campus inclusion efforts. Such opportunities were considered vital especially given the context anti-LGBT protests that were taking place at the time of the research, and which were receiving considerable media attention (The Canadian Press, 2023; Fagan, 2023; Canadian Anti-Hate Network, Sept. 28, 2023). I also wanted to uncover whether the growth of anti-trans sentiments in popular media played a role in how trans and non-binary students navigate campus spaces, as evident by the second of my three research questions. Such questions enable me to generate further knowledge about the negotiations of safety that trans and non-binary students are considering, while also highlighting space for further inquiries into whether more can be done by the university staff and faculty to ensure trans and non-binary students feel safe at Sullivan University.

All participants referred to negative depictions of trans people in the media. Three participants referenced ‘the protests’ that were taking place across Canada at the time of the research (Mason and Hamilton, 2023); the two remaining participants who did not refer to the protests still made tangible connections to anti-trans discourse, specially those that discussed trans women in sports.

(d) Million March for Children

Within the context of this study, the 1 Million March for Children’s impact cannot be ignored. During Fall 2023, an alt-right, anti-trans movement organized protests across Canada to protest and “eliminate Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) curriculum and policies from Canadian schools” (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, Sept. 15, 2023). Though the movement was initially a response to Canadian provinces adopting provisions that included sexual orientation and gender identity in their sexual education curriculum, the rhetoric mobilized at protests often condemned all 2SLGBTQ+ people as groomers (Handsoffourkids.ca). The movement also shares grassroots connections with anti-trans ‘parental rights’ movements based out of the United States (Mason and Hamilton, 2023). The concept of ‘parental rights’ is cut from the same cloth as the groomer discourses that often target trans people (Bettcher, 2007). Protestors, mostly parents, raise concerns that schools are including 2SLGBTQ+ topics as a means to 'brainwash' or 'indoctrinate' their children. These values are expressed through the approved slogans circulated by the Hands Off Our Kids movement, one of the grassroots groups affiliated with the 1 Million March for Children. Approved slogans include but are not limited to: "EDUCATION NOT SEXUALIZATION; DEMOCRACY NOT DICTATORSHIP; and I BELONG TO MY PARENTS" (Handsoffourkids.ca). Since interviews were conducted at the end of October and the beginning of November 2023, interviews were conducted less than a month after the initial protests. This context specificity should be considered moving forward, since proximity to certain events can have implications for participants and how researchers understand and analyze their comments and experiences.

Participants who mentioned the protests had varied knowledge of the movement's origins and their tangible political motivations. Most made references to 'the protests' rather than completing a deep dive into the discourses or opinions coming from the growing parental rights movement in Canada (Mason and Hamilton, 2023). Even though there were not any protests on campus itself, participants did discuss how hearing about them made them feel uneasy being out to others on campus, or how it made them more vigilant navigating gendered spaces like washrooms or changerooms. Participants also discussed the changing media narratives surrounding trans people, and the implications it had on their feelings as a trans or non-binary student on Sullivan's main campus. For example, Samuel felt that he had not seen any anti-trans media itself on-campus, explaining that:

> [anti-trans media] came up a lot on my feed through different social media platforms, but in terms of interacting with it in-person I didn't. I had class at that time, so I couldn't

> attend the counter protest even though I wanted to. But it was also separated from [Sullivan], so I didn't necessarily cross paths with it. (Samuel)

Though some participants expressed interest in attending counter protests on September 20th, only one reported attending rallies within the city. Steph was able to attend the rallies with several colleagues-turned-friends from the administrative office of their department. They expressed gratitude for the support they offered them during the day, fondly remembering how they supported them. These administrators not only took a day-off of work to attend the rally with Steph, but they also provided ongoing support throughout:

> They stood with me and one of them 'Mama beared' me. Like, they were constantly checking in with me to see how I was doing, giving me hugs all the time – just protecting me. I think being at that rally together with the folks from the B.Ed program and also with another faculty member who was part of our group, was a really important shift from other years. (Steph)

This outpouring of tangible support reveals the deeper cultural shifts taking place within different spaces at Sullivan University. More information about Steph's experience and Sullivan University's shifting climate is provided under the 'Participants' Stories' section; this includes a chronological exploration of Steph's experiences as they navigate gender diversity and their studies simultaneously.

Despite their continued allyship with other pride events, Steph shares that their colleagues within their departments' administrative offices were still shocked at what they saw during the protests. By sharing this liberatory space with them, Steph was present as their cisgender peers began to understand the true extent of transphobia within education:

> In talking with my colleague, and she was saying that she had been to pride – and there’s always protestors – but she had never been face to face with that level of hate and how it shifted her perspective; she could never unsee it, she can never unknow that. That was an important climate shift as well because I think there’s an understanding now that it's not just ‘Love is love! Everyone belongs!’, but that there’s some deeper work that needs to be done within the faculty to make sure that this is as safe of a space as possible. (Steph)

As Steph points out, this exposure represents a moment of illumination for some of their colleagues. Once one witnesses the violence experienced by trans and non-binary people, as well as the impact on has on students like Steph, one can no longer ignore the atmosphere of violence trans and non-binary people must navigate. Even though they are a student studying trans and non-binary people, Steph themselves admits that the increasingly negative media attention does change how they navigate campus:

> I don’t know how it couldn’t when you know something is happening. For me, I have a different level of awareness. There’s always a level of awareness, but when it’s so up in your face all the time, for me it just always has some impact. And I try not to [let it affect me] because I don’t want to be intimidated, I don’t want to be scared, and I don’t want to be less ‘out’ (Steph).

Steph’s comments connect to the heightened visibility of trans people, as well as the necropolitical position they are often portrayed in. Stanley (2017), for example, writes about the existence of an atmosphere of trans violence and how it is perpetuated in the media and popular culture, specifically through a necropolitics that centres on “regimes of being seen but not known” (p.618). It is such politics of visibility within the context of these protests, and how it engenders feelings of precariousness and vulnerability, that Steph explains how the anti LGBT protests seep into their life on campus. As Stanley (2017) points out, such protests amplify the politics of trans visibility: “at the centre of the problem of [trans] recognition lies this: how can we be seen without being known and how can we be known without being hunted?” (p. 618). So, the protests produced a heightened sense of trans visibility in respect to participants’ movements on campus.

Steph speaks about how this atmosphere of violence impacted their navigation of campus life and pedagogical spaces. Adding to these pressures to hide their identity for safety reasons, Steph also had their picture taken at one of the counter-protests. They found this image on a 1 Million March for Children website. They were investigating which social and political groups lead the organization of the September 20th protests:

> after I got home [from the rallies], I was curious to see who was organizing [in the city] for the other side and I found the people who were found on the 1 Million March for Children website as the leaders. I was just clicking through their files and looking at who they’ve responded to and interacted with. It was through 3 clicks [that I found it] and [at the moment and angle the photo was taken], I was standing with my colleagues, and they had been cropped out of the picture; I think it was because I was holding a big flag? (Steph).

Regardless of *why* Steph had been singled out, the act of having their face circulated for alt-right consumption created a sense of surveillance they had not experienced before. As described by Stanley (2017), Steph was hunted insofar that they were seen, or ‘clocked’ as trans or non-binary, and subsequently targeted due to their assumed gender identity (p. 617). The user’s profile had been removed, or possibly made private, when Steph’s friend went to check it out; however, the damage to Steph’s sense of safety on-campus had already been done.

When asked to reflect on how these experiences informed their movements on campus, Steph explained that:

> because of my exposure to the absolute vitriol [aimed at trans and non-binary people] that was everywhere, my perceptions of safety – they were shattered. I did not feel safe, and that didn't necessarily have to do with anything real that was happening. It was just the knowledge that bad things could happen and that this is just the context that we're living in. (Steph)

Here Steph highlights an important facet of creating campus spaces that are safe for trans and non-binary students. If one asked a cisgender person on the street what they think of when they imagine anti-trans hate, they will likely invoke similar images that Steph did when describing the protests; angry people brandishing insensitive signs and chanting slurs, perhaps. As violence against 2SLGBTQ+ intensifies in Canada, government agencies like the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) have started to warn Canadians, stating that "the violent threat posed by the anti-gender movement is almost certain to continue over the coming year" (Tunney, 2024). Some of the 1 Million March for Children protests became so spirited that anti-trans protestors "were arrested for 'inciting hatred' by 'displaying hateful material' during a protest in [British Columbia's] capital" (CBC News, 2023).

However, the lack of such displays does not equate a safe campus climate for trans and non-binary students. Hatred toward trans and non-binary people is often more implicitly communicated through cissexism, in which cisgender people are given privileges and opportunities ahead of their transgender and non-binary peers (Jenkins, 2020, p.65-66). Even when there is an absence of physical violence against trans and non-binary violence on campus, "the archive of harm, dismemberment, state-sanctioned torture, and death is still unfolding. This unfolding, which we might call modernity, continues to claim those who exist against it, banishing the possibility of another history" (Stanley, 2017, p. 619). When cissexism and the growing prevalence of anti-trans rhetoric converge, the result is an atmosphere of violence that follows trans and non-binary students and clings to their bodies, enveloping them in precarity and vulnerability.

(e) Engagement with Anti-Trans News Media

Whether they attended the protests or not, four of the five participants mentioned that the protests were troubling. One participant, however, commented that their focus on the elementary and secondary school system made it feel far removed from campus, stating that:

> In terms of news media, I think it's okay. I knew that there was a big protest on banning – or rather not allowing schools to teach about gender. But that never really impacted how I navigated campus. It's a protest which means it only represents the opinion of part of a group instead of the whole group (Morgan).

