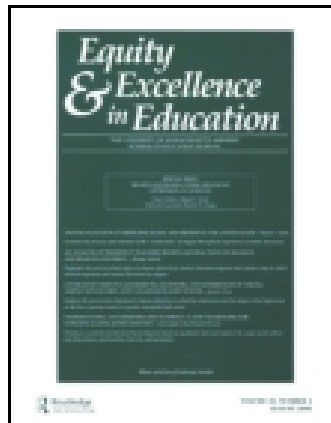


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D. Chase J. Catalano^a

^a Syracuse University

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Beyond Virtual Equality: Liberatory Consciousness as a Path to Achieve Trans* Inclusion in Higher Education

D. Chase J. Catalano
Syracuse University

Trans* men have not, as yet, received specific research attention in higher education. Based on intensive interviews with 25 trans* men enrolled in colleges or universities in New England, I explore their experiences in higher education. I analyze participants' descriptions of supports and challenges in their collegiate environments, as well as advice they offer to other trans* men in college. I offer liberatory consciousness as a model that higher education staff and faculty can use to attend to the needs for trans* men's inclusion in higher education.

The image of Laverne Cox on the cover of *Time Magazine* with the corresponding article entitled "The Transgender Tipping Point: America's Next Civil Rights Frontier" (Steimetz, 2014) signals the arrival of trans* identities into mainstream culture's visibility. This arrival comes with new opportunities to engage in political movements to end trans* oppression. Trans* oppression names the system of individual, institutional, and cultural manifestations of oppression against gender-nonconforming and trans* people, and connects this system to the theoretical frameworks of multi-issue social justice education (Catalano, McCarthy, & Shlasko, 2007). In higher education, the addition of gender identity and gender expression to college and university non-discrimination policies is an attempt to address trans* oppression (Beemyn, 2003, 2005; Beemyn & Pettit, 2006). The extent to which such policies are reflected in practice, and their effectiveness in creating a more inclusive campus climate, remain unknown (Beemyn & Pettit, 2006).

The title of this article borrows the phrase "virtual equality" from Urvashi Vaid (1995) to suggest how trans* students in higher education have only achieved a partial level of inclusion via policies (p. 4). Steps toward trans* student inclusion in higher education, including adding gender identity and gender expression to non-discrimination policies, may fail to "ultimately transform the institutions of society that repress, denigrate, and immobilize sexual and gender minorities" (Vaid, 2012, p. 3). In an effort to offer more a comprehensive framework to achieve trans* inclusion on college campuses, I draw upon the liberatory consciousness approach (Love, 2010). The liberatory consciousness model suggests an approach that

enables humans to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression, characterizing society without giving in to despair and hopelessness about that condition, to maintain an awareness of the

role played by each individual in the maintenance of the system without blaming them for the roles they play. (Love, 2010, p. 599)

Liberatory consciousness provides a holistic framework for strategies and practices that go beyond virtual equality.

In my research, I used higher education as a site to explore trans* men's experiences and to advance recommendations for going beyond virtual equality. My research focused on the experiences of trans* men on college campuses in New England, but I believe some results might be applicable to broader issues of trans* inclusion. In this article I offer some directions for more complex thinking about trans* student inclusion—beyond a one-size-fits-all policy, practice, or training—based on recommendations made by trans* men who are students and my own observations as a trans* man, student affairs administrator, and college teacher.

I begin this article with a review of relevant language and terminology, since common usage around trans* identity is constantly shifting. Next, I briefly review literature on trans* men and trans* identities in higher education. Then I describe my research on trans* men and explore my findings on how trans* men describe their experiences of campus support and challenges. I examine how participants' low expectations lead them to express gratitude for even the slightest gestures in the direction of trans* inclusion, and explore the advice participants offer to other trans* men's on navigating collegiate life. Finally, I apply the components of the liberatory consciousness approach (awareness, analysis, action, and accountability) to suggest campus strategies that are more inclusive of trans* men and, potentially, all trans* students.

