

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone  
Projects

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

---

6-2020

### Transgender in College: Engaging Marginalized Collegiate Students

Lo Ferguson

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/3729](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3729)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).  
Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

TRANSGENDER IN COLLEGE:  
ENGAGING MARGINALIZED COLLEGIATE STUDENTS

by

LO FERGUSON

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

© 2020

LO FERGUSON

All Rights Reserved

Transgender in College: Engaging Marginalized Collegiate Students

by

Lo Ferguson

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Women and Gender Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

---

Date

---

Paisley Currah

Thesis Advisor

---

Date

---

Dana-Ain Davis

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

Transgender in College: Engaging Marginalized Collegiate Students as Leaders

by

Lauren Ferguson

Advisor: Paisley Currah

In an educational structure not built for marginalized students how can inequality be counteracted within the system itself? Specifically, what are the best practices to engage and empower transgender students within student involvement and leadership on college campuses, specifically through engagement within the Office of Student Life? This thesis theorizes that practices that are inclusive and respectful to transgender students creates climates that engage and retain them. It will establish an understanding of the basics of what being transgender means, discrimination that impacts this community, and reviewing the transgender collegiate experience. These cumulative aspects of the transgender experience will prove the need for specific policies and practices for these students on college campuses. In response to this foundation, this thesis outlines examples of needed policies to build inclusive spaces for transgender students. In implementing such procedures, campuses create safer and welcoming environments for students to flourish, and by moving the margin to the middle, Student Affairs can promote policies that are inclusive of all identities and highlight and encourage marginalized students to engage both socially and financially with the college, as well as counteract educational inequality. This research aims to lay the groundwork for more progressive policies and practices as the field of Student Affairs evolves with the students it serves.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	1
PART ONE: Establishing Transgender Oppression	
II. What is Transgender?.....	3
III. Transgender History.....	5
IV. Modern Transgender Discrimination.....	7
PART TWO: Collegiate Engagement and Transgender Experiences	
V. The Transgender Collegiate Experiences.....	11
VI. Student Engagement on College Campuses.....	16
VII. Supporting and Retaining Transgender Students.....	19
PART THREE: Practices and Policies that Engage Transgender Students	
VIII. Minimization of Harmful Experiences.....	22
IX. Explicit Steps and Actions to Address transphobia.....	26
X. Supporting Transgender Specific Spaces.....	30
XI. Recognizing Intersectional Experiences.....	32
XIII. Conclusion.....	35
XIV. Bibliography.....	37

## **Introduction**

Transgender people on a whole are a marginalized population, and on even the most liberal of college campuses, this experience is replicated. According to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 78% of transgender students reported harassment and bullying from not only fellow students, but staff and faculty as well (Grant 36). This experience is amplified in conjunction with the specific barriers transgender students may face, including limited access to housing, higher rates of unemployment, and a stronger likelihood to be rejected by family members. Transgender students of color experience these hardships at an even higher rate. These students' lived experience varies wildly from the general population as their lack of privilege may bar them from traditional occurrences, such as collegiate student involvement.

For a typical collegiate experience, student engagement has numerous positive impacts on students from resume-building to personal growth. Involved students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, are more likely to graduate from their institution if they are involved on campus (Creighton). Furthermore, as found by John D. Foubert Lauren U. Grainger in their article "Effects of Involvement in Clubs and Organizations on the Psychosocial Development of First-Year and Senior College Students," "involvement in student organizations has a strong association with psychosocial development, particularly on students' establishing and clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation" (Foubert 180). However, transgender students may be unable to access these experiences if gatekeepers, such as the Office of Student Life, are transphobic, meaning they are not transgender-friendly, and make the students feel unwelcomed. Even if these gatekeepers' intentions are positive, but lack the proper ally training, transgender students may experience

microaggressions or be subject to the community's unconscious biases. Due to these factors, transgender students may face particular challenges with involvement on their campuses.

As such, this thesis will theorize and argue that practices that are inclusive and respectful to transgender students create climates that engage and retain them. In implementing such policies, campuses create safe and welcoming environments for students to flourish, and by moving the margin to the middle, Student Affairs as a whole can promote policies that are inclusive of all identities and highlight and encourage marginalized students to engage both socially and financially with the college, as well as counteract educational inequality.

In order to institute a robust understanding of the collegiate transgender experience on college campuses, this paper will be split into three sections. It will begin with establishing the construction of gender, and how this directly impacts the transgender experience. A large amount of space will be occupied by giving a background of transgender people to allow proper context for their experiences and oppression. Next, by examining common practices of Student Affairs to engage students, and contrasting them with the lived experiences of transgender students, this thesis will build an argument for particular programming and policies for transgender students and establish that programming must be specific for it to be truly useful and engaging for transgender students. It will conclude with recommendations of methods to provide transgender students with a safe and engaging experience with student involvement.

## **PART ONE: Establishing Transgender Oppression**

### **What is Transgender?**

In the simplest of terms, “transgender” encompasses all those identifying with a gender different than that assigned at birth. GLAAD defines it as “an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth” (“GLAAD”). As established by numerous gender scholars, including Kate Bornstein, Judith Lorber, and Judith Butler, sex, or genitalia, does not determine gender, as gender is socially constructed<sup>1</sup>. In contrast to sex, gender identity is “a person's internal, deeply held sense of gender. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others” (“GLAAD”). Transgender people’s gender identity does not correlate with the gender they were assigned based on their sex. In contrast to transgender, the term cisgender labels all non-transgender people, or those who identify with the gender they are assigned at birth.

Transgender people are not limited to binary genders, meaning solely transgender women and transgender men. Although sex is culturally viewed as the binary male or female, this categorization has not been consistent over time and location, and thus cannot be considered the only designation for gender. Furthermore, the gender assignment that begins at birth based on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Judith Butler argues in her book *Gender Trouble* that gender, rather than inherent to identity, is an act. She says “gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (Butler 25). It should be noted that aspects of Butler’s assertion of gender performativity has been challenged by certain transgender scholars, notably Julia Serano. While Serano is not critical of Butler’s work, she is of the perverted interpretation of Butler’s writing of “all gender is drag” (Serano). As Serano says in *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, “many feminists have interpreted Butler’s writings to mean that one’s gender is merely a “performance”...the most often cited example of this is a drag queen whose “performance” supposedly reveals the way in which femaleness and femininity are merely a performance” (Serano 336). Put simply, Butler’s work focuses on the construction and “doing” of gender rather than arguing it is highly performative and gaudy.

appearance of the genitalia is not apt and is derivative from a cisnormative culture, and transgender people who fall outside the binary complicate this designation of gender. Genderqueer and non-binary classifications are defined as an identity in which “gender [is] falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms” (GLAAD). Genderqueer people do not exclusively identify as a binary gender, and depending on one’s identity, they may shift from gender to gender, lack a gender, or exist outside of the gender spectrum entirely. Genderqueer is not a third gender, rather, it is an umbrella term for all genders (or lack thereof) that exist outside of the binary. The language surrounding genderqueerness is still growing and refining to best support these communities. However, it is important to note the diversity of gender identity and expression within the transgender community.