Morgan often referred to their ability to bracket themselves off from negative forces and opinions throughout their responses. Rather than choosing to engage with the vitriol and violence against trans and non-binary people online, they consider how the most vocal anti-trans movements are often a vocal minority within the wider community. Part of this approach from Morgan involves intentional and purposeful engagement with news media. They explain how they proactively filter what they engage with online:

> I don't use snapchat or other social media platforms that are known for spreading hate. Anything that's related to potential bullying, I cut them all off. I don't use reddit, I don't have a snapchat. I use Twitter, but not with people from campus, just academics. So, my

> personal space is very free of these things. I think it’s good because here you can choose what you subscribe to. That’s important to me. (Morgan)

Morgan’s choice to avoid social platforms exposes the nuances of trans and non-binary students’ negotiating their safety and well-being on-campus considering current conditions of insurgent anti-trans hate in broader society. For Morgan, the choice to not interact with these negative discourses on social media was one of self-preservation. By avoiding these negative spaces, Morgan preserved their emotional safety. Nicolazzo (2017c) discusses trans students’ choice to not engage in negative discourses surrounding trans people as a form of self-care. Rather than demanding resiliency as a constant burden that trans and non-binary students must accept to be seen as ‘strong’, Nicolazzo (2017c) contends that at times, choosing to retract from the discourses that harm us “in favor of finding an academic department where [one] could be more comfortable and safe practicing resilience on a consistent basis” was a major way trans and non-binary participants protected themselves on campus (p. 99).

Morgan was not the only participant who carefully monitored their engagement with anti-trans media. Steph was also careful to check in with themselves as they navigated social media during the height of the anti-trans protests. When I asked them whether they were “seeking out news relating to trans and non-binary people”, or if they simply stumbled across this news media, they explained that it was a combination of both:

> It’s both, but I am also very, very careful about social media. I don’t have it on my phone, I exclusively use it on desktop applications because I cannot function when I’m being inundated by news and it’s not teaching me anything new. This is the line that I’ve drawn for myself. If it’s just consuming misery to consume misery, that’s not helping me do anything more productive in changing things – it is literally just weighing me down. So, I

> am seeking it out – I seek it out especially with the rallies. I even redownloaded Facebook messenger so I could be connected to the [city] community and know what was going on. There wasn't that much in the mainstream media, and don't have a TV anyways so that's fine. (Steph)

For Steph, protecting themselves from 'consuming misery to consume misery' allowed them to direct their attention and energy to avenues that served their needs better. However, this is not to say that Steph had completely removed themselves from online spaces. Instead, they turned to thoughtful engagement with other local community members to stay 'plugged in' to the counter protests taking place in the city. By avoiding unproductive negative spaces to facilitate community action, Steph's selective engagement with anti-trans media constituted a resiliency practice as explained by Nicolazzo (2017c). Nicolazzo (2017c), for example, explains that understanding trans and non-binary experience requires consideration of how trans students:

> seek community beyond what has traditionally been thought of as the campus grounds. Specifically, educators need to think about how they use virtual landscapes and local communities in their work, as both are generative locations for the creation of trans* community and kinship. (Nicolazzo, 2017c, p. 95)

By understanding these online spaces and how they allow trans and non-binary students to practice resiliency, researchers can consider both the detrimental and beneficial impacts of social media engagement. A full representation of trans and non-binary students' social media habits falls outside the scope of this study; however, there is more to be learned about the role of selective engagement with anti-trans media and the impact it has on trans and non-binary students' sense of safety on campus.

(f) The Politics of Visibility

Quinn also referenced the protests taking place across Canada. As a PhD student studying trans and non-binary students in higher education, they were monitoring the situation from a research perspective. However, when asked if anti-trans media has impacted how they navigate campus, they used the protests as a backdrop to examine their positionality as non-binary. Even though Quinn did not attend any of the protests or counter protests themselves, they explained that the protest provided a space for them to reflect on their gender expression, which connects to their perceptions of safety on campus. Throughout their interview, Quinn often returned to their gender expression and how visibly 'non-binary' they appeared to others. When Quinn discusses the 'privilege of being non-binary', they are referring to how cisgender people often assume them to also be cisgender:

> …even in [the city where I live], actually all across the country with all the protests going on. I do feel safe, and I think that is a huge privilege for me that comes with being non-binary. Being whatever 'passing' means, ya know. So, I do recognize that I do benefit from that and that I do feel safe. But at the same time, I am always hyper aware of the trans people in my life - especially on campus. (Quinn)

Quinn's experience and reflection demonstrates why some trans people might feel the impact of anti-trans protests more than others. Since Quinn's gender expression leans more towards their birth-assigned gender, people often do not perceive or treat them as non-binary. The nuances of what it means to be 'visibly non-binary' notwithstanding, this once again highlights the embodied aspects of knowledge for trans and non-binary communities (Rubin, 1998; Aboim, 2016). Rubin (1998) discusses the ontological concept of "the body-for-others", as articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre. The body-for-others articulates the reality of bodies as objects that exist for others; it represents “when the I is coerced into taking the viewpoint of the Other on its own body, when the body as a point of view is grasped as a second-level body, as the body-for-others” (p. 269). In this way, others’ assumption that your body exists to serve them is a violation in and of itself. This relates to Quinn’s comments surrounding gender expression because it articulates the power present in the perceptions of cisgender people. If, like Quinn, a trans person is not perceived as trans or non-binary, they may not be forced to reckon with their identity in the same way a visibly trans or non-passing person might.

As Bettcher (2007) explains, transgender people experience differing levels of violence based on the way others perceive them. A visible trans person might experience discrimination and violence everyday because their existence confronts cisgender peoples’ worldviews. This is not to say that a trans person whose identity is ‘invisible’ lives unburdened by their identity. Instead, they live with the fear of being discovered, or depicted as a sort of deceiver or liar (Bettcher, 2007, p. 50). Bettcher also explains that these are fluid categories, and that some trans and non-binary people move between visibility and invisibility as they navigate different spaces and interact with different people, who have different understandings of their (the trans person’s) body and gender expression (p. 55). This means that Quinn’s (in)visibility can fluctuate depending on whichever space they are navigating. However, their comment reveals that in most spaces on campus, people assume them to be cisgender, rendering their gender identity invisible.

Part of them assumptions about Quinn’s gender identity reside in other’s perception of their body. Aboim (2016) also identifies the role of the body in how other’s make sense of our gender. She explains that “Rather, bodies matter, as Butler (1993) stated, but not only because they are campuses where stories are written but because they have a material reality, a shape defining self-perception and the perception of others” (Aboim, 2016, p. 232). In this way, trans and non-binary peoples’ bodies are modes of expression intrinsically linked to their gender identity. The way Quinn moves through the world, through their embodied expression of their hairstyle, clothes, or mannerism, are extensions of their internal sense of themselves. To say that Quinn ought to change or modify how they express themselves to be taken seriously in their identity would constitute elevating a cisnormative world view that centers the (mis)understandings of cisgender strangers over Quinn’s subjective understanding of their own identity.

An effect of the material reality of gender for Aboim (2016) is that whether or not a person wishes to be seen as cisgender, being assigned that label socially by others results in social consequences, both positive and negative. For ‘passing’ trans men, “being seen as a man generated a competitive advantage in the labor market”; the same could not be said for ‘passing’ trans women (Aboim, 2016, p. 231). Within the context of Quinn’s comments, they experience these cisgender privileges; however, this is not to say that they are free from discomfort. Instead, the burden Quinn copes with is knowing that their identity is made invisible by other’s assumptions based on their gender expression. They are still hyperaware of the violence against trans people in spaces like washrooms and changerooms, and ‘passing’ for cisgender cannot free them from these anxieties entirely.

Samuel also discusses his relationship with ‘passing’ and being assumed to be cisgender. Since he has medically and legally transitioned, Samuel does not navigate campus in the same way that a person who is earlier in their transition. Eckstein (2015) considers the role of medical transition for transgender men specifically, asking why trans men and their pursuit of happiness is often framed through the “pursuit of cisness or cis-passing as a standard of gender purity” (p. 44). By placing medical transition and the performance of ‘cisness’ at the center of trans peoples’ lives, normative institutions apply pressure to trans and non-binary people who are not striving to be seen as cisgender, or ‘normal’. Though more will be said of Samuel’s relationship with ‘passing’, reflecting on the role cisnormativity plays for trans men in light of Eckstein (2015) provides language to extrapolate Samuel’s experiences as a trans man who most assume to be cisgender. For example, Eckstein (2015) highlights how terms like ‘passing’ informs scholars’ understanding of how trans men navigate the world, while he also acknowledging that these “narratives of transgender men attempt to rationalize rather than represent transgender lives in the glory of all of their contradictions” (Eckstein, 2015, p. 27). Eckstein’s (2015) nuanced engagement with trans men’s contradictory understandings of masculinity lay a useful foundation for understanding Samuel’s comments around his status as a ‘passing’ trans man.