LANGUAGE

The language to define or describe transgender identities has been under construction since its emergence in academic literature and, previously, in trans* communities and social movements (Davidson, 2007; Stryker, 2008). Prior to the current use of "trans*," the phrase "transgender umbrella" was used to reference the myriad of identities such as transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, female to male (FtM), male to female (MtF), transgender woman, gender nonconforming, and so on, that describe the many experiences of gender that diverge from the mainstream binary assumption (Currah, 2006; Davidson, 2007). Trans* uses the asterisk to "open up transgender or trans to a greater range of meaning" (Tompkins, 2014, p. 26). Although there is not full agreement in the use of trans*, I employ it in this article because its intentional ambiguity allows it to include the full range of people whose experiences I (along with many others) examine in this article.

The continuously shifting landscape of language about trans* communities, with much of the new language emerging from trans* communities, speaks to the vibrancy of gender diversity and highlights the importance of continuing research on trans* people. Such research should always be conducted with the aims of giving voice to trans* experiences and identities and contributing to changes that will lead to increased self-determination of trans* people. I use trans* to describe participants in the aggregate, as a way to honor the diversity of ways they described their individual gender identities, which included using one or more of the following terms: guy, genderqueer, man, and trans.

LITERATURE ON TRANS* MEN

The literature about trans* people has grown in the last 20 years, but much of the literature specifically about trans* men (sometimes referred to as female-to-male, FtMs, transsexual men, or transgender men) has mostly been rooted in memoirs about personal experience and biomedical transition stories. Much of the research-based work on trans* identities looks at all trans* people together, relying on an assumption that all trans* people share similar experiences. In interpreting findings, the researchers often try to force trans* men's experiences into a parallel narrative with trans* women's experiences (Cromwell, 1999; Stone, 1997). Research on trans* men¹ has been limited to FtMs as a broad category, not within a specific context (Cromwell, 1999; Devor, 1997; Forshee, 2008; Rubin, 2003), their sexual orientation (Dozier, 2005; Schleifer, 2006), male privilege and masculinity (Dozier, 2005), accounts of identity (Lee, 2001), and social work practices with FtM youth (Pazos, 1999). There is no published empirical research that speaks directly to the experiences of trans* men in college (Catalano, 2014).

Within higher education, research on trans* students has been overshadowed and subsumed by the ubiquitous use of the LGBT moniker. "Although much of what has been written about the needs of transgender college students has presumed them to be synonymous with those who identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian, their concerns are distinctive" (Marine, 2011, p. 61). The use of the LGBT moniker seems to acknowledge the existence of trans* students, but the focus of the research is on sexual orientation, homophobia,² or heterosexism. Even in research that correctly describes trans* identities as gender categories instead of sexual orientations, there are moments in which trans* becomes invisible through the LGBT moniker.³

Focus on Student Affairs: Research in Context

The late 1990s to mid-2000s offered some publications about the specific needs of trans* students (Bilodeau, 2005). Recommendations based on anecdotal evidence can be valuable, but without research there is a risk that authors may have misinterpreted trans* students' needs, or that the particular students the authors had interacted with were not representative of all trans* students. On the other hand, as McKinney (2005) notes, much of the research on trans* people does not include the experiences of trans* college students. The support, programs, and services for trans* students in higher education could benefit from being informed by more empirical data (see Hart & Lester, 2011; McKinney, 2005; Pusch, 2005).

The limited empirical data about trans* students in higher education may be due to the small numbers of known trans* students on campus, and a lack of organizations that effectively gather them together.

There are not likely to be enough out transgender students on most campuses to form their own organization. One must use existing organizations, most likely LGB organizations. Again, not all transgender people want to be associated with these organizations, but there is usually nowhere else to hang that "T." (Lees, 1998, p. 41)

Similarly, LGBT Resource Centers,⁴ usually located on the student affairs⁵ side of higher education, and some women's centers, have often taken on responsibilities for trans* students, faculty, and staff inclusion through programs and advocacy. The lack of data about the numbers of trans*

students in higher education (Beemyn, 2003) means there is an additional student population of unknown size for LGBT Resource Centers to provide education about, training to teach support, and services to offer without any additional funding or staffing.