Transgender people’s identity may not be immediately clear to them. The discovery of their gender identity can vary and is not consistent from person to person. Some transgender people understand their identity from a very early age, others do not make the discovery until much later in life (“Frequently”). One of the key symptoms that may lead to one discovering their transgender status is gender dysphoria. As recognized in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)<sup>2</sup>, gender dysphoria is a “marked difference between the individual’s expressed/ experienced gender and the gender others would assign [them]” (*Diagnostic*). This difference can manifest in discomfort, depression, and other trauma, as the person’s perceived gender does not correlate with their correct identity. While some

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the inclusion of gender dysphoria, referred to as gender identity disorder (GID) until 2013, within the DSM is controversial due to associating the phenomenon as a mental illness, rather than a symptom of the damaging role gender policing and adherence plays in western culture. Others argue that its inclusion makes medical transition more accessible to transgender people (Dreger).

transgender people utilize hormones therapy and gender confirming surgery to alleviate their dysphoria, not every transgender person does so, with reasons ranging from personal preference to safety to financial barriers. The presentation of transgender people can vary, and, as the GLAAD notes, passing as a man or woman is not a requirement for being transgender.

## **Transgender History**

Transgender people historically faced marginalization in the United States, from the infamous gender clinics to the gender-fueled tension leading up to the Stonewall riots. At least 28 transgender people in the United States were homicide victims in 2018, one of the highest annual totals on record (“Violence”). The discrimination they face stems from transphobia, which originates from gender panic. As outlined above, gender is very carefully constructed in western culture, and so deviation from that mode causes deep confusion. As gender is taught to be implicit, transgender people may be perceived as unnatural and perverse. Western human beings are made uncomfortable when one’s gender expression does not match their perceived gender assigned at birth, which leads to violence<sup>3</sup>. This discomfort has existed as long as the United States has, and perseveres into today’s culture. In the interest of space, this paper will provide only a broad overview of historical and systematic discrimination transgender people experience, but the following will outline the experiences of transgender people in America through the past 300 years.

Prior to 1800, the only recorded history of transgender people in the United States are third-gender people that existed in some Native American tribes. These people played special

---

<sup>3</sup> Contrary to those assigned male at birth, gender expression is more widely accepted in people assigned female at birth. Transgender women or gender variant people assigned male at birth, especially those who are people of color, experience higher rates of violence, as their perceived abandonment of privilege and status causes confusion (Flores).

roles in ceremonial and social structures (Katz). The modern term two-spirit has been coined by indigenous groups to describe transgender Native Americans. In other early American history, there were several notable transgender figures, including the genderless preacher who named themselves The Public Universal Friend and Thomasine Hall, an English indentured servant whose gender fluidity caused massive controversy in their community (Beemyn 503). However, while transgender people did exist, their lives were dangerous as their identities were not accepted. Genny Beemyn writes in their chapter “US History” in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*, “the extent to which such individuals were acknowledged in the colonies, it was largely to condemn their behavior as unnatural and sinful” (Beemyn 503). For example, Hall was brought to the courts because of their appearance, and was subject to judge-mandated public ridicule as punishment.

For early American transgender history, society as a whole was unwilling to name the transgender community, and they mostly existed in the shadows. A unified transgender community did not exist until 1895 when the first recorded American transgender advocacy group, the Cercle Hermaphrodites, was founded in New York City (Stryker 41). The group, in order to protect their safety, left very little record of their existence, and as such, not much is known about them. While transgender history continued along, notably with German physician Magnus Hirschfeld originating the term “transsexual” in 1923 and Christine Jorgensen’s massive rise to fame as one of the first people known to have gender affirmation surgery, it was not until the 1960s that transgender visibility increased and their role in society was examined. There were several important riots against gender policing and homophobia, with the most notable being the 1969 transgender women of color-led Stonewall Riots, which began the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement (Stryker 85).

In the last fifty years, transgender people slowly garnered more rights and a larger role in society, predominantly due to the work of activists within the transgender rights movement and the increased perceptibility of transgender people, including numerous transgender celebrities such as Janet Mock, Laverne Cox, and Caitlyn Jenner. While some of this visibility has not always been in a positive light (see *Ace Ventura's* Lois Einhorn or *Saturday Night Live's* Pat), within the last decade, more progressive representations and the demand for equality has increased. However, as will be explored below, transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, are still murdered and commit suicide at a disproportionate rate. They also face discrimination in the workplace, in community groups, and even within the LGBTQ+ community, meaning there is still work yet to be done. While this summation is brief in nature, the ultimate goal is to prove that American transgender people existed as long as this country has been populated, and to show that transgender people has historically faced marginalization, which plays into their modern trauma and lived experiences.

### **Modern Transgender Discrimination**

In examining modern discrimination, the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, published in 2011 by the The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality, has perhaps best outlined the marginalization modern American transgender people face. On a whole, transgender people experience inequality in every aspect of society due to transphobia, which the origins and reasons for were outlined above. The expectations of gender and the roles created for those genders are challenging for transgender people, as their placement outside of this structure can be confusing for both themselves and the cisgender people they interact with.

In brief, the survey found that transgender people experience extreme poverty, unemployment, had a higher chance of experiencing sexual or physical assault, and 41% has attempted suicide (as opposed to the 1.6% of the general population) (Grant). In both school and the workforce, transgender people are experiencing high rates of bullying, with 90% of transgender workers experiencing “harassment, mistreatment or discrimination on the job or took actions like hiding who they are to avoid it” (Grant). 19% of transgender people have experienced homelessness, and 19% were denied housing because of their gender identity. In other public spaces, such as hotels, restaurants, or government agencies, 53% reported experiencing verbal harassment or disrespect. 57% reported family rejection. Overall, 63% of respondents experienced a serious act of discrimination, or “events that would have a major impact on a person’s quality of life and ability to sustain themselves financially or emotionally” (Grant). Overwhelmingly, transgender people are experiencing marginalization in every aspect of their lives.

The survey also found that transgender people of color are facing particular oppression. In the survey’s executive summary, it was noted that “people of color in general fare worse than white participants across the board, with African American transgender respondents faring far worse than all others in most areas examined” (Grant). On the whole, black transgender people faced much higher rates of unemployment (28%) and harassment and assault by police (60%), while Native American transgender people experienced the highest rates of being denied housing (47%) and job loss due to race (36%).

In regards to education specifically, which will be expanded upon in the next section, the survey found “transgender and gender non-conforming people are currently unable to access equal educational opportunities because of harassment, discrimination and even violence. Our

data also shows the way this discrimination impacts educational attainment, which in turn affects other outcomes such as income, incarceration, health and suicidality, over respondents' life spans" (Grant). Furthermore, they found that there were barriers regarding their basic human rights including: "denial of campus housing (5%) denial of gender appropriate housing (20%), and denial of appropriate bathroom facilities" (Grant)<sup>4</sup>.

Outside of the survey, other sources confirm transgender student's marginalization on college campuses. In "Barred, bullied, depressed: life for many U.S. trans students," Rachel Savage echoes the survey as she notes "students who are trans or identify as neither man nor woman have been barred from using the bathroom of their choice, turfed out of dorms and called before disciplinary hearings to explain their gender reassignment. All that alongside a daily diet of abuse and isolation" (Savage). Much of this bullying comes directly from the institution itself. In a case cited in the article, transgender student Vincent McDonald was suspended for two terms after receiving gender-confirming surgery on the basis of sexual perversion and going against god's design from the religious Welch College. In a personal narrative, McDonald describes being removed from his dorm: "my roommate let the housing administration do the dirty work telling me, in a sterile office setting, that she had no interest in trying to understand me" (McDonald). While students may experience bullying from their fellow students, they also experience it from the university itself, leaving them with little access to resources. The experiences of transgender collegiate students will be further explored in a subsequent section.