Samuel’s masculine gender presentation aligns with his gender identity. Because he has changed his name, gender marker, and appearance, his classmates, professors, as well as administrative staff on campus see him as just another cis man. This frees him from the extra scrutiny faced by non-passing trans people and non-binary people, “which overemphasizes their trans*ness and, as a result, increases their sense of threat and potential for violence” (Catalano, 2017, p. 241). Despite the distance ‘passing’ creates between him and other trans people, Samuel still concluded that the increase of hatred targeting trans and non-binary people did change how he navigated campus, saying:

> I think that especially recently with all the protests happening across Ontario, I have been more hesitant to be open about my trans identity – whether that’s with my classmates or just having a pin symbolizing trans pride or pronouns or anything like that. I just feel more apprehensive about it. (Samuel)

Samuel’s hesitation in the above quote is not just an expression of campus climate, but also the non-optimal choices they are forced to make within cisnormative institutions like education. As a result, trans students like Samuel and Quinn are forced to weigh the physical safety provided by ‘passing’ for cisgender with the emotional harm caused by having their gender identity made invisible as a result.

Participants’ Stories: An in-depth case analysis of Trans and non-binary Student Experiences on Campus

After establishing the key themes identified by all participants, I now move on to provide more detailed and specific case analysis of particular student accounts on Sullivan University’s campus. Each of these students provide further detailed insights into the themes outlined above with respect to specificities and particularities of trans and nonbinary students’ lives in navigating campus life. Such an analytic focus on individuals allows for more contextual specifications about navigating campus life and spaces, while also allowing me to further engage with and indeed extend my previously articulated thematic analysis more deeply in light of my study’s core research questions.

Steph: Navigating Cisnormative Pedagogical Spaces

At the beginning of their studies at Sullivan University, Steph was a student within the Bachelor of Education (BEd); now, they are a PhD candidate in the 6th or 7th year of their degree. Given their extended presence on Sullivan University’s campus, Steph’s story follows the ebb and flow of trans inclusivity at their university. Their area of study is also focused on trans and non-binary students. This, coupled with their embodied experiences as a non-binary student themselves, made addressing their stories especially important within this study. When they first came to Sullivan as teacher candidate, Steph explains that:

> …there was absolutely nothing in terms of trans representation. There was one student who was working with [my current supervisor] at the time who was putting together a panel session [on the topic] and they did that for a couple of years. But, you know, it was tough in terms of things I was hearing in the hallways. There was a lot of homophobia, there were a lot of – I wasn't out as non-binary at the time, but I had a lot of experiences with cis dudes thinking that they could 'change me' and crossing lines physically. (Steph)

Navigating the program came with many challenges. The spectre of homophobia hung over Steph as they navigated campus, which made accepting both their queer and non-binary identity more challenging. Though they did not identify as non-binary at the time, navigating homophobia within the BEd program made imagining a world where they could be themselves *and* an educator impossible. Steph was dealing with the trauma of a man overstepping their physical boundaries, something trans and non-binary students are more likely to experience on-campus than their cis peers, while also struggling to see themselves within the faculty's curriculum (Woodford et al, 2022a; Goldberg et al, 2019). Steph explains that they moved through the program "knowing that I would be teaching as a queer teacher, and that feeling of insecurity because there was no representation that I was aware of and there was no way of doing that" (Steph). Even though they wanted to act as a resource to 2SLGBTQ+ students, there was no framework in Sullivan University's curriculum for them to refer to.

After graduating from the Teacher Education program, Steph returned to Sullivan to complete their graduate studies. While doing so, they remember seeing the climates around queer and trans people changing. Referring to the course they teach currently, Steph explained that:

> [the course I teach] – that came into the BEd program after I graduated, when I started my master's, I think. And that was a big shift because it sort of guaranteed some sort of

> representation. There was still a lot of nasty stuff you could hear in the hallways at the time. (Steph)

This observation demonstrates the issues with improving campus climates around trans and non-binary students. Though this new gender and sexual diversity course was an elective course, and thus not mandatory, it did provide some representation for queer and transgender students within Steph's department. Even though the faculty itself had taken small steps to implement inclusive curriculum, this was not enough to address the vulnerabilities and negative experiences of queer, non-binary and trans students such as Steph. Despite these challenges, Steph completed their coursework and their master's thesis, and is current enrolled in their PhD at Sullivan University.

Though they were taking classes at the beginning of their program, Steph has now crossed the barrier between student and instructor. As previously mentioned, they are one of the instructors for a class discussing topics of gender and sexual diversity. Despite their position as a course instructor coming with limited institutional power, and therefore some level of security, it also had its own set of unique challenges. Early in their role teaching this course, there were students who felt this course was an opportunity to voice their transphobic concerns around trans women in sports. However, Steph articulates precariousness throughout their interview, specifically the way their course evaluations from students reflect poorly on them as an instructor. However, what Steph chooses to highlight and focus on is how they are able to use this feedback to productively develop their pedagogical skills:

> my instructor evaluations actually reflected that, which was scary in terms of someone wanting to go into academia. Those instructor evaluations matter, so if you have someone writing 'you made this space unsafe because I couldn't say xyz', that reflects really badly

> on me as an instructor. But I also think that made me a smarter instructor in terms of how to navigate that. (Steph)

The idea that a professor’s teaching prospects could suffer due to course evaluations is not a new reality. In Jaekel and Nicolazzo’s (2017) study of trans educators in higher education, they found that students would use course evaluations to resist their instructor’s trans identity. This normally involved students intentionally misgendering them or commenting that they were “either “too much” or “not enough” due to their gender presentations” (Jaekel and Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 5). This common theme between Jaekel and Nicolazzo (2017) and this study demonstrates the precarity present within early academia for trans and non-binary graduate students. As emerging scholars, graduate students face pressure to project intelligence and professionalism during every encounter, less their professional development or career prospects suffer. Goldberg et al (2019) discuss the importance of professional identity for graduate students. Trans and non-binary graduate students in their study “spoke to the academic and professional risks of dressing in a way that was less clearly gendered and/or that deviated from the gender they were assigned at birth” (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 44). For some, their trans or non-binary identity does not contribute to the perceived knowledge they offer, but rather is used to discredit their intelligence. In Goldberg et al (2019), an agender student shared that a professor called their ‘they/them’ pronouns ‘ungrammatical’. This could have lasting effects for non-binary graduate students especially, since their “precarious position in the academy relies upon their being viewed as intelligent” (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 46).

Since these initial evaluations, Steph has changed tactics when it comes to integrating trans and non-binary identities/content/representation into their course curriculum. Despite the many challenges they have faced, like being doxed online or facing penalties from transphobic students' course evaluations, Steph refused to hide or diminish their non-binary identity on-campus. They explained that "The feelings of hesitation are definitely there, but I fucking refuse. And I don't – I will not [allow it to change how visible I choose to be]" (Steph). Through this refusal, Steph's existence situates them as an anti-cisnormative force within their faculty at Sullivan University. Though their identity led to them to feeling more vulnerabilities when compared to their cisgender peers, they refuse to be coerced into hiding. When asked what this refusal on their part reflects about their experiences on-campus, Steph primarily reflects on their position as an educator:

> I don't think it's so much a 'I deserve to take up space', and more a 'if I don't do it, how can I turn to students – [that I teach] – how do I tell them they can take up space?' So, with my teacher candidates, there is a lot of fear around being out in the classroom. I know that I am able to be out in the classroom. I am out in as spaces as I can be because I know the policies that support me, because I have network that will back me up. Since I know how to navigate that, I am also involved with the union, so I have multiple access points to institutional support. That is an immense fucking privilege, so I have to use that because there is no way for me to stand up in front of 40 candidates and say 'think about it, if you feel comfortable be out with your students because if you're out, they feel safer'. There is no way for me to teach with teenagers and tell them that it's safe to be out if I'm not willing to go there myself. (Steph)

What Steph highlights in this quote is the obligation they feel to their students, particularly their trans and non-binary students who attend Sullivan University as teacher candidates. Rather than focusing on accessing the resources at their disposal as an instructor, Steph reflects on how they can leverage their privilege and help their students. In a way, Steph's description is an articulation of the role model they needed in their teacher training program. Acting as the advocate they needed, Steph is able to transform their precariousness as a non-binary PhD student and instructor into a useful knowledge base for their 2SLGBTQ+ students to access. Steph has adapted to their environment, creating a safe space for both them and the 2SLGBTQ+ students within their Bachelor of Education (BEd) course.

When asked about the current environment in the faculty of education, Steph discusses their current cohort of students in the gender and sexual diversity course:

> Now, I'm in my fifth year of teaching this course and I have a group of 38 this semester – it's the biggest class I've ever had. I have more out - or closeted but out to me – students in that class than I think I've ever had before. Which is incredible – having that feeling of solidarity amongst educators. But the faculty is still not a safe place because a lot of [students] still chose not to be out except in very specific spaces. (Steph)

Steph's reflections expose the barriers educators face while trying to create safe pedagogical spaces in higher education. Despite the fact that they are teaching a gender and sexual diversity course, and that there is an increasing number of out 2SLGBTQ+ students in that course, this does not mean that the faculty is a trans inclusive place, or necessarily one that is more accepting of trans and non-binary students. This is reflected here as Steph, the sole non-binary educator in the B.Ed program, appears to be doing this inclusivity work on their own without any real support or commitment from their department. Martino et al (2022) highlight that attempting to enact inclusive policies for trans students, schools are "resorting to a general approach to addressing equity, obscuring and deflecting attention from the specific systemic barriers that contribute to trans marginalization" (Martino et al, 2022, p. 88). By using generalized inclusion policies, Steph's department is signaling that they 'care' about trans and non-binary students, while neglecting to address the attitudes and systems on campus that make students in their own department uncomfortable identifying as 2SLGBTQ+ in pedagogical spaces.