Exceptions to the dearth of research-based publications on trans* students are McKinney (2005) and Pusch (2005). One of the first published articles on trans* students' experiences sought to capture "the experiences of transgender students on campuses across the country" (McKinney, 2005, p. 3). Another notable publication "investigated how college students who identify as transgender or transsexual came to understand their identities" (Pusch, 2005, p. 47). Other publications have focused on policy and practice suggestions and were not based on empirical research (Beemyn, 2002, 2003, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005; Beemyn & Pettitt, 2006; Sausa, 2002).

In an attempt to remedy these gaps in the literature, I focused my research on trans* students in college, specifically trans* men. I chose to study trans* men because of my own identification as a trans* man and my desire to examine a specific subset of trans* people rather than inappropriately conflating all trans* people as a monolithic group. Although I do not claim that my identity as a trans* man gives me any special insights into the experiences of other trans* men, my foundation of understanding and study of trans* identities' experiences helped me to start my research from an informed and empathetic perspective. I entered the research with a desire to share trans* men's stories and experiences with unflinching honesty, whether or not their experiences reflected my own, in order to catalyze a conversation about trans* men in college that extends beyond the small circles of trans* men and their allies.

METHODS

In a larger study devoted to the experiences of trans* men on college campuses (Catalano, 2014) I conducted face-to-face interviews with 25 trans* men attending colleges and universities in New England; 16 at private four-year colleges (3 at single-sex institutions), 8 at large public universities, and 1 at a public community college. The age range of participants was 18 to 52 years old; 17 identified as white, 5 as biracial, 1 as African American/black, and 2 as multiracial/multi-ethnic. I used mixed qualitative methods, grounded theory process, for interview, coding, and data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and qualitative descriptive methods to shape data presentation and discussions (Sandelowski, 2000).

In this article, I focus on only one of my research questions, which was: How would trans* men advise other trans* men on what kinds of support they might need in college settings? Participants' responses that addressed this research question included descriptions of their institutional experiences, kinds of support they found at their colleges/universities, support they would have liked to find, challenges they faced, and advice to other trans* men.

SUPPORTS AND CHALLENGES FOR TRANS* MEN IN COLLEGE

Participants named a variety of supports and challenges they experienced as trans* men in college. Challenges cited included unavailability of accessible restrooms, inconsistent application of inclusive practices, and unclear policies about issues such as name or gender change on

documents. Trans* men experienced the failure of institutionalized support mechanisms as a stressor in their collegiate experience. They struggled to manage institutional challenges along with the individual stressors of continually coming out, public knowledge of their personal gender history, and tokenization.

Given the many significant challenges participants described in their collegiate experiences, it is a wonder that participants named any forms of support. Most participants easily named positive experiences of support, but the examples they provided reflected behavior I would characterize as minimally inclusive. Supports included experience with a single supportive faculty or staff member, supportive friends, and supportive family members. Robert,⁶ a white, 19-year-old student, described supportive administrators, policies, and practices. "The dean who I work with has been phenomenal. My name change was really easy. For the health center, they put this thing on my form that, like, says male pronouns." Brandon, a white, 20-year-old student, recounted how his family was his major source of support.

Well, I guess the big support system would be my family, because with the exception of one person, they were all extremely supportive, surprisingly so . . . So, obviously when you're going to college, it's a whole new experience and stuff like that being able to go back to them and explain things that are happening is definitely a huge help.

Shawn, a white, 20-year-old student, described a "safe" environment at his college, in regards to trans* identities. "You know that coming on to this campus, it is a safe place. People, even if they don't agree with it, will be okay with it. Or they'll—they might not understand it, but they, if you tell them, they'll support it."

Support was not always an overt action, but sometimes was characterized as the absence of a negative or inappropriate response a participant felt from a supportive person. For example, Nate, a black, 21-year-old student, described his relationship with his faculty advisor: "My advisor, my current advisor, is really awesome, and I think it's pretty obvious that I'm gender-different, in whatever way. But he's never said anything. I've never said anything. We've never felt the need to have this conversation." Tucker, a white, 21-year-old described his ease with his peers as an indicator of his comfort on campus. "Pronouns are really easy with most students. Like most people ask, if you look at all non-normative in your gender presentation, and the people who don't ask, pick it up the first time anyways."