Despite the marginalization transgender people face, the survey also found that the group as a whole is extremely resilient. In spite of systematic structures of discrimination, 76% of

---

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, despite the marginalization they face, transgender people are still attaining degrees at the same rate as the general population. The survey noted: "almost half of our sample had a college degree (27%) or a graduate degree (20%); this compares to a combined total of 27% of the general population with these degrees" (Grant).

respondents were able to access hormonal treatment, a notably 22% of older transgender students returned to school to pursue their education after previously dropping out (as opposed to 7% of the general population), and “of the 26% who reported losing a job due to bias, 58% reported being currently employed and of the 19% who reported facing housing discrimination in the form of a denial of a home/apartment, 94% reported being currently housed” (Grant). While this population faces social injustice, they are resilient. This may, in part, explain how many transgender students are able to complete their degrees and find community on college campuses despite their oppression.

Overall, the nascent oppression sprouted from gender panic, the toxicity of gender assignment, gender performance, and roles attached to gender designation. This anxiety led to the historical marginalization of transgender people, who typically fall outside of the designations and expectations aligned with gender. This discrimination has manifested in numerous ways throughout American history, from gender policing, to inaccessibility to basic human rights, to murder and death. In a so-called modern age, transgender people still experience a low quality of life and must fear for their own safety. Even at the university level, traditionally liberal spaces, transgender people are treated poorly in all aspects of the campus community.

## **PART TWO: Collegiate Engagement and Transgender Experiences**

### **The Transgender Collegiate Experience**

On college campuses, transgender students face marginalization. Unfortunately, the research surrounding transgender students on college campuses is not particularly rich, so it is challenging to declare exactly what they are experiencing. The primary bulk of research that exists on transgender students on college campuses comes from Z. Nicolazzo, particularly his book, *Trans\* in college: transgender students' strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional politics of inclusion*. In the text, Nicolazzo argues that the marginalization of transgender students on college campus ultimately affects retention rates for these communities. Ze notes in another article, “Exploring the Ways Trans\* Collegians Navigate Academic, Romantic, and Social Relationships,” co-authored by Antonio Duran, “trans\* students are academically and socially disadvantaged [at college] as a result of an inability to create important relationships,” including those with faculty and staff members (Duran 526). Their primary conclusion in regards to the relationships between transgender students and faculty were as follows:

Trans\* students shared needing faculty members to create an atmosphere in which they could express themselves. Yet, these collegians remarked on how faculty members either failed to draw attention to problematic statements asserted by their students or made such statements themselves, forcing participants to advocate for themselves and educate others at their own risk. These instances required students to assert...the “authority of experience,” in which they were only able to navigate the classroom by using their identity to gain access to the conversation at hand (Duran 535).

In this case, students express a need to be seen, but instead are given the responsibility to constantly advocate and provide education. This action creates a barrier between transgender students and faculty, which can bar them from important relationships needed for growth, mentorship, and education. Transgender students demand respect in the classroom, and the right to learn without having their identity examined and interrogated. In order to create more inclusive classrooms, Nicolazzo outlines that it is the school's responsibility to highlight the narratives of transgender people. Ze argues "by talking about trans\* issues on an individual level, people's perceptions of trans\* individuals may shift in positive ways. Conversely, if faculty create climates of support regarding trans\* people, then individual interactions between students of all genders reflect that same respect" (Duran 537).

Outside of the classroom, campus LGBTQ+ Resource Centers can provide community for transgender students. In Brent Bilodeu's article "Beyond the gender binary: a case study of two transgender students at a Midwestern research university," transgender students found benefit in having a LGBTQ+ organization or center on their campus. Bilodeu argues these spaces play a key role in supporting transgender identity development, as they build a sense of community, provides educational and health resources, and gives students a safe space to gather. In a 2012 proposal for John Hopkins University's first LGBT Resource Center, it was argued that "a lack of visible institutional support for LGBT faculty, staff, and students has contributed to a climate that prohibits this population from achieving their full potential as individuals and members of the Johns Hopkins community," noting that the lack of visible LGBTQ+ support on campus directly negatively impacts queer and transgender students ("LBGT"). The proposal argued that a LGBTQ+ Resource Center would counteract the isolation of LGBTQ+ campus members, improve the mental health of students who may experience bullying or harassment,

improve retention of LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, and students, and build community. The proposal was ultimately successful, with the 2013 establishment of the LGBTQ Life office.

However, it should be noted that LGBTQ+ centers are not on every college campus<sup>5</sup>, and as Bilodeu notes, may lack funding. Also, these spaces can be occupied predominantly by cisgender queer students, and may not be supportive of transgender people (Nicolazzo). In Abbie Goldberg's article "What is needed, what is valued: Trans' students' perspectives on trans-inclusive policies and practices in higher education," transgender students advocated their need for transgender-only spaces to build community and find resources in a safe way. The article also noted that if transgender students could not find in-person community, they often turned to the internet and social media to connect with other transgender people (Goldberg). In short, transgender people may not be able to find the resources and shared community they desire on a college campus, but are consistently seeking them out and asking for them<sup>6</sup>.

Other traditional collegiate spaces on campus may be inaccessible to transgender students. In Roxanna Jessica-Dyan Patton's 2012 thesis "The College Experiences of Transgender Students: Creating a Welcoming Environment on Campus," she points to the inadequacy of Greek life for transgender students, as sex is often a qualifying factor for joining an organization. She says "transgender students living on campuses lacking a Greek organization that accepts transgender students are forced to refrain from being a part of Greek life or to not disclose their sex assigned at birth" (Patton 10). In fact, some organizations specifically bar

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, within the City University of New York (CUNY) system, there exists only two formal LGBTQ+ resource center across the 25 campuses, located at the College of Staten Island and Brooklyn College ("CUNY").

<sup>6</sup> This notion is further complicated when noting that at many institutions, Student Life activities, including club funding and involvement programs, are funded by the student's mandatory student-activity fee. When students cannot access these offices, they are also actively paying for services they are barred from.

transgender people; in 2019, Zeta Phi Beta announced in a diversity statement that transgender women are not eligible for membership. However, there do exist several organizations which are inclusive of people based on their sexuality. Only one, Gamma Rho Lambda, is inclusive of all non-cisgender male identities. As of 2019, There currently only exist 20 active chapters and three colonies. Overall, Patton concluded by noting that “areas of student activities were not always welcoming” to transgender students (Patton 25).

Transgender students of color experience amplified discrimination, as not only do they face transphobia, but the intersection of racism as well. As noted before, transgender women of color are in particular danger due to the combined effects of racism and misogyny, and their murder rates are currently rising (Holter). At academic institutions, which were built upon and oftentimes amplify white supremacy, students of color are required to carefully navigate the system for their safety. The 2018 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that “one in seven black students feel physically unsafe on college campuses” (New)<sup>7</sup>. Other students of color reported similar feelings. Physical and mental violence is often a threat to students of color on college campuses; for example, in late 2019, a black female student at American University was violently taken from her room, as described by another student on campus on Twitter:

American University sent 7 officers into Gigi’s dorm room & removed her against her will. What should’ve been an earnest concern about the mental and emotional well-being of the student, was weaponized and used to permanently traumatize Gigi. Black and brown students have the right to feel safe in their dorms. Since the inappropriate

---

<sup>7</sup> The survey also found that gender-variant students experienced higher rates of feeling uncomfortable being themselves at their institution, feeling unsafe at their institution, and not feeling like part of the campus community (New).

"wellness check", Gigi has not been able to resume her classes and AU has forbidden her from entering back on campus - stating supposed safety concerns (@Anarchopology, Johnson).

While the institution is often at fault for creating unsafe conditions, outside factors also come into play. For example, in 2018, according to data compiled by CNN, historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) accounted for 25% of all school shootings while only making up about 2% of the total universities in the United States (Ahmed). Compounded, these facts point to a frightening experience for transgender students of color in particular, as their identities intersect both transphobia and racism.