Though Steph acts as a resource for their students, either by acting as a confidante or by fostering a safe space through their course, they cannot be the only solution nor should they be expected to provide such education in a siloed fashion that is disconnected form a systemic cross-curriculum commitment to addressing gender diversity through an intersectional lens (Kassen et al, 2023). Ahmed (2012) also discusses the importance of colleges and universities making tangible and supportive commitments to inclusivity on campus. She explains that often, universities' commitments to equity are merely performative. This is because a university being seen 'doing' inclusivity through committees has become a replacement for tangible change that could improve the experiences of trans and non-binary students on campus; in this way, "institution can 'do committees' as a way of *not* being committed, of not following through" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 122). As a result, sole practitioners, like Steph, are left to do inclusivity work in their classrooms on their own with little institutional support.

Steph is only one instructor in one department, so the reach of their advocacy is inherently limited. Even in Steph's class, where they are proactive about creating a safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ students, some students still do not feel safe to be out in class, or in other spaces on campus. Of course, people's comfort levels will vary based on their lived experiences and identity; the comments from participants within this study prove this. However, a student's choice to still not identify themselves does show that individual instructors cannot shoulder the load of confronting transphobia and cisnormativity within their home departments, let alone Sullivan University's broader campus. Cisnormativity's existence as "a detrimental and predominantly tacitly held and communicated prejudicial ideology, rather than an individual attitude", which means that attention ought to be directed to the systemic forces that create transphobic conditions in the first place (Kennedy, 2018, p. 308). These systemic forces must always be at the forefront of any intervention or policy response. Steph commits themselves to helping their students, faculty members, and community members confront cisnormative ideas in education, they also acknowledge that part of this work requires Sullivan University to intervene.

When asked what the administration needs to do to better by enhancing trans and non-binary students' sense of safety on campus, Steph encourages them to reflect on what staff and students are telling them:

> Create opportunities to _*critically*_ [emphasis added] reflect on what people are saying to you about your program. Not just 'We need to stick some rainbows up', but to actually do a deep dive into the underlying causes of why people are feeling unsafe in your program. (Steph)

Steph references the 'underlying causes' and invokes similar analytical strategies as this study does when discussing institutionalized precarity. In this sense, precarity and cisnormativity are intrinsically linked. When a social system is constructed with cisnormative assumptions, all the policies, attitudes, and practices that emerge "may not aim to cause harm, but nonetheless contribute to making schools unsafe environments" (Horton, 2022, p. 75).

Even in instances where trans and non-binary people do not face immediate threats to their safety, these cisnormative systems produce the precarious conditions experienced by Steph and the other participants. Malatino (2021) discusses the tendency to frame trans people's suffering through a lens of 'self-care', which posits that individuals are equally responsible for their own mental state and flourishing, ultimately neglecting to address the systemic and social contexts that contribute to trans and non-binary students' feelings of vulnerability; this framework presents "a model of self-care as bootstrap logic" (Malatino, 2021, p. 836). When researchers consider the barriers that obstruct trans and non-binary students from exercising self-care and self-advocacy, it promotes questions of how trans students are meant to "make a home if [they] don't get to exist in the first place" (Malatino, 2021, p. 848).

Sullivan University as a cis, heterosexual and colonial institution is instilled with institutional power (Woodford et al, 2019, 2022a; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This power means that their stifling of trans and non-binary peoples' experiences, whether it be through gendered washroom and changeroom spaces or outdated curriculum, constitutes a dismissal of gender diversity (Austin, 2016, p. 221). Cisnormative institutions such as Sullivan University inhibit trans and non-binary students' ability to "claim our humanity and our right to be treated fairly under the law and within the purviews of morality and culture", forcing us to quarrel with systems that have never treated trans identity as intelligible (Doan, 2010, p. 648). Rather than considering how we can provide trans and non-binary students tools to increase their resiliency, one must consider how institutions like Sullivan University systemically 'other' trans and non-binary gender identities, and therefore impacting the embodied experiences of trans and non-binary students.

Samuel: Passing, the Fallacy of Security and Trans Students as Informants

When he began his studies at Sullivan University, Samuel was a new master's student in health sciences. His program was very hands on, using in-person labs to inform his classes' study of the human body. Though he identifies as a trans man, Samuel moves through campus as a 'stealth' trans person, which is to say that he does not disclose his identity as transgender to those around him. This is facilitated given the point he is at in his legal and medical transition. Samuel has changed his name legally and has accessed gender affirming healthcare like hormone replacement therapy and top surgery. When asked to reflect on his experiences personally on campus, Samuel is acutely aware of his privilege given these facts:

> In general, I'm pretty comfortable in most spaces because I have the privilege of passing most of the time. People don't know that I'm trans, so there's only a few circumstances where I either am explicitly identifying or showing that I'm trans, or that someone might pick up on scars or things like that. (Samuel)

Given his ability to 'pass' as cisgender in most instances, one might be quick to dismiss Samuel's experiences as non-representative of trans and non-binary students' experiences. He has also legally transitioned by changing his legal name and gender marker, thus helping him to almost completely avoid things like deadnaming or being misgendered. However, for the purposes of this study, how Samuel negotiates his own safety as a 'passing' trans guy provides many important insights. His reflections bring forward discourse of what it means to be 'passing' on-campus, both for one's feelings of safety as well as one's ability to be their most authentic selves while pursuing higher education. Scholars continue to negotiate the space between visibility and invisibility. Catalano's (2015) study notes that the desire to 'pass' as cisgender "pushes trans students toward a hormonal and surgical imperative, which reinforces pathologizing of trans identities" (p. 412). While passing is often framed as an important safety measure for trans people, it ignores the violence experienced by trans people when cisgender people 'discover' their identity, fuelling the fallacy of 'trans people as deceivers' (Bettcher, 2007). Samuels' reflections demonstrate this tension in the literature, showing how different aspects of medical or legal transition can either mitigate or add to the vulnerabilities experienced by trans and non-binary students at Sullivan University.

To facilitate this reflection, I would ask questions that were relevant to his lived experiences; this also communicated to him that I was actively listening, thus reinforcing the trust we built throughout the interview process. For example, questions around deadnaming were not very relevant to Samuel since he had legally changed his name before coming to Sullivan University; his peers, professors, and university administrators did not have access to his deadname for this reason. In these instances, I asked him to compare his present experience to his past experience at his previous post secondary institution. Samuel began transitioning during his undergraduate studies at a different university of a similar size. Despite that these early reflections may not reveal specific findings about Sullivan's campus, they do provide a contextualization for understanding his transition which further illuminates the role one's personal gender journey plays in how different trans and non-binary people navigate campus.

At his previous institution, Samuel admits that:

> I was fortunate that my classmates and faculty were very supportive. Even the school itself, it was very easy to change my name. I didn't have to provide any legal documentation or anything, I could just change it based off my gender identity. I reached out to them and within a week or two, they had it changed on my student ID card, and I got a new photo. The one thing that was more of a struggle was that in the actual system, my name took a very long time to be changed. So, I would keep coming up with the wrong name or I would try to access health services and they weren't allowed to change it because they need to have my legal name on file. But in terms of my classmates, I was pretty fortunate in that most people either didn't bring it up and worked to shift my names and pronouns, or they might have some questions for me. I did encounter some people where their questions were probably a little transphobic, but it was more rooted in

> ignorance than hatred towards trans people. A lot of the time they were just curious to learn, and they weren't trying to offend me.

Samuel is the first to admit that his experience is far from the worst-case scenario; instead, he reflects positively on the different people, policies, and on-campus supports that aided him in his transition. Though some of his living conditions on campus have improved since he has been able to pass, washrooms and changerooms continue to be spaces characterized by discomfort:

> I haven't gotten to explore too much, but in terms of spaces that feel maybe a little less safe – the gym is a pretty obvious one for most trans people. Being in a [health sciences] program, that tends to be a space that we frequent quite a bit. So, feeling a bit unsafe or uncomfortable there, as well as in the men's change room in the faculty building where they hold our classes. Not that it's necessarily unsafe, but I as if I need to hide a little bit or turn myself away so no one will see my scars on my chest.

In this quote from Samuel, we see that 'passing' for a cisgender man has not alleviated his feelings of vulnerability in gender spaces like washrooms or changerooms. Even though he has had his breast tissue removed, the conspicuousness of his top surgery scars still provides an 'othering' characteristic that he feels the need to hide. Even though he has only come out to one classmate and a handful of professors in his faculty, Samuel's identity as a trans person continues to inform his embodied experiences on Sullivan's main campus.

Moving beyond Samuel's embodied characteristics, one can begin to consider the true implications of 'passing' on-campus and the effect it can have on how a trans person navigates spaces on campus. Samuel admits that 'passing', or being 'stealth' was once the ultimate goal of his legal and medical transition:

> I think at the beginning of my transition I maybe had a more optimistic view. It was also something I could escape – I had to be open about my trans identity when I was first coming out a lot of the time. Though I eventually wanted to be ‘stealth’, now I’m at the point where that’s not the case. But now I feel like I have to be, almost. Before it felt like a privilege to be able to hide my identity, and now it feels like it’s restraining me and that I have to be for my own safety or comfort. Whereas before, it was more of a goal I was aiming for because of my dysphoria.