Participants' ability to list multiple forms of support from faculty, staff, friends, and institutional policies was encouraging. At the same time, the experiences they listed as supportive were minimal, and most participants did not struggle to list challenges they experienced at their institution. Participants' most cited challenge on their campus was the lack of availability of gender-inclusive or gender-neutral restrooms, and of a place to live that felt safe. Jackson, a biracial (Native American and white), 21-year-old student struggled with his inability to impact his institution's practice of listing his assigned gender at birth on documents. "[W]hen I go to various departments, they all have my gender listed as F so they always, without fail, use female pronouns." Institutional facilities, specifically restrooms, were a frequently cited challenge for participants. As Patrick, a white, 22-year-old student described, "Bathrooms are often a problem. Being able to know where I can use the bathroom, where the gender-neutral bathrooms are." Participants described their challenges as stressors that impacted their negotiation of their identity. For example, Deciding, a white, 21-year-old student who never decided on a pseudonym, discussed the stressors of continuously having to come out in order to have his gender respected.

“And with a new incoming class, every year the same thing happens . . . there’s a whole new group of first years who need to know I’m trans so they can use the right pronouns because I may or may not be passing to them.” Participants also cited concerns about being “outed” by their institution in the future, for example by gender markers on transcripts, as a stressor. Nate, a black, 21-year-old student, discussed his concerns about his gender impacting his career: “How do I want to handle it in my professional life? Because in my professional life I just want it to be male, and there be no confusion or issue because I don’t want gender to eclipse my academic accomplishments, because it’s just my gender.”

Another stressor was the expectations to speak on behalf of or represent all trans* people.

We try to do at least one [trans ally training] a year here, like a trans 101, . . . but sometimes it’s frustrating because I feel like I’m the only out trans person . . . I like doing that, but not 24/7, so that can get kind of frustrating. [Joshua, a biracial (Latino and white), 32-year-old student]

Ren, a biracial (Asian and white), 21-year-old student, described a similar experience of tokenization as Joshua and, especially, in the context of offering trans* awareness trainings, also felt pressures to conform to gender expectations. “I feel like the most challenging [experience] though has just been [dealing with other people’s question] . . . ‘Okay, it’s perfectly fine that you don’t identify as a girl, but why can’t you just match our idea of masculinity?’”

Participants also noted interpersonal challenges, such as an uncertainty about how others will respond to their gender, an inability to make connections or find other trans* people, and experiences of being mis-gendered when others use the wrong pronoun.

When to disclose is always really tricky . . . Are they gonna judge me for it? What am I going to tell professors to call me? Am I going to correct them and say call me Myles? Do I even bring up the topic of pronouns? Are they going to acknowledge it, are they not? (Myles, a white, 19-year-old student)

The areas participants listed as supportive were the same areas they listed as challenging. The supports they reported were most often interpersonal, not institutional, and reflected inconsistent practices within each institution. For example, Sal, a white, 18-year-old student, noted his inconsistent experiences with faculty.

Been kind of a crap shoot. One of my professors wrote me the nicest recommendation I have ever gotten from anyone. When I was applying for transfer and he called me a fine young man . . . Most of my professors are terrible at pronouns.

The campus offices where students are often encouraged to go for support were sometimes the very locations where participants experienced invalidation and disrespect. Robert’s description of his experience with counseling services at his college conveyed his frustration with continuous mis-gendering by a staff member he was seeing for support. “I’ve been seeing a counselor here at school since I arrived . . . so I see her every week. Tell her about being trans . . . She still calls me she.” The inability to accurately predict which resources, services, and individuals could be counted on to consistently provide support was a stressor above and beyond the lack of support per se.

ADVICE FOR TRANS* MEN FROM TRANS* MEN

In general, participants named positive experiences at their institutions and cited a number of ways they felt supported in college. Yet, an undercurrent of discomfort or disappointment with collegiate efforts to provide support significantly influenced the overall advice from participants. In light of the supports and challenges trans* men in my research reported experiencing in college, what advice did participants offer to other trans* men in college? Advice from participants included encouragement to seek out allies, develop self-awareness, and take opportunities for self-reflection and gender exploration. "Read everything. Read everything 'cause the more you read, the more you can see bits of yourself in what you're reading" (Tucker, a white, 21-year-old student).