Overall, transgender students are not able to access many of the experiences readily available to the general collegiate population. Traditional experiences, such as Greek life or clubs and organizations, may not have the tools to navigate supporting transgender members, and even queer focused groups may lack this ability as well. Transgender students expressed a need for intentional space created for them so they may feel safe to be involved. And while there is some research regarding the relationship between transgender students and student-led organizations and faculty members, there remains a question regarding their relationship with the Office of Student Life and professional-led leadership development. I hypothesize that, based on the research regarding transgender student experiences at college, in addition to the historical and cultural trauma they face, unless these offices are intentional regarding their programming and policies, transgender students will not be able to safely access their services.

## **Student Engagement on College Campuses**

Having established the barriers transgender students face in approaching student engagement, this section aims to state Student Affairs's goals for its students. As noted above, while these goals aim to support all students, transgender students in particular may not be able to access the department's resources. Once the aims of student engagement are established, the remainder of this thesis will aim to provide solutions to close the gap between Student Affairs and transgender students.

Engagement, in this case, means student involvement through Student Affairs, and, more specifically, Student Life offices. The purpose of the Office of Student Life is to provide collegiate students with a meaningful college experience outside of the classroom with co-curricular program, from leadership opportunities to community involvement. It predominantly aims to develop the student. These programs are vast and differ from institution to institution, but may include: programming, Greek life, Student Government, student clubs and organizations, and student unions. The practices of Student Life vary based on institution, since cultural and geographical factors may contribute to the university's mission. However, they share a common goal of developing students through engagement. As noted in *Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues and Best Practices*, the Office of Student Life should fulfill the following functions:

- Provide opportunities to imprint critical and creative thinking/problem-solving.
- Provide social and cultural opportunities that enhance the education and personal development of students.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and individual responsibility through participation and leadership in student activities and organizations.

- Provide opportunities to associate with others with similar interests.
- Provide opportunities for students to develop tolerance through understanding and appreciation of other cultures. (Ludeman 172).

These functions are fulfilled through providing recreation programs and services, including but not limited to: student government, student leadership training, student organizations, Greek life, and community service (Ludeman).

Overall, it should be noted that the Office of Student Life serves to create a more meaningful experience for collegiate students, and the benefits of their involvement for personal development and future careers cannot be understated. As outlined in the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), students who are involved in activities outside of the classroom typically perform better in their classes and are more likely to return to college the following semester (National). Additionally, the National Association of Student Activities outlines several competencies expected of involved students, including: leadership development, knowledge-based decision making, development of strong interpersonal relationships, collaboration, event management, intellectual growth, knowledge of diversity, social responsibility, and effective communication (Brill). If students achieve these capabilities, they will be more emotionally intelligent human beings, and ultimately more adjusted for life beyond the college campus. If a student does not feel that they can access this office, they also cannot access these benefits. Their collegiate experience is impacted negatively and they lose many of the advantages that make navigating the post-graduate landscape much easier.

Many of the activities of Student Life revolve around staff working directly with students, from advisement, training, to encouragement. These functions rely on forming meaningful relationships with students. Unsurprisingly, the NSSE found that “students perform

better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus” (National). Without forming these relationships, the functions of the office fails, and in turn, the purpose of the office as well. And, as noted above, if the office’s goals are not achieved, students are barred from the numerous benefits. On the part of students, involvement requires some level of vulnerability and hard work, and students must maintain a strong relationship with the office and the members of their involved community, for example, other members of their organization, in order to effectively engage and stay committed. The Office of Student Life may create this culture through hosting accessible programming and being intentional regarding the cultivation of student relationships. However, if an office or student group cannot maintain a healthy relationship with a group due to discrimination or lack of education, it problematizes the goals of engagement.

Within Student Life Offices on college campuses, staff aim to develop student’s skills and worldviews. They work towards this mission by creating programming and leadership opportunities that ask students to tackle challenging work and build community with other students. This work requires much vulnerability and buy-in from the students, but if they do participate, they receive all the positive consequences of engagement, from as specific as building a strong resume and as broad as developing life skills. However, for transgender students, they may be unable to access these spaces due to marginalization they may experience from staff members and other students. As many so-called safe spaces on campus may not actually be safe for them, from their own housing to the classroom, it can be argued that the Office of Student Life may not be accessible to them as well. Thus, they lose the benefits engagement offers and, once graduated, do not have the same skills as cisgender students. Due to

the historical and systematic oppression that transgender students experience, they need specialized policies and practices from the Office of Student Life and other leadership opportunities that emphasize transgender safety in order for them to safely garner the benefits of involvement as their cisgender counterparts.

### **Supporting and Retaining Transgender Students**

The culminate aspects of discrimination point to need for specific programming and practices to adequately engage transgender students. Knowing that the needs of transgender students may not be met within the context of traditional student engagement as outlined above, this thesis will now move towards the question of how to retain transgender students. Currently, very little is being done on an institution-wide level to ensure transgender students are safe and welcomed. Retention rates for LGBTQ+ students are not formally tracked by educational institutions<sup>8</sup>, however some data have been collected regarding transgender student's relationship with school. According to the NYCLU's report "Dignity for all? Discrimination Against Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students in New York," "More than half of [K-12] transgender youth stay away from school on a regular basis. Drop-out rates are staggering, and those who stay in school have lower grade point averages." ("Dignity" 8). Furthermore, according to the 2010 Campus Pride Index, "38 percent of transgender people surveyed said they seriously considered leaving their institution due to the challenging climate and the lack of on-

---

<sup>8</sup> The tracking of LGBTQ+ students on college campuses may be changing. Several colleges are now asking students to identify their gender identity and/or sexual orientation on admission forms, which will also for tracking the data of LGBTQ+ attendance and retention. While this data is not yet available, this action may allow for more robust research in the future (Windmeyer). The importance of having this information cannot be understated, as it will provide justification for the institution to shift resources and energy into projects that benefit LGBTQ+ students, once it is apparent how many are on campus.

campus support” (Windmeyer). Overall, without specifically cultivated practices and policies for these students, they are not willing to actively participate in engagement, which causes harm. However, this need is not currently being met, as the Campus Pride Index also noted that “less than 13 percent of colleges and universities prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and only about 6 percent have explicit protections inclusive of transgender people” (Windmeyer). As will be outlined below, these explicit protections are vital to retain transgender students.

As noted, to participate in engagement activities, transgender students must have a sense of safety. In order to create appropriate accessibility within collegiate engagement offices, numerous actions can be taken, but most significant is the creation of spaces that maintain the transgender student’s safety. In the John Hopkins proposal mentioned above, the piece emphasizes that, by building a space that provides safety and community for LGBTQ+ students, the overall mental health of students, faculty, and staff would improve, and community bonds would strengthen (“LGBT”). They argue the space would improve retention, increasing the student’s social, academic, and financial relationship with the institution. Without spaces that actively provides the resources LGBTQ+ students need to bridge the gap between themselves and accessing campus, these students may not participate, and ultimately leave the school. The spaces do not need to be LGBTQ+ specific (although that certainly helps), it simply means that engagement areas on college campuses, such as the Office of Student Life and their programming, as well as other student organizations, must cultivate spaces that are welcoming, affirming, and safe for students of all identities, including being transgender.