Samuel’s experience is interesting because it shows that trans people are not defective gendered subjects aiming to replicate accepted, cisnormative understandings of gender. Rubin (1998) articulates this point exactly, arguing that accepting transgender people into society requires accepting the “function these identities serve for the subjects who claim them” (Rubin, 1998, p. 266). By framing gender around the subjective embodied experiences of an individual, trans and non-binary people exist as “embodied subjects who mobilize around their body image to sustain their life projects”, rather than failures at exemplifying cis-centric gender presentations (Rubin, 1998, p. 271). Samuel presents the possibility for someone to long to be seen for who they are in *all* their complexities, rather than having to obscure one aspect to ensure that the other will be respected. Austin (2016) discusses trans students’ desire for acknowledgment in her study of trans and gender non-conforming youth navigating gender non-conformity. Even if they did not identify as transgender at the time, participants did highlight “a sense of authenticity and wholeness was associated with the ability to transgress gender norms and expressions associated with their assigned sex at birth in order to validate an internal sense of identity” (Austin, 2016, p. 223). What participants in Austin’s (2016) study reveal is that transgender identity is not just a mimicking of the opposite sex characteristics; it is an expression of someone's internal sense of themselves.

For Samuel, he explains that he fears if comes out to his classmates, he "maybe not viewed as equal to the other men in my program – especially since we constantly talk about sexed differences in health, size, muscle mass, and all sorts of things". In this case, Samuel is trading his classmates seeing and treating him as a man for the restrictions implicit in hiding his trans identity from them:

> Being 'stealth', I have the privilege of people not deadnaming more or misgendering me, facing transphobia through violence or harassment or anything like that, but at the same time I feel like I'm hiding a huge part of who I am. It's isolating. I feel like it separates me from my community of trans and queer people. I feel like it keeps me away from my cishet peers because I feel like I can't cross this line of closeness or intimacy with them. If I start telling them about my past more then I have to come out. So, it's a bit of a balancing act. The privilege gives me that safety, but it also feels restraining.

This identity negotiation is something that sets Samuel apart from his cisgender peers. While his peers might be occupied with trying to make new friends or mastering the course material, Samuel, and presumably other 'stealth' trans people, are consumed by a juggling act of safety versus authenticity. Even the use of the term 'stealth' has negative implications. It feeds into discourses that "reinforce the dangerous notion that cis people have moral grounds to feel aggrieved and deceived—and perhaps to even respond with righteous violence—when trans people simply exist as themselves" (Walker-Bellamy, 2021). I mention this not to fault Samuel for the language he uses to describe his experiences. Instead, I want to consider the extent the trans people feel pressure to placate cisgender people to ensure their physical or emotional safety. The desire to be seen as a man, however, is also only one of the competing desires Samuel outlined in his interview.

Samuel also reflected at length on the pedagogical support he provided to faculty members in his program. He is currently out to more members of his faculty than classmates within his program which is due, in part, to his interest and experience regarding trans-inclusive care within his field. Samuel had met with different professors in his program to discuss implementing trans-inclusive care practices into the curriculum:

> I have only been here for a few months, but I brought up a couple of things to my faculty. Professors have been super receptive to it and have even asked for my help in changing the current curriculum to make everything more inclusive – like adding case studies that might be more representative to the trans community. But *actual* changes haven’t happened as far as I have seen. (Samuel)

In a number of these meetings, when faculty asked about his interest in trans-inclusive care, Samuel explained that he was drawing on his ‘personal experiences’. Though these conversations were hidden behind subtext, Samuel explained that his professors had understood what he meant by ‘personal experience’:

> I never even explicitly said it, I just talked about creating this trans healthcare workshop and mentioned that I would have personal experience and they just picked up on it very quickly. They never changed my name or pronouns; they just asked me if there was anything that they could do anything to make me feel more comfortable in lab. (Samuel)

At first blush, this is a win for trans-inclusivity at Sullivan University. By consulting with trans community members and taking their feedback seriously, Samuel’s professors are openly prioritizing trans students' experiences in their department. In addition, by including trans-specific case studies, the curriculum can begin to accept trans and non-binary people as legitimate sources of knowledge.

However, this is not to say that this approach is without its flaws. First, there is no mention of whether the program is consulting anyone else *but* Samuel. Though he may be a subject matter expert, both due to his identity and his experiences with trans-informed client care, treating him as the sole representative for trans and non-binary students navigating their program is both inappropriate and problematic. Not only does this construct transgender experiences as a single monolith, but also puts Samuel in a precarious position. He explains that at times, he feels like the single person informing the department's thinking on trans people:

> I don't mind being the 'go-to trans person' [chuckles] I've liked to create educational workshops and lectures and to assist with that kind of stuff. But it almost feels like a bit of pressure on me to be this sort of learning resource for faculty. That also extends into a sort of feeling of responsibility to feel comfortable showing my [top surgery] scars and to be open with my classmates so they have the opportunity to work with a trans person and to understand how to treat a trans patient. I know that it's not a responsibility put on me by any external factors or people. But it's a sort of intrinsic feeling of responsibility that, well I'm the only trans person that they will probably interact with in a physiotherapy setting right now. (Samuel)

Malatino (2015) emphasizes the need to respect "more expansive tableau of the terrain of gender transformation, especially as it is inextricably bound to the diverse racial, ethnic, sexualized, classed, and bionormed inequities" (Malatino, 2015, p. 398). Adopting this intersectional understanding to trans identity would empower the most marginalized voices within the trans community, while also discouraging cisgender members of Sullivan's community from referencing Samuel's comments as "the "trans take" on certain ideas" (Malatino, 2015, p. 400).

While no faculty member has explicitly pressured Samuel into acting in this role, he still experiences an additional burden that his cisgender peers do not. Acting as an advocate for one's community can be a liberating experience that restores the voices of marginalized people within normative institutions. The issues bubble up to the surface when this advocacy begins to feel like an obligation. When Samuel considered setting boundaries so that professors do not treat him as their sole informant, he explained that:

> Honestly, I would rather they just come to me [chuckles] and have a trans person's perspective be heard than have them seek out the wrong information or just not seek the information out at all. (Samuel)

Samuel communicates some of his foundational assumptions about the university. He assumes the university to be a cisnormative institution, placing cisgender people and their dominant gendered experiences at the forefront of campus infrastructure, which creates "cultures of ignorance and delegitimization, where prejudice and stigma can thrive" (Horton, 2022, p. 85). Samuel also assumes that they are not taking proactive steps to address the systemic cisnormativity and cissexism that informs Sullivan University as an institution, as evident by the lack of inclusive curriculum which results in rendering trans and non-binary identities unintelligible and largely invisible (Horton, 2022; Bettcher, 2007; Catalano, 2015).

Samuel assumes that faculty are only consulting with trans students if they are able to act as an ingroup informant for the trans community. More disturbingly, however, he is questioning the faculty's ability to critically engage with trans experiences and resources. Green (2010) emphasizes the need for educators who wish to be trans-inclusive to think beyond the brief 'Trans 101' training they may have been provided, explaining the importance of "educators to seek out further information about trans identities, be it from continuing education seminars, local events and panels, research and narrative literature, or personal community involvement" (p. 7). Whether they believe a trans person might be present or not, educators need to incorporate inclusive language and knowledge. This ensures that curriculum is actively centering trans perspectives, thus addressing the some of the concerns around cisnormativity in Sullivan University's curriculum (Green, 2010).

Since he notes a lack of this thoughtful engagement with trans perspectives in class curriculum, Samuel is once again suspended between two, less-than optimal options: either to act as the sole trans informant and shoulder the burden of that responsibility for his community, or to establish personal boundaries with his professors to protect his emotional wellbeing. However, he worries that by doing so, his inaction will lead to trans and non-binary entering the program in the future to face the sorts of vulnerabilities he himself is navigating. Though these vulnerabilities are not intrinsically linked to his identity as transgender and are really an extension of "systemic cissexism that heightens precarity in legal, medical, economic, and social structures aimed at reducing the conditions for trans people", Samuel's ability to 'pass' cannot protect him from the varied vulnerabilities of being a trans graduate student (Jenkins, 2020, p. 66).

Taylor: The Impact of a Student's Supervisor

As a second-year master's student, Taylor has been navigating Sullivan University's campus for longer than other participants (except for Steph, who has spent almost a decade at the institution). For graduate students, the relationship they have with their supervisor can have a significant influence on their graduate study, as well as the student's mental health. Having a supportive supervisor who understands and respects their student fosters feelings of trust and mutual respect. This relationship of trust and respect allows the supervisor and their student to work together so the student can complete their program requirements. This relationship becomes even more important when a student is subject to funding deadlines or has a specific time where their tuition fees are partially or completely paid by their department. For this reason, delays caused by miscommunication with one's supervisor, or from switching supervisors, can affect a student's ability to complete their study within the required time period. Though a graduate student's supervisor is normally highlighted as an invaluable resource, Taylor shared that they did not have a positive relationship with their supervisor.