Self-exploration and gender reflection are important efforts to finding a level of comfort with oneself to possibly build confidence. Participants also conveyed other sentiments through their advice that call attention to expectations of negative experiences. Consider how Patrick, a white, 22-year-old student framed his advice:

I would say, just recognize the fact that people are going to ask unfortunate questions. And, at college people are going to say unfortunate things and not realize how incredibly offensive they're being. And as difficult as it is, it's not helpful to go off on them. It's not going to be good for you, and it's not going to be good for them. It will be good for you for about five seconds after you're done, and then you're going to start feeling the backlash from that.

Ultimately, Patrick articulates that trans* men in college should expect to be made uncomfortable and be offended by their peers, faculty, and staff. Patrick's advice suggests that if trans* men lower their expectations, then they will experience more comfort, and they will be more prepared for their actual college/university experience. For Robert, a white, 19-year-old student, an awareness of the tough road ahead did not make his experience any easier, so instead, his advice focused inward on one's path toward transition.

Knowing that it will be difficult will not make it easier. . . . It sucks to be trans. Right? It really, really, really sucks [laughs] so it's like, I kind of—I think that you have to pick your battles with people. I've stopped worrying about pronouns, basically. If people haven't gotten it by now, that's fine. I'm going to get hormones, and I'm going to do my thing.

Robert's advice was influenced by resigning himself to the idea that others will be problematic, and self-determination would be the only place of solace, at least until he could embody a male gender expression.

Despite these discouraging outlooks, participants did offer advice about the importance of finding allies, participating in self-advocacy, and working with campus administrators. Patrick, for example, advised trans* men to look beyond expected communities of support.

Probably I would say one of the most important things is not necessarily the groups you find yourself interacting with, 'cause some of the best people I've found generally about my gender weren't these activists spaces or these support spaces, or weren't queer spaces, necessarily, but some of the greatest support spaces was my role in the theater. Just being recognized as just a person. Having other activities, so you can just be a person who's doing something . . . I can have other parts of my identity.

Patrick's advice echoes Pusch's (2005) research about trans* college students' desire to be seen as more than their trans* identities. Overall, participants' descriptions of finding community reflected finding comfort for themselves as individuals not only linked to their trans* identities.

Many participants indicated that self-advocacy would be a common role for trans* men in college. The experiences they describe are reflective of an earlier study that indicated the focus on trans* student inclusion as mostly limited to person-to-person support (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Participants' various comfort levels with self-advocacy (and success at it) influenced their experiences at their institution.

I would say that I know it sucks to out yourself, but [laughs] in the long run it might be easier for you to go and just talk to the administrators 'cause a lot of them, it's not an issue that's even on their radar. And a lot of them would be willing to help if they knew. [laughs] So I think that unfortunately you have to be your own advocate. (Jackson, a biracial Native American and white, 21-year-old student)

In Jackson's view of support, there was a trade-off. Enduring the energy required and privacy sacrificed in the challenge of continually coming out was the price to be paid in order to gain visibility, recognition, and support. The campus experiences of the participants were not horrendous, but reiteration of need for support exposes the collegiate environment as one with many potential discomforts. In consideration of how participants experienced adversity, the next section delves more deeply into participants' overall expectations of support in collegiate settings.

Low Expectations

It was striking and sometimes painful to hear participants' low threshold for what kinds of institutional responses felt like "support." For example, Shawn, a white, 20-year-old student, who described his campus as supportive in general, had this to say about his friends: "My close friends know about my transition, of course, and two out of the five who know have learned to use the correct pronoun." For Shawn, having two out of his five friends correctly use his pronoun felt like a victory and demonstration of support.

For other participants, the practices they described as institutionally supportive might be considered problematic or even exploitative. AJ described situations as clearly demonstrative of support, but I characterize them as only being nominally supportive or providing only nominal recognition.