The remainder of this thesis will outline specific practices that allow transgender students to access college campuses' engagement spaces. I argue that there are four vital actions that will increase retention:

- Minimization of harmful experiences
- Explicit steps and actions to address transphobia within spaces
- Supporting transgender oriented spaces
- Recognizing intersectional lived experiences

These four methods were prioritized based on the goals of Student Affairs as a field and the needs of transgender students. As transgender students experience historical marginalization and trauma, they must be approached differently than the standard white, cisgender, able-bodied college student, predominantly using methods that prioritize their safety and intentionally build community and relationships with them. And as Student Affairs strives to provide all students with opportunities of growth and development, the field must adjust to accommodate these student's needs. The actions I outline were selected because they emphasize the elimination of harm while making community building attainable for transgender students. By combining these two primary focuses, transgender students do not experience further trauma, feel free from harm, and are able to achieve Student Affairs's goals. Below I will expand on each specific practice I suggest, why it is important, and how to perform it accurately.

## **PART THREE: Practices and Policies that Engage Transgender Students**

### **Minimization of Harmful Experiences**

In order to be retained and participate fully in engagement activities, transgender students must feel free from harm and be met with a welcoming climate and safe space within the Office of Student Life and its programming. Safe spaces are defined as a place where an individual can be certain they will not experience trauma based on their identity (Amenbar). It is a space where marginalized populations, who often are forced to weather the effects of white supremacy, discrimination, and microaggressions, can allow themselves to be more vulnerable, oftentimes through community building. Safe spaces should not be oriented on repressing a student's development, rather it aims to cultivate their growth in an environment they feel safe doing so. Nor do these spaces need to focus their action strictly on advocacy work; they rather serve to establish community agreements regarding respecting and supporting one another's identities. Offices of Student Life, where many different types of students, including those who are transgender, may enter, should strive to be safe spaces for their students in order to advance their student's growth. Based on a report by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, there are several recommended transgender-specific policies universities should follow in order to create safe spaces for transgender students. The most applicable to the Office of Student Life are listed as follows:

- "Students should be able to list their preferred name...
- Faculty/staff should be exposed to mandatory training on gender identity issues.
- Trans-specific spaces and/or groups should be created with sufficient resources to support programming and events" (Goldberg 12-14).

These recommendations will be further expanded upon below.

In order to create safe spaces with Offices of Student Life and student organizations, it is vital that transgender student's identities be valued in the office's programs and other areas of involvement. In simplest terms, and as recommended above, their identity can be respected by using the student's requested name and pronouns, regardless of their legal name or birth sex. By continually affirming the student's identity, it communicates to them that they are validated and respected in the space. In a recent study entitled "Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior Among Transgender Youth," it was found that "transgender youth who were able to use their chosen names in multiple contexts reported fewer depressive symptoms and less suicidal ideation and behavior. For transgender youth who choose a name different from the name given at birth, use of their chosen name in multiple contexts appears to affirm their gender identity and lower mental health risks known to be high in this group" (Russell 12). And in a 2014 study entitled "Experiences with Misgendering: Identity Misclassification of Transgender Spectrum Individuals," it was found that 32.8% of transgender people felt very stigmatized when misgendered (Mclemore 57). The study also noted that those who were misgendered frequently held a strong importance in their identity, but experienced low self-esteem. So, transgender students will not put their identity aside to participate in student engagement, and must be recognized for who they are in order for them to feel safe. The study also found that genderqueer people were the most likely to be misgendered, emphasizing the important of respecting all transgender student's identities, not solely the binary ones. And as the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reports 35% of transgender people are non-binary, this is a significant population to support (U.S.). Referring to a student's requested name and pronouns is a critical and most basic step in cultivating spaces that are accessible to transgender students.

While using a student's correct name and pronouns is vital, this action does not combat what are commonly referred to as "microaggressions," which they may face from Student Life staff or other student leaders. This action is "a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group," and in within this thesis will be referred to as transphobic abuse<sup>9</sup> ("microaggression"). Examples of this type of transphobic abuse include expressing cisnormative views that may other transgender student's lived experience, asking intrusive questions about their body, or making assumptions based on the student's identity. While microaggressions as they apply to transgender people have not been thoroughly researched, a review of racial abuse in this context found that it causes the recipient to feel anger, frustration, and sadness and this may affect the person's physical health over time, including diminished confidence and potential mental health issues (Sue)<sup>10</sup>. The effect of physical harm of this type of abuse causes over time has not been adequately researched. Thus, if a student encounters a staff member or student leader who abuses them, they will not feel welcome or safe in the spaces they are offering. It should be noted that there are countless types of abuse transgender people may face, and that the Offices of Student Life must continually assess their relationship with transgender people and examine if they are causing harm. As such, there is great importance of education and ally training for any campus member interacting with a transgender person.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibram X. Kendi argues in his book *How to Be Antiracist* against the term microaggression when applied to people of color. He says: "a persistent daily low hum of racist abuse [referred to as a microaggression] is not minor. I use the term "abuse"...abuse accurately describes the action and its effects on people: distress, anger, worry, depression, anxiety, pain, fatigue, and suicide" (Kendi 46-47). I agree that this same principle can be applied to transgender people, as the effects of so-called microaggressions cause are similar. However, the term "microaggression" is helpful for identifying the type of abuse transgender people are facing.

<sup>10</sup> At this time, there has been insubstantial research reading the effect of microaggressions on a specifically transgender population. However, some of these results, as they are based on the minimization of one's identity, can be applied here.

While there are numerous resources online and within the community, one of the most common types of ally training accessible to campus communities is Safe Zone programs. There is very little information regarding the history of the trainings, and the term “Safe Zone” has become a catch-all for many campus’ ally trainings (“What”). According to the national website, the ally trainings are “opportunities to learn about LGBTQ+ identities, gender and sexuality, and examine prejudice, assumptions, and privilege” (“What”). As an example, the University of Washington lists the content of their Safe Zone training as follows:

“[Safe Zone includes] basic information on human sexuality, sexual and gender orientation, sexual and gender identity, and sexual and gender expression. Many of the “I-should-have-known-that” kinds of questions are discussed in a learner-friendly welcoming atmosphere. You will confront your internalized homophobia/heterosexism (we all have it, we are trained to have it!). You will become familiar with the “tools” of an ally, which will help you to create safer, more affirming spaces for all your students and colleagues” (“Safer”).

Oftentimes, at the completion of the training, participants are given a sticker or placard for them to display outside their office that signifies clearly that they have received training and are an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. This training can provide the tools to be an effective ally, but also provides LGBTQ+ students with a visual marker that there are safe spaces for them on campus. However, it should be noted that training can vary from campus to campus, making it difficult to assess the value of specific programs. Furthermore, ally training cannot be limited to Safe Zone, and staff members must be required and given the resources to attend multiple ally trainings over time<sup>11</sup>. And while staff must do constant work to undo learned internal biases and

---

<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, ally training is often most effective for those who are receptive and open to learning, and is not extensive enough to change deeply-rooted transphobic mindsets. If members

minimize harm for their transgender students, they must also plan for when transphobia does occur.

The final aspect of the William's Institute recommendations to creating safe spaces for transgender students, the cultivation of trans specific spaces, will be explored in the following sections.

### **Explicit Steps and Actions to Address Transphobia**

While Offices of Student Life should aim to be radical in their approach to transgender students, that is, getting to the root of the issue in preventing harm, it would be irresponsible to not prepare for occurrences of violent transphobia within the office and at programming. This type of abuse goes farther than well-meant aggressions; it is the willful and intentional harm placed upon transgender people, ranging from purposefully misgendering/dead-naming<sup>12</sup> to acts of physical, mental, or sexual violence. In order to combat this abuse, staff members must construct specific action-plans. Furthermore, this planned policy must also be executed. While large-scale occurrences of transphobia should be handled by the Office of Student Conduct and falls beyond the responsibility of the Office of Student Life, the trauma of transphobia will directly affect the communities they serve. Especially if the event occurs within the Office of Student Life itself or its programming, the office has a responsibility to respond and affirm transgender students in any way it can in order to continually engage them<sup>13</sup>. It is important to

---

of staff are openly transphobic, which causes harm to students, they must be removed from their position to minimize violence and provided transformative justice training.