When they initially started the program, Taylor's courses were held online through Zoom. Using Zoom's new pronoun feature, Taylor chose to display their pronouns next to their name; this way, their name and pronouns would be visible to everyone in their online meetings. When asked whether their classmates or lab mates knew about their gender identity or pronouns, Taylor explained how they made this information available to their peers:

> I think technically yes, because when I started it was in January 2022 and our classes were all online still. So, it was easy because my pronouns were next to my name and Zoom and stuff. So, if they saw that then they would know, but throughout the past two years we have had different conversations about how I identify and also queerness in general. So as far as I know, they've known the whole time. (Taylor)

Despite Taylor's best efforts to be forthright with their preferred pronouns, their master's supervisor did not acknowledge their identity and continued to misgender them. Though Taylor's supervisor *could* have not noticed their posted pronouns, either over Zoom or within their email signature, their supervisor's discomfort and transphobia became quite apparent when he began to process Taylor's non-binary gender identity. Rather than discussing it with Taylor, he spoke to their lab mates. Not only did this risk outing Taylor, but it also put their lab mates in an uncomfortable situation:

> And he has also spoken to them about it when he first became aware of my identity and pronouns. He was in those same zoom calls where I displayed my pronouns and such, but I guess he only noticed at the beginning of this year. So, after he noticed, he first had a conversation with my lab mates about what pronouns I use, and then afterward he called a meeting for us to talk about it. So, my lab mates know that he knows my gender identity, they know that we had that conversation, and they also know that he still misgenders me. They have asked me if when he refers to me if they should correct him. So, they are aware of all that stuff.

Not only did Taylor's supervisor react adversely when he discovered their gender identity, he voiced his 'concerns' with their lab mates. One of their lab mates did notify Taylor that this had happened with their shared supervisor, which did ensure that Taylor would not be caught off guard when their supervisor eventually confronted them. Rather than focusing on the positives, like their supportive lab mates, Taylor was still reeling from their supervisor essentially gossiping about them with their lab mates:

> I think he didn't need to have a conversation with my lab mates at all. Because, again, he had already confirmed what my pronouns were based off the department website because I have my pronouns posted as 'they/them' there. So, he had concrete evidence if he was unsure. I think it was inappropriate to talk about someone, especially about such a personal detail, to somebody who isn't that person.

Having their supervisor inquire to their lab mates about something so personal was already upsetting for Taylor. However, their supervisor's actions grew more intrusive and upsetting overtime. Gaining this knowledge about their supervisor's intrusive and unethical behaviour was the beginning of a very fraught supervisory relationship, in which the supervisor continued to conduct himself in ways that induced further anxiety and preciousness for Taylor. Not long after this incident with their lab mates, Taylor's supervisor reached out to them to conduct an in-person meeting. In this meeting, Taylor explains that their supervisor did most of the talking. This is not uncommon for their supervisor, however Taylor explained that their supervisor's dominance in the conversation had different implications within this specific discussion:

> He talks a lot normally, but I think there still could have been more of a discussion. Like, he opened the discussion with 'have you always been a 'they''. I said yes and explained that it was displayed on things like Zoom since I started the program. Then he launched into it 'being weird' and that 'it doesn't make sense' – he even said that 'it's grammatically incorrect' to use a singular they. So, we kept talking about stuff like that even though he had gotten his answer within the first ten seconds of the meeting. It just felt like he was trying to do the supportive thing by confirming this with me. But also, I don't really care because it feels weird and let me justify to you why it is weird. (Taylor)

This negative interaction with their supervisor is a prime example of the intellectual invalidation discussed by one of the participants in Goldberg et al (2019) who shared their pronouns with a professor and faced similar backlash:

> upon sharing their pronouns (they, them) with a professor, the faculty member declined to use them, stating that "they were ungrammatical." This type of faculty response assaults not only a student's gender, but also their intellect—and could prove especially

> detrimental to a graduate student whose precarious position in the academy relies upon their being viewed as intelligent. (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 46)

As Taylor explained, their supervisor relied on the grammatical precedence of the singular ‘they’, or lack thereof, as proof that their identity is not valid or intelligible. By attaching non-binary identities and their use of singular ‘they’ pronouns to a sort of ‘objective truth’ like grammar, Taylor’s supervisor is freeing himself of any obligation to respect, validate, or listen to Taylor. These mechanism of avoiding accountability are enabled by the cissexism implicit within Sullivan University. By neglecting to educate faculty on the legitimacy of non-binary gender identities, and the correct use of they and them pronouns, the university enable faculty members’ ignorance and transphobia toward their trans and non-binary students. Even when trans and non-binary graduate students attempted to educate uninformed faculty, “they often concluded that the stress associated with such efforts was “not worth it,” in that they often encountered unpleasant responses, ranging from shock to confusion to dismissal” (Goldberg et al, 2019, p. 46). The inappropriateness of this discussion only grows the longer one examines their relationship and the impact it could have on Taylor’s future in graduate level study.

Upon unearthing these troubling stories in their interview, Taylor was asked whether they would be open to revisiting this discussion with him. Their answer, though troubling, exposes the power imbalance present between faculty supervisors and their students:

> It’s hard to say because assuming I’m successful in completing my master’s, I’d be co-supervised by him and another faculty member for my PhD. So, I’d like to be able to have a conversation like that again. The next four years for me personally are going to be important with lots of things happening, and I’d want to feel comfortable letting him

> know about them. I just don't know how I want re-initiate that conversation with him. (Taylor)

Though Taylor says they are open to future discussions with their supervisor as a means of asserting boundaries and repairing their student-supervisor relationship, their hesitation in doing so is indicative of their precarious position as a graduate student. Despite many witnessing their supervisor's poor behaviour, Taylor remains suspended between two very difficult decisions. They can either stand up for themselves, and risk alienating a potential co-supervisor and reference for their PhD, or they can remain quiet and bear the load of being misgendered and disrespected by their supervisor. These sort of tense supervisor-student relationships are not exclusive to trans and non-binary graduate students. However, Taylor's experiences do highlight the potential barriers faced by gender diverse grad students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an analysis of the participants' comments and experiences as communicated through the interviews I conducted. Within my initial thematic analysis, I apply ideas from scholars like Bonner-Thompson et al (2021) and Jenkins (2020) to articulate the difference between my participants' feelings of precarity (or vulnerability) on campus and the institutionalized nature of trans vulnerability in Canadian higher education. This revealed the precarious conditions affecting trans and non-binary students at Sullivan University, as well as the diverse ways precarity can manifest according to participants' intersecting identities, including their role as a graduate student (Goldberg et al, 2019). These precarious conditions were exacerbated by the growing anti-trans sentiments in Canadian media, as well as the existence of cross-Canada anti-trans protests during the time participants were being interviewed (Mason and Hamilton, 2023; Canadian Anti-Hate Network, Sept 28, 2023). After considering these overarching themes, I applied an individualized case study approach to explore these themes as rooted in three participants subjective experiences.

This focus on particular stories from participants further reflected a commitment to desubjugate trans voices within my study, while also articulating the tensions and negotiations different trans and non-binary graduate students face as they navigate life on campus. This analysis revealed that trans and non-binary students face unique vulnerabilities on campus based other embodied expression and understanding of their non-normative gender identity. Steph, Samuel, and Taylor all experience different vulnerabilities that reflect their relationship with cisnormative conceptions of gender, their position within their department as a graduate student, as well as their choices in how and when they chose to identify, or not identify, as trans or non-binary on campus (Horton, 2023; Nicolazzo, 2017c; Nicolazzo, 2021). What unified these diverse accounts, however, is a sense that Sullivan University, despite its equity policies, has failed at creating tangible changes for trans students; instead, policies on campus are largely performative, “obscuring and deflecting attention from the specific systemic barriers that contribute to trans marginalization” (Kassen et al, 2023, p. 88).

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

This study was concerned to generate knowledge about the lived experiences of five trans and non-binary graduate students navigating the same Canadian university in Ontario. The purpose was to learn more about how trans and non-binary graduate students articulate and embody their gender identity in different spaces on campus, and how the presence of systemic issues like cisnormativity and cissexism affect the participants' feelings of security, and therefore how they choose to navigate different campus spaces.

I drew heavily from trans studies scholars such as Stryker (2006), Horton (2023), Radi (2019), and Rubin (1998) whose theoretical frameworks allowed me to ground my study in the foundational terminology and concepts that characterize trans studies as a diverse, interdisciplinary field. As Stryker (2006) has pointed out, trans studies seeks to disrupt and make explicit the link cisgender institutions make between the sexed body, the social roles those bodies ought to fill, as well as the systems they use to delegitimize and alienate transgressive understandings of gender (Stryker, 2006, p. 3). She has also highlighted that the aim of trans-informed inquiries is committed to enacting trans desubjugation, "an assertion that no voice in the dialog should have the privilege of masking the particularities and specificities of its own speaking position, through which it may claim a false universality or authority" (Stryker, 2006, p. 13). Drawing on Radi (2019) was also helpful in applying these principles within higher education in that he argues for "trans epistemic agency" that amplifies trans and non-binary voices within colleges and universities to reclaim control of their stories and experiences (p. 55). Rubin (1998) was significant as he also highlights the role of research as returning agency over trans narratives to trans people. He articulates how phenomenological studies, similar to this one, elevate transgender and non-binary students as "a place to find counterdiscursive knowledge" (p.

271), allowing researchers to understand and confront established cisnormative and cissexism institutions like higher education. When participants were given a chance to do so within this study, they highlighted the performativity of university inclusion efforts, as well as the feelings and institutionalized experiences of precarity and vulnerability that characterized their navigation of spaces on campus at Sullivan University.

Given my own positionality as a trans man and a graduate student, I knew firsthand some of the barriers trans and non-binary graduate students faced throughout their studies. As I witnessed the growth of anti-trans rhetoric and policies in Canada, I wanted to address the gap in Canadian higher education research that desubjugated trans voices on campus by giving my participants to articulate their experiences authentically. My study highlighted the diverse experiences of trans and non-binary graduate students, as well as how their gender identity, gender expression, and feelings of vulnerability ebbed and flowed while navigating campus. Despite drawing on different themes and views, participants' accounts emphasized the precarity constructed within pedagogical spaces, as well as their interpersonal relationships with peers, professors, supervisors, and other university staff members.