They, the college has, the newspaper has published a few articles about being trans, and I get news flashes every once in a while of hate crimes going on in bathrooms directed at trans people and that it is not acceptable in this college. So, I know that things happen, but at the same time, the staff seemed to be on our side, in general.

AJ presented a particularly low standard for what counted as support: the college's mere acknowledgement of trans* students' existence, along with news coverage—some of it sensational and inappropriate—with stock statements that hate crimes are not acceptable at the college. The school's well-intended statement of how transphobic behavior was unacceptable was not accompanied by efforts to educate the campus community or protect trans* students. AJ cited similar incidents of transphobia that "happen all the time," that he expected to continue, which speaks to the minimal impact on the campus community of official statements against anti-trans* violence.

AJ described the minimal, ineffectual response to transphobia as an example of support, but he did not describe himself as emotionally impacted by the incident.

At some institutions, there was a basic awareness that education was needed on campus in an effort to avoid trans*phobia, and some participants were called upon to provide those trainings. James2, who was not a Resident Assistant, was the “designated expert” on trans* issues, who was called upon to educate RA staff members and his campus employer, specifically, to help them resolve trans*-related challenges:

And they would invite [me] to RA trainings, . . . to talk to the RAs about like how [to] deal with trans residents and things like that . . . I would help ‘em out with a lot of that stuff. . . . [About the manager for his on-campus job who didn’t know how to deal with employment paperwork for a transgender staff member]. You could tell he just never encountered that problem before and wasn’t sure how to deal with it and was literally like, “Okay, well you’re the trans person. What do you do in this situation?” . . . I’ve found that that’s really the only problems that I run into is, whatever institution it is that I’m dealing with, they just kind of say like, “Okay. What is your suggestion to fixing it?”

This example highlights a complexity in some of the opportunities participants encountered on campus. James2 experienced his “designated expert” role as an opportunity to be empowered and have his voice heard. At the same time, he was expected to speak on behalf of all trans* students, and was assumed to possess expert knowledge about trans* identity in general (not just his own), as well as residence life policies and student affairs practices. His tokenization makes room for only his voice, and may actually obscure consideration of other trans* student experiences, which he may not know about and certainly should not be relied upon to teach about. The department relied on James2 to educate student and professional staff, in lieu of hiring an outside educator who would have broader expert knowledge, or tasking internal staff with researching and presenting best practices. James2’s role of educating staff, using him as an example, came with risks he may not have been aware of, including exploitation, and the possibility of giving bad advice based on partial expertise. His situation as one of the few out trans* students meant that he was put in the role as a matter of convenience to others, rather than because he had any interest in Residential Life, diversity trainings, or professional development. These decisions do not take seriously the responsibility Residence Life has to make all staff aware of culturally competent practices for working with trans* students.

It is especially problematic that James2’s manager took no responsibility for self-education on trans* issues. The episode reveals a lack of professionalism concerning trans* issues, as well as an expectation that one student’s personal experience will be adequate to guide policy or administrative response. Most troubling is the fact that James2 described his experiences with two campus student service offices as part of a recurring pattern for him at his institution, which indicates that departments were making no progress in developing the internal capacity to take responsibility for ongoing training.

The experiences of tokenization and exploitation described by James2 were present in several other participants’ accounts. Sal described a few different experience he characterized as support for being a trans* man at his school. Both participants described a gray area, opportunities to impact campus culture in ways that benefit all and the expectation that they will take these initiatives because they are the “only one” or “one of the only” out trans* people on campus. In one of the examples, Sal talked about being invited to speak in a sexuality class, where he was asked questions for about an hour, and he had another class visit invitation for the week after my

interview with him. There was no evidence in his account that these invitations were meant to contribute to Sal's education, nor that Sal or those who requested his intervention had considered possible negative consequences he might face for publicly sharing his story. Neither was there any indication that the faculty member who invited him had provided students with supporting materials to contextualize Sal's story; rather, the instructor relied entirely on the personal narrative of one student to teach about trans* identities.

In another example, Sal described his experience with his campus administration.