<sup>12</sup> Deadnaming is “the term used in the trans community for calling a trans person by our assigned name at birth”. When done intentionally, it aims to distress the transgender person and shame them for their identity. Similarly to misgendering, it causes transgender people harm. (Talusán).

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Office should plan to address currently-existing transgender exclusionary policies within its own department. For example, if Greek organizations on campus bar

create these plans as the Office of Student Life can continually demonstrate their support of transgender students and create safer communities, which will encourage their participation in engagement activities.

Unfortunately, very few institutions as a whole, much less Offices of Student Life, have nondiscrimination policies for transgender students. As noted above, the Campus Pride Index found “only about 6 percent [of universities] have explicit protections inclusive of transgender people” (Windmeyer). Of those that existed, according to lawyer Isaac Mamaysky, they “lacked clear policies and institutional consistency in their response to the needs of the transgender community” (Mamaysky). However, in the cases of addressing racism on college campuses, the American Council of Education recommended the following steps after encountering a racist crisis:

- Prepare a strategic diversity and inclusion plan as a way to address racism
- Give students space to speak and process their trauma and grief
- Form an action plan that addresses student’s emotions

In addressing feelings, staff should give students space to speak honestly without fear of political spin, listen actively, and work directly with the group in moving forward. Additionally, the report strongly advised against the common action colleges take, which includes launching a task force/committee and providing recommendations. It argues that it is “destructive to campus communities that need authentic engagement from their leaders,” because it does not engage with the student’s emotions or work with them to find solutions (Kezar IX). As such, if applying these recommendations to acts of transphobia, reactions should involve the student community,

---

transgender people from joining their organization based on gender assigned at birth, the Office of Student Life must address it.

place great value on their voices and emotions, and give them agency to decide how to address the occurrence.

The protocol to address acts of transphobia within the office or programming of the Office of Student Life should be created and accepted with total group buy-in so that all are willing to execute it and support it. Furthermore, it should be communicated to higher ranking members of Student Affairs and the Office of Student Conduct, so that the Student Life office will have institutional support and ensure the policies are appropriate for the scope of the office. The cultivation of a plan not only provides cisgender members of staff with tools to minimize harm to transgender students and provide restorative justice, it also demonstrates to transgender students that engagement activities are safe and welcoming, as labor has been dedicated to minimize transphobia.

These action plans can, and should, vary from institution to institution based on the campus climate and the needs and identities of its student population. Transgender people, particularly those who are facilitators or community organizers, should be consulted in the creation of this plan, and they must be compensated. Most importantly, these plans should address transphobic behavior and actions with swift action and be based in a restorative justice framework. Restorative justice focuses on transformation of those who cause harm, rather than utilizing punishment. As outlined by adrienne maree brown in her book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, transformative justice has four major tenets: it “acknowledges the reality of state harm, looks for alternative ways to address/interrupt harm, relies on creative strategies that are community created and sustained, and transforms the root cause of violence, not only the individual [who does harm] experience (brown 35). Most significant is the final tennet, for if the root cause of transphobia is not addressed, it will continue

to perpetuate abuse. If a student is expelled based on transphobia, and their mindset is not transformed, the root cause of transphobia has not been addressed. Furthermore, transformative justice is effective: according to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire, 85% of victims are satisfied by the work restorative justice does and it minimizes repeat offenders by 14% (“What”). While the Office of Student Life is not responsible for penalizing a student for transphobia, they may have to plan for how to reintegrate the perpetuating student back within engagement, of which restorative justice is a strong tool for providing healing for all.

The framework for restorative justice includes: “safety, healing, and agency for all survivors, accountability and transformation for people who do harm, community action, healing, and group/organization accountability, and transformation of social conditions that perpetuated violence” (Brown 136). It is vital to use the restorative justice framework to the anti-transphobic policies of the Office of Student Life. If done so, transphobia will become less and less prevalent within engagement activities, reducing harm to the transgender student. Furthermore, it will also transform the person who does harm, which aligns with the goals of Student Affairs which was outlined above.

Finally, the policies created must be utilized. As noted above, institutions are not often consistent in their follow up of transphobia and addressing the needs of transgender students. In order to create a safe environment for transgender students, it is vital that consequences exist for acts of transphobia, and the root cause is addressed. Furthermore, transgender students should be frequently surveyed to examine if the policies are adequate to address their needs. In doing so, harm can be minimized within the Office of Student Life and its programming.

## **Supporting Transgender Specific Spaces**

Once an Office of Student Life can ensure transgender students will have minimized harmful experiences by those in the office and have put protections in place for acts of transphobia in their office and at their programming, the office must shift its focus to cultivating and supporting communities that prioritize transgender people. It is vital to do so as bolstering these spaces proves safety and community for the transgender community, making it more accessible for them to join engagement activities.

For example, in the report “Transgender prejudice reduction and opinions on transgender rights: Results from a mediation analysis on experimental data,” it was found that an increase of representation of transgender people reduced transphobia, which led to an increase in the support of the transgender community (Flores). Additionally, seeing representations of themselves can be empowering to transgender people, as they are often rendered invisible in media. In supporting transgender specific communities and programming, the Office of Student Life can both educate and transform allies while also providing needed spaces for transgender students. Examples of community-oriented spaces in which members share similar identities or world views include Greek organizations, student clubs, and transgender-exclusive student programming. I do not argue that students should segregate themselves, rather, it is empowering for students to connect with people who share their same identities.

As noted above by the William’s Institute in the recommendations to build safe spaces for transgender people, Offices of Student Life must support not only LGBTQ+ spaces, but ones that are also transgender specific, as LGBTQ+ spaces can become transphobic or only focused on sexuality and may ostracize the transgender identity, making spaces for gender diverse people vital. Transgender-specific organizations allow their members space to live authentically, build

community, and develop social and leadership skills without risking their safety. In “Psychosocial and Leadership Identities Among Leaders of Identity-Based Campus Organizations,” it was found that “at the point of being a leader in an identity-based group, students’ leadership identities and psychosocial identities promoted a cycle of increased identification as leader and as, for example.... transgender” (Renn 20). These spaces empower both students' identities and their leadership skills. Examples of transgender-specific organizations at the University of California, Berkely, a traditionally liberal institution, include T-Cal, a social organization, and Trans\*Action, an activist-focused group (“On-Campus”). In order to thrive, transgender-specific organizations should be supported by the Office of Student Life. While these spaces should not be wholly occupied by staff, institutional support is vital. This support may include, but is not limited to, funding, providing meeting space, recognition for their work, and facilitating transgender-specific student programming. Additionally, the student leaders in transgender-based organizations should be able to enter the Office of Student Life, interact with its staff, and receive resources safely and without fear of abuse.

Community-oriented spaces should not always require labor from the transgender student to be made to feel welcome. Another vital aspect to building this community is to provide accurate representations of the transgender experience in campus programming, most often created by the Office of Student Life. The people orchestrating all types of transgender programming, typically staff members, should ensure that all information given and shared about the transgender community is accurate and respectful of transgender people. Similarly to building action plans, transgender people (not necessarily students) should be consulted to ensure the programming is accurate, and they should be appropriately compensated for doing so. This programming removes the labor from transgender students to educate others on how to interact

with them, as well as the labor of building their own community spaces, and shows them that the Office of Student Life/student organizations are making steps to ensuring the campus is a safe place for transgender students.