While analyzing the data in Chapter 5, pedagogical spaces were often highlighted as tenuous, with participants either feeling vulnerable being out, or feeling invisible when not explicitly identifying themselves as trans. Interpersonal relationships played different roles for each participant. Some highlighted supportive relationships to peers or faculty, which allowed them to exist authentically without being forced to account for themselves as a trans or non-binary person. On the opposite side, one participant reported an inappropriate situation where their supervisor interrogated and dismissed their non-binary gender identity's legitimacy. These varied responses highlight a need for more studies into trans and non-binary students' relationships within higher education, as well as the role interpersonal flourishing plays in trans and non-binary's sense of safety on campus.

The other unique finding produced by this thesis is how participants were affected by anti-trans media and protests, specifically the 1 Million March for Children. Four of the five participants mentioned that knowledge of the growing hate fuelled by the alt-right led them to feeling more vulnerable or anxious navigating campus spaces. However, one participant notes that they were able to bracket themselves off from these discourses by strategically engaging with social media and disengaging to practice of self-care or resiliency. These differences amongst participants prompted a more detailed, individualized case study approach into three participants' lives. This approach allowed the study to consider the particular experiences of each participant as entrenched in their intersectional identities and interwoven with their understanding of themselves and their gender identity. Participants allowed me a glimpse into their lives, exposing both the joy and cruelty they faced and trans and non-binary graduate students navigating cisnormative campus spaces.

Implications for Further Study and Final Reflections

This thesis has important implications for higher educational research, as well as institutional praxis for student affairs workers and university policy makers. Given the under-investigated nature of trans and non-binary graduate students in Canada, especially for studies that center trans studies and trans desubjugation, this study shines a light on the barriers trans and non-binary students must navigate as they also undertake graduate level study. This study also considered the role anti-trans media and protests, like the 1 Million March for Children, played in participants' perception of campus climate. However, more research is needed to reveal the full effects of growing social and political animosity against trans and non-binary people in Canada.

Though this study did question whether participants sought out media relating to trans and non-binary people, it only scratched the surface of participants' relationship with social media. Specifically, more needs to be understood about how trans and non-binary students are navigating online spaces to build community with other trans people, as well as their strategic engagement with anti-trans rhetoric and media. As a result of these questions, I wonder whether investigating these areas might highlight new avenues for student affairs or equity-based staff members about what it means to create a safe and inclusive environment for trans and non-binary graduate students in Canada.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Guide

Project Title: Amplifying Trans and Non-Binary Graduate Students' Experiences at a Canadian University.

Document Title: Interview Guides

Principal Investigator

Dr. Wayne Martino, Ph.D. Faculty of Education, Western University

Co-Investigator

Malcolm Macdonald, MA Student, Faculty of Education

Introduction (for all participants)

Hello, and thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. My name is Malcolm, and I am the Co-Investigator working alongside the Principal Investigator, Dr. Wayne Martino. You can reach either of us through our institutional email addresses if you have any questions after the conclusion of this interview. This study is a component of my current master's thesis research through the Faculty of Education at Western University. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of and climate surrounding transgender and non-binary students on campus. Your interview transcript will be used to establish trends amongst gender diverse students on campus, alongside the experiences and comments of the other participants. This interview is being audio recorded to preserve your experiences, thoughts, and opinions in their entirety. You are free to pause or end the interview at any time. This is safe space for you to articulate and discuss your gender identity and experiences without judgement. Do you have any questions about the interview, consent forms or research before we begin?

Participants Demographics (for all participants)

Sex assigned at birth: ___________________________

Gender Self-Identification: _______________________

Age group: 18-24____, 25-34___, 35-44____, 45+____

Racial/ Ethnic Identity: ___________________________

Year of Study: __________________________________

Area of Study: __________________________________

Interview Guide for Participants

1. How do you feel about your current experience on campus? What are your classes like?
2. How would you describe the climate and attitudes on campus towards trans people?
    - Has the climate on campus changed since you first started your degree?
    - Are there any stories or experiences that contribute to these feelings?
3. Are there any spaces where you feel safer than others on campus?
    - What is it about this space that makes you feel safer?
    - If you do not feel safe, what changes would make you feel safer as a trans student?
4. Do you read news articles/ other media relating to transgender and non-binary people?
    - If so, do you feel the news impacts how you navigate campus as a trans person or how you feel as a trans person on campus?
        - Has anti-trans rhetoric made its way onto the university's campus?
        - How does it manifest in your day-to-day life?
    - If you do not consume news media relating to trans and non-binary people, do you intentionally avoid it? If so, why?

5. Do you choose to identify as transgender or non-binary within classroom settings?
    - If so, how do your professor, teach assistants (TAs), and peers interact with you?
        - How did this make you feel?
        - How long did these feelings last?
    - If not, why did you choose not to self identify?
        - How does being closeted in class make you feel?
        - Does it impact how you express your gender?
6. Do you experience deadnaming/ misgendering from your professors, administrators, or classmates?
    - If so, how did this make you feel?
        - How do you normally respond?
    - If not, has this always been the case?
7. Can you name any 2SLGBTQ+ clubs or supports on campus?
    - How do these initiatives make you feel as a trans or non-binary student on campus?
8. Overall, do you find the university a supportive and trans positive space?
    - On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest score how you would rate your university?
9. Have you attended 2SLGBTQ+ club events or accessed 2SLGBTQ+ supports on campus before?
    - If so, which ones?
        - Where they helpful for you and why?
    - If not, what deterred you from accessing them in the past?

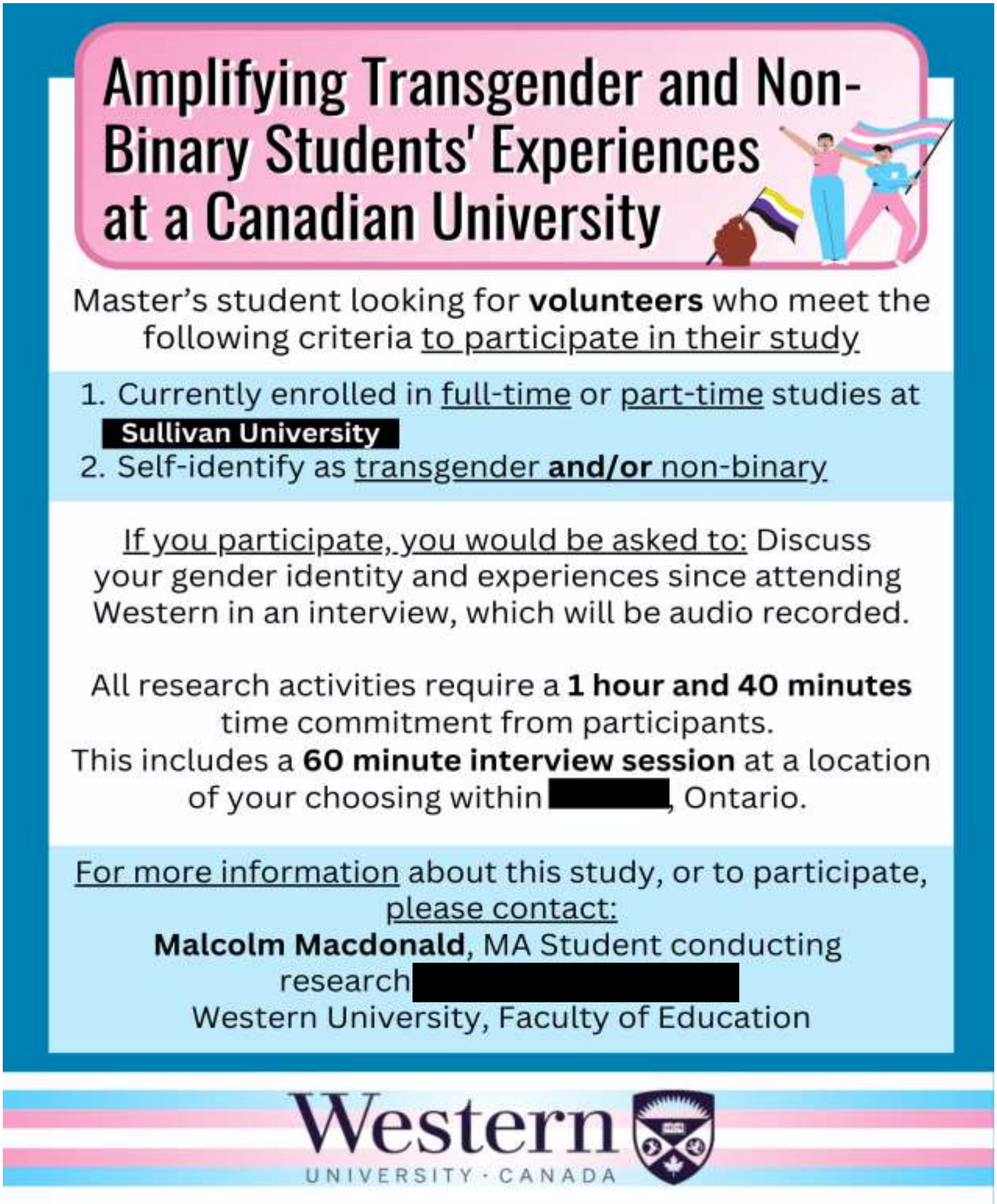
Conclusion

10. If you could tell the university administration one thing about our experiences on campus, what would it be?

11. If there anything you thought we would cover that we did not address? What would you like to say about this topic?
12. Do you have any final comments or questions?