Transgender specific programming typically manifest in two ways: education and/or celebration. Educational programming should focus on building awareness of the transgender community and giving cisgender people tools for understanding the lived experience of transgender people. Programming can include ally trainings, workshops, Trans Day of Remembrance vigils, etc. Celebratory programming focuses on uplifting the transgender experience, rather than their traumatic lived experience, which does not make space to honor their lives and identities. Examples of this programming include Transgender Pride, Trans Day of Visibility, Coming Out Day, etc. These events give transgender students space to see their identity represented in a positive manner, while also allowing themselves to celebrate their identity and meet other transgender people in a safe space. In creating environments that are actively strengthen and encourage the transgender community, Offices of Student Life can cultivate an environment that is safe and welcoming for transgender students. And by seeing themselves actively represented in the collegiate community, transgender students will be more amenable to interact with engagement spaces.

### **Recognizing Intersectional Experiences**

Transgender students are not limited in oppression to simply their gender identity. Numerous factors may contribute to discrimination and disadvantages they face. By taking an intersectional approach to recognizing students' lived experiences, a wider view of the complex

prejudice they face can be recognized, and ultimately be factored into how Offices of Student Life engages with their transgender students.

The term intersectionality was first formally introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her 1989 article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” She argues that the experience of being a black woman cannot be singularly understood through the independent identity of “black” or “woman,” but rather how these identities interact with one another to create new lived experiences and oppressions (Crenshaw). In the case of transgender people, as noted earlier, transgender people of color experience higher rates of oppression, and they make up a large percentage of the transgender community. According to the Williams Institute, of all transgender people, 16% are Black, 21% are Latinx, and 8% identify as other races (Flores 2). However, race cannot be the only factor, albeit it is a vital one. Consideration for socioeconomic status, health, ability, citizenship, education, etc. must be taken into account when considering a transgender student’s entire identity and how to properly approach and engage them.

As explored above, the student’s entire humanity and experience must be recognized for their safety within spaces of engagement, and in order to so, curators of such spaces must be knowledgeable regarding not only a student’s individual identities, but also their intersections. In order to support these students, Student Affairs professionals must educate themselves on the lived experiences of all types of marginalized identities, especially race, and consider those factors when interacting with students. While Safe Zone trainings are a first step for engaging with transgender students, staff members must be committed to training and education regarding all types of oppression. Additionally, they must continually work to dismantle white supremacy

as it appears in their programming and office. In doing so, they may garner a greater understanding of their students' lived experiences.

Once an understanding of intersectional identities is established, it must be factored into the programming provided by the Office of Student Life. In order to do so, the office's practices must be surveyed in order to examine how accessible it is to transgender students of all lived experiences. Examples of questions to ask include:

- Is there a gender-inclusive restroom near the programming/office? It is accessible to all bodies?
- Is there a financial barrier for transgender students to attend this programming? Can scholarships/funding be provided?
- Are trans-femme people receiving institutional support/community support? Where can we grow?
- Is the timing of our office hours/programming accessible to all, including those who take night classes, work full time, or have long commutes?
- How is the Office of Student Life addressing racism within the office, within student organizations, and at programming? Is white supremacy actively being dismantled at our programming? Is our viewpoint antiracist?
- How are the staff members of the Office of Student Life interacting with transgender people of color, particularly those who are femme?

These questions are but a small sample of inquiries that must be asked by the Office of Student Life to ensure their office/programming is accessible to all transgender people, and others queries must be pursued. These questions should prioritize identities that are traditionally marginalized. Only when the office has a thorough understanding of how it interacts with all

types of transgender students, and corrects behavior where needed, can the office and its programming become truly accessible. Furthermore, once changes are put in place, they will also benefit cisgender students who may fall into these marginalized identities as well. In doing this work, the Office of Student Life can ensure they are fully providing for all of its students.

## **Conclusion**

Due to western notions of gender, the American transgender community has faced continuous marginalization and oppression beginning at the inception of the country. This historical trauma has left transgender students on college campuses navigating transphobia in spaces that claim to support their growth, and traditional student engagement/retention techniques may not adequately meet their needs and allow them to safely access involvement. As such, transgender people, having a distinctively unique experience as a marginalized community, need specialized policies and practices with Offices of Student Life in order to access the resources properly. Offices of Student Life, who facilitates engagement activities and aim to develop all students within their programming, must adapt in order to adequately involve transgender students. They must do so in order to fulfill their mission as an office, which includes developing students as leaders, enhancing their social skills, and preparing them for life outside of college. This thesis argued that practices that are inclusive and respectful to transgender students creates climates that engage and retain them.

In order to engage students within their programming, Offices of Student Life must minimize harm within their offices and programming, create specific plans to address transphobia, support the transgender specific clubs, organizations, and programming occurring within their office, and orient their mission and actions within an intersectional approach. In

doing so, the Office of Student Life, can create an explicit image and follow-through to indicate safety and welcome to transgender students. Without these specific steps, transgender students will not reap the same benefits afforded to their cisgender counterparts.

In implementing such policies, campuses create safer and welcoming environments for students to flourish, and by moving the margin to the middle, Student Affairs can promote policies that are inclusive of all identities and highlight and encourage marginalized students to engage both socially and financially with the college, as well as counteract educational inequality. This research aims to lay the groundwork for more progressive policies and practices as the field of Student Affairs evolves with the students it serves. Moving forward, in order to complete its mission of engaging and developing students, Offices of Student Life must prioritize and elevate the voices, lived experiences, and needs of its marginalized students.

## Bibliography

- Amenabar, Teddy. "The New Language of Protest." *The Washington Post*, 19 May 2016.
- @Anarchopology. "On Sept. 27 American University Sent 7 Officers into Gigi's Dorm Room & Removed Her against Her Will. What Should've an Earnest Concern about the Mental and Emotional Well-Being of the Student, Was Weaponized and Used to Permanently Traumatize Gigi. There Will Be a Rally Oct 28." *Twitter*, 25 Oct. 2019.
- Ahmed, Saeed, and Christina Walker. "There Has Been, on Average, 1 School Shooting Every Week This Year." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 25 May 2018, [www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/us/school-shootings-2018-list-trnd/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2018/03/02/us/school-shootings-2018-list-trnd/index.html).
- Beemyn, Genny. "US History." *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 501–535.
- Brill, Ken. "Competency Guide for Collegiate Student Leaders." *Campus Activities Programming*, March 2009.
- brown, adrienne maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, 2017.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.
- Creighton, Linda M. "Factors Affecting the Graduation Rates of University Students from Underrepresented Populations." *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, vol. 11, July 2007.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139–167.
- "CUNY LGBTQ Resources." *The City University of New York*,

[www2.cuny.edu/academics/academic-programs/lgbtq-studies/cuny-lgbtq-resources/](http://www2.cuny.edu/academics/academic-programs/lgbtq-studies/cuny-lgbtq-resources/).

*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*. American Psychiatric Association, 2017.

*Dignity For All: Discrimination against Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students in New York State*. New York Civil Liberties Union, 2015.

Dreger, Alice. "Why Gender Dysphoria Should No Longer Be Considered a Medical Disorder." *Pacific Standard*, 18 Oct. 2013, [psmag.com/social-justice/take-gender-identity-disorder-dsm-68308](http://psmag.com/social-justice/take-gender-identity-disorder-dsm-68308).

Duran, Antonio, and Z Nicolazzo. "Exploring the Ways Trans\* Collegians Navigate Academic, Romantic, and Social Relationships." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 58, no. 4, May 2017, pp. 526–544.

Flores, Andrew. *Race and Ethnicity of Adults Who Identify as Transgender in the United States*. The Williams Institute, 2016.

Flores, Andrew, et al. "Transgender Prejudice Reduction and Opinions on Transgender Rights: Results from a Mediation Analysis on Experimental Data." *Research & Politics*, vol. 5, no. 1, 19 Mar. 2018.

Flores, Jayson. "How to Explore Your Gender When You're a Person Who Was Assigned Male at Birth." *Everyday Feminism*, 22 Jan. 2016, [everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/exploring-gender-as-amab/](http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/07/exploring-gender-as-amab/).

Foubert, John D. and Lauren A. Urbanski. "Effects of Involvement in Clubs and Organizations on the Psychosocial Development of First-Year and Senior College Students." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2006.

“Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People.” *National Center for Transgender Equality*, 9 July 2016,  
[transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people](http://transequality.org/issues/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-transgender-people).

*GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Transgender*. GLAAD, The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, April 2017.

*GLAAD Media Reference Guide 10th Edition*. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, October 2016.

Goldberg, Abbie E. *Transgender Students in Higher Education*. The Williams Institute, 2018.

Goldberg, Abbie E. “What Is Needed, What Is Valued: Trans Students’ Perspectives on Trans-Inclusive Policies and Practices in Higher Education.” *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2018, pp. 27–67.

Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011.

Holter, Lauren. “The Murder Rate Of Transgender Women In The U.S. Isn't Declining.” *Refinery29*, 24 Apr. 2017, [www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/04/151401/transgender-women-murder-rate-us-2017](http://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/04/151401/transgender-women-murder-rate-us-2017).

Johnson, Elin. “Forced Removal of Student Prompts Protest.” *Inside Higher Ed*, 31 Oct. 2019, [www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/31/american-university-students-protest-mistreatment-black-student](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/31/american-university-students-protest-mistreatment-black-student).

Katz, Jonathan Ned. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* The Hearst Corporation , 1976.

- Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Antiracist*. One World, 2019.
- Kezar, Adrianna. *Speaking Truth and Acting with Integrity: Confronting Challenges of Campus Racial Climate*. American Council on Education, 2018.
- Kheraj, Evaan. "What It Means to Be Intersex." *Teen Vogue*, 27 June 2017, [www.teenvogue.com/story/what-it-means-to-be-intersex](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-it-means-to-be-intersex).
- "LGBT Resource Center Proposal." *Johns Hopkins University*, Johns Hopkins Diversity Leadership Council, 17 Oct. 2012, [web.archive.org/web/20181013072129/http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/initiatives/recommendations\\_proposals/lgbt\\_resource\\_center/index.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20181013072129/http://web.jhu.edu/dlc/initiatives/recommendations_proposals/lgbt_resource_center/index.html).
- Lorber, Judith. "Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender." *Paradoxes of Gender*, Yale University Press, 1994.
- Ludeman, Roger B, "Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues and Best Practices." *International Association of Student Affairs and Services*, 2009.
- Mamaysky, Isaac. "Special Policies for Transgender Minors on Campus." *University Business Magazine*, 3 Dec. 2019, [universitybusiness.com/special-policies-for-transgender-minors-on-campus/](http://universitybusiness.com/special-policies-for-transgender-minors-on-campus/).
- Mclemore, Kevin A. "Experiences with Misgendering: Identity Misclassification of Transgender Spectrum Individuals." *Self and Identity*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2014, pp. 51–74.
- McDonald, Vincent. "I Got Kicked Out of My Dorm for Being Transgender." *College Magazine*, 6 Nov. 2016, [www.collegemagazine.com/kicked-out-dorm-transgender/](http://www.collegemagazine.com/kicked-out-dorm-transgender/).
- "microaggression, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2019. Web.
- "National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)." *Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on*

*the Quality of Undergraduate Education*, 2009.

New, Jake. “NSSE Survey Finds Lack of Support, Unsafe Feelings among Minority Students.”

*Inside Higher Ed*, 17 Nov. 2016, [www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/17/nsse-survey-finds-lack-support-unsafe-feelings-among-minority-students](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/17/nsse-survey-finds-lack-support-unsafe-feelings-among-minority-students).

Nicolazzo, Z. “‘Just Go In Looking Good’: Resilience, Resistance, and Kinship-Building of Trans\* College Students.” *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 57, no. 5, July 2016, pp. 538–556.

Nicolazzo, Z. *Trans\* in College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion*. Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2017.

“On-Campus Organizations.” *On-Campus Organizations | Campus Climate, Community Engagement & Transformation*, UC Berkeley Division of Equity and Inclusion.

Patton, Roxanna Jessica-Dyan. “The College Experiences of Transgender Students: Creating a Welcoming Environment on Campus.” *Wright State University*, 2012.

Renn, Kristen A., and C. Casey Ozaki. “Psychosocial and Leadership Identities among Leaders of Identity-Based Campus Organizations.” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 14–26.

Russell, Stephen T., et al. “Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior Among Transgender Youth.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2018, pp. 503–505.

“Safer Zone.” *University of Washington*, 14 Jan. 2019, [depts.washington.edu/qcenter/wordpress/education/safe-zone/](https://depts.washington.edu/qcenter/wordpress/education/safe-zone/).

Savage, Rachel. “Barred, Bullied, Depressed: Life for Many U.S. Trans Students.” *Reuters*,

- Thomson Reuters, 16 Aug. 2019, [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-education/barred-bullied-depressed-life-for-many-u-s-trans-students-idUSKCN1V609P](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-education/barred-bullied-depressed-life-for-many-u-s-trans-students-idUSKCN1V609P).
- Serano, Julia. "Julia Serano on Judith Butler." *Whipping Girl*, 11 Sept. 2015, [juliaserano.blogspot.com](http://juliaserano.blogspot.com).
- Serano, Julia. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Seal Press, 2007.
- Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History*. Seal Press, 2017.
- Sue, Derald Wing. "Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 39, 2008, pp. 329–336.
- Talusan, Meredith Ramirez. "What 'Deadnaming' Means, and Why You Shouldn't Do It to Caitlyn Jenner." *Splinter*, Splinter, 24 July 2017, [splinternews.com/what-deadnaming-means-and-why-you-shouldn-t-do-it-to-1793848137](http://splinternews.com/what-deadnaming-means-and-why-you-shouldn-t-do-it-to-1793848137)
- "U.S. Transgender Survey." *National Center for Transgender Equality*, 2015.
- Windmeyer, Shane. "The Path Forward: LGBT Retention and Academic Success." *Insight Into Diversity*, 16 May 2016, [www.insightintodiversity.com/the-path-forward-lgbt-retention-and-academic-success/](http://www.insightintodiversity.com/the-path-forward-lgbt-retention-and-academic-success/).
- "What Is Restorative Justice?" *YouTube*, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire, 19 Nov. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfQhfN6PxPI&feature=emb\\_title](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfQhfN6PxPI&feature=emb_title).
- "What Is Safe Zone?" *The Safe Zone Project*, [thesafezoneproject.com/about/what-is-safe-zone/](http://thesafezoneproject.com/about/what-is-safe-zone/).
- "What's Wrong with the Way Intersex Has Traditionally Been Treated?" *What's Wrong with the Way Intersex Has Traditionally Been Treated? | Intersex Society of North America*, 2008, [www.isna.org/faq/concealment](http://www.isna.org/faq/concealment).