Thank you for taking time out of your day to participate in my study. I will email a copy of this interview transcript for you to review in the coming days. Please make any necessary revisions and send it back to me by (2 weeks after the date the interview was conducted).

Appendix B - Recruitment Poster



Amplifying Transgender and Non-Binary Students' Experiences at a Canadian University

Master's student looking for **volunteers** who meet the following criteria to participate in their study

1. Currently enrolled in full-time or part-time studies at **Sullivan University**
2. Self-identify as transgender **and/or** non-binary

If you participate, you would be asked to: Discuss your gender identity and experiences since attending Western in an interview, which will be audio recorded.

All research activities require a **1 hour and 40 minutes** time commitment from participants.
This includes a **60 minute interview session** at a location of your choosing within [redacted], Ontario.

For more information about this study, or to participate, please contact:
Malcolm Macdonald, MA Student conducting research [redacted]
Western University, Faculty of Education

Western
UNIVERSITY · CANADA

Appendix C – Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title: Amplifying Trans and Non-Binary Graduate Students' Experiences at a Canadian University

Document Title: Letter of Information and Consent – Student

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wayne Martino, PhD, Education, Western University

1. **Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in this research study about transgender and non-binary students' experiences articulating and navigating gender on university campuses. You are invited because you self-identify as transgender or non-binary and are registered in full-time or part-time studies at Sullivan University.
2. **Why is this study being done?** The purpose of this study is to learn more about how transgender and non-binary students articulate and navigate their gender identity while on university campuses. The knowledge gained from conducting this research will generate insight into constructing safe campus environments for gender diverse students.
3. **How long will you be in this study?** There will be one study visit during your participation in this study and each visit will take approximately 1 hour. Including the time spend filling out paperwork and reviewing transcripts, participants will spend approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes of their time on the study.
4. **What are the study procedures?** If you agree to participate, then the Co-Investigator will reach out via email to set a time and location that works best for you and your personal comfort level. You will be one of up to ten (10) different participants completing a one-on-one interview with the Co-Investigator. You will not be required to interact with any other participants at any time. Your interview will be audio recorded to ensure your comments and opinions are recorded accurately and in their entirety.
5. **What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?** You may experience distress recounting your past experiences of transphobic violence. In this case, you are encouraged to access supports available to Sullivan University students, including but not limited to:
    1) Sullivan Mental Health Services – By Appointment

    2) Sullivan University Human Rights Office

    3) Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager

4) Good2Talk - Post-secondary Student Helpline (24/7 support)

5) Trans Lifeline

6) LGBT YouthLine – (24/7 support)

Participants are free to withdraw their data from the study at any time up until the publication of the thesis.

6. **What are the benefits of participating in this study?** The possible personal benefits to you may be an increased sense of inclusion, as the study discussions will provide a safe environment to reflect on your gender identity and experiences.
7. **Can participants choose to leave the study?** If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request (e.g., by phone, in writing, etc.) the withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed, please let the researcher know and your information will be destroyed from our records. Once the study has been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.
   It is important to note that a record of your participation must remain with the study, and as such, the researchers may not be able to destroy your signed letter of information and consent, or your name on the master list. However, any data may be withdrawn upon your request.
8. **How will participants' information be kept confidential?** Identifying information like names will not be revealed as a part of this study. The experiences, opinions, and direct quotations from all participants will be attributed to a pseudonym to preserve your privacy.
   The researcher will keep all personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for 7 years. A list linking your study pseudonym with your name and contact information will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your interview data. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used.
9. **Are participants compensated to be in this study?** You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.
10. **What are the rights of participants?** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on you/your academic standing at Sullivan University. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

11. **Whom do participants contact for questions?** If you have questions about this research study, please contact Principal Investigator: Dr. Wayne Martino.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

12. **Consent**

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be audio-recorded in this research:

☐ YES ☐ NO

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research:

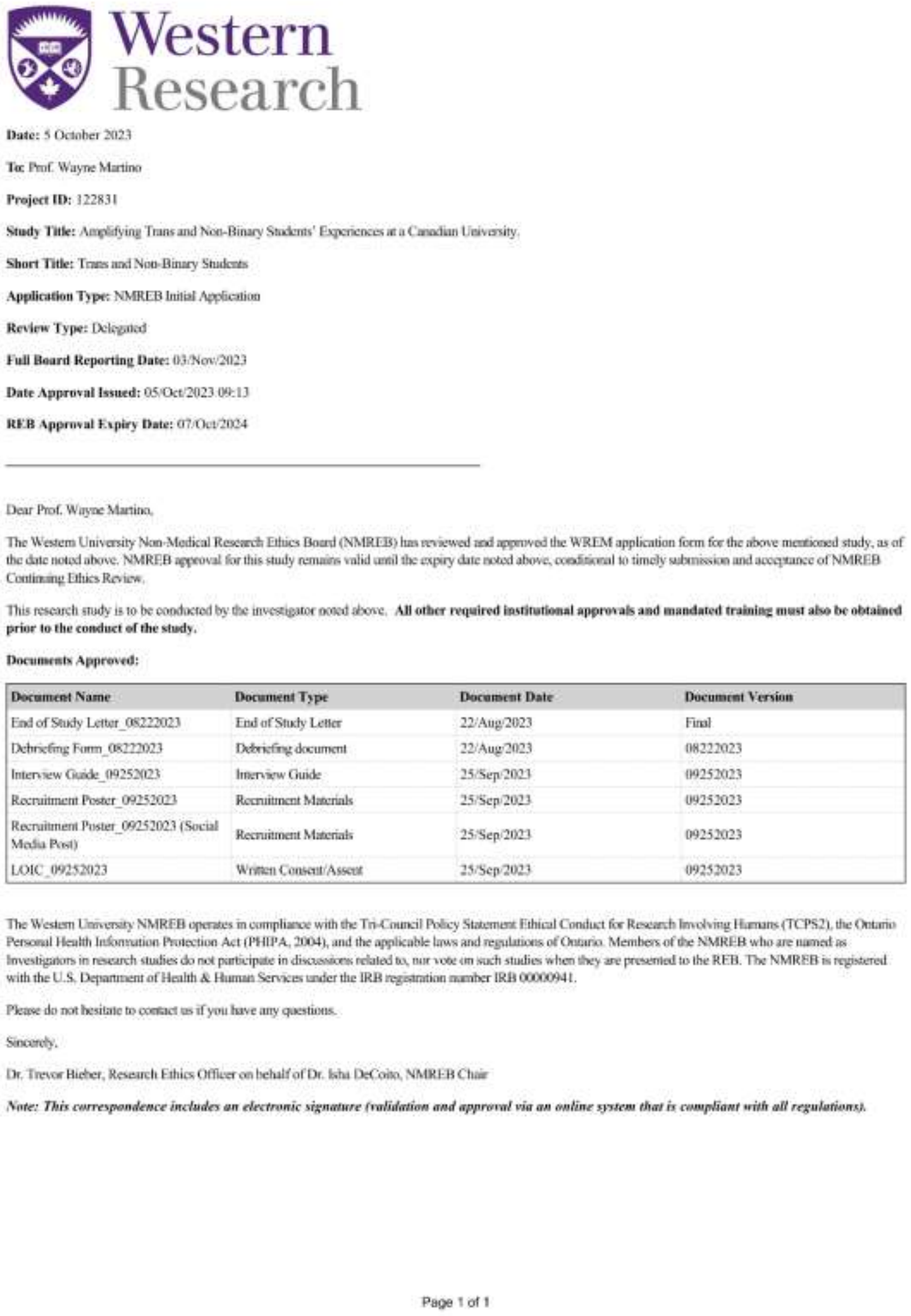
☐ YES ☐ NO

____________________	____________________	____________________
Print Name of Participant	Signature	Date (DD-MM-YYYY)

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

____________________	____________________	____________________
Print Name of Person	Signature	Date (DD-MM- YYYY)

Appendix D – Ethics Approval Notice



Western
Research

Date: 5 October 2023

To: Prof. Wayne Martino

Project ID: 122831

Study Title: Amplifying Trans and Non-Binary Students' Experiences at a Canadian University.

Short Title: Trans and Non-Binary Students

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 03/Nov/2023

Date Approval Issued: 05/Oct/2023 09:13

REB Approval Expiry Date: 07/Oct/2024

Dear Prof. Wayne Martino,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
End of Study Letter_08222023	End of Study Letter	22/Aug/2023	Final
Debriefing Form_08222023	Debriefing document	22/Aug/2023	08222023
Interview Guide_09252023	Interview Guide	25/Sep/2023	09252023
Recruitment Poster_09252023	Recruitment Materials	25/Sep/2023	09252023
Recruitment Poster_09252023 (Social Media Post)	Recruitment Materials	25/Sep/2023	09252023
LOIC_09252023	Written Consent/Assent	25/Sep/2023	09252023

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Trevor Bieber, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Isha DeCoito, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

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Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Malcolm Macdonald
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	Trent University Peterborough, Ontario, Canada 2018-2022: Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) – Philosophy
	The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2022-2024: Master of Arts in Educational Studies