I went and talked to the Dean of Students, which I was able to do because someone in student affairs co-advises [the LGBT group on campus] and was able to get me in to see her. And, when I talked to her and I told her about some of the things that were going on [harassing comments said outside his room and written on the white board outside his room] and about how frustrated I was and about how—How the only bathrooms that I can use on all of campus are in this building, and this building is not close to any of the buildings where any of my classes are and that sucks. And she was really cool, and we formed a programming committee, and now it meets like every other week . . . and we talk about what sucks and how we can fix it, and that's really cool, and I'm glad that they're doing that.

Both examples cited here required Sal to serve in a similar role as James2, as expert and self-advocate. The initiatives were focused on the student, not on the system. In both cases, there was no evidence that the campus was itself proactive on trans* issues and inclusion.

When participants described the different kinds of information their institution should provide about the transition process, there was a desire for information to be accessible. Instead, participants described a desire to have more transparent and current information about college/university processes and services.

I think just whether it's a packet of information or a list of websites or, whatever, just a brochure, I think it would be helpful for places, such as health services and whatever gay office . . . there is on campus. (Jackson)

In terms of education for staff and faculty, participants only mentioned health services staff, and clerical staff insofar as they needed to have clarity on name or chosen name change processes.

Participants articulated suggestions that did not require much work on behalf of the institution. "I think, just having information so people can be understanding and know that it's difficult, so that they don't ask like asinine questions or anything," Charlie, a white, 20-year-old student remarked. Many participants had similar opinions and just longed for accurate information that could be found on a website or in a pamphlet. Patrick commented, "I think, if nothing else, where you can go to find out good accurate information." Participants articulated the request for a trustworthy information source as meeting their threshold for what would feel like support. Institutional size and type may influence what resources and services are reasonable to expect. For example, making sure that biomedical transition services are covered in student health plans is more feasible for larger institutions than smaller ones. However, my participants' expectations were considerably lower than that. What they did ask for—clarity and accessibility of information—should be considered a standard practice for institutions of any size.

The overall picture the participants provide can be characterized as a few examples of minimally supportive interactions that participants rely on for feeling supported even though, actually, the institutions are doing very little to support these students. Possibly these moments or actions of

support were sufficient for participants, but put in the larger context of institutional expectations compared to what is possible, it is clear that institutions should be doing better and doing more.

By recognizing that participants' expectations were low, I don't mean to suggest that their low expectations are the problem, or that having higher expectations would be sufficient to create more inclusive campuses. Rather, I want to urge institutions to be aware that trans* students' requests or demands may often be quite minimal, and the institution should be proactive in identifying best practices that students may not be demanding yet. Even more urgent is that participants were put into situations that could be characterized as exploitation and tokenization. I have significant concerns about the impact of well-meaning faculty and staff who may rely on a small number of trans* students to be their primary source of education about trans* issues. When faculty and staff ask trans* students to train or educate other students, they must consider the potential impacts of outing oneself to strangers, even if the student seems confident. Beyond the concern for the individual student, faculty and staff should consider the range of experiences represented by trans* students who are available for such work, and what may be missing. Many of the critiques of published trans* narratives discuss the absence of trans* people of color and reinforcement of a biomedical transition framework. Students who are most comfortable stepping into such roles may be exactly those most likely to replicate those dominant narratives of whiteness and transition (Snorton, 2009).

In Search of Allies

Participant's most common advice was to find allies as a way to endure interpersonal strife, as well as to assist in navigation of the institution. Regardless of how participants experienced institutional or individual support, they clearly articulated the necessity of developing allies and coalitions. Participants defined allies as those to whom they would turn for support or when in distress, as a form of self-advocacy.

And, specifically, around college, find who your allies are. Find them. Because I can guarantee you, even if you're at some school that has a notoriously bad reputation for diversity, there's going to be at least one person on that campus who will have your back. And that person may not be super easy to find, but there's always somebody. (Joshua)

Joshua's advice reflects a tone that finding "at least one person" to serve as an ally might be a difficult task (which also echoes low expectations for support) but is usually possible.

The significance of allies was a crucial area of advice, but participants had different definitions for the role of allies: "Any place, any form of support that you can get from anyone, do it . . . That can be hard as well, but that's what you have to do" (Robert). Many participants described allies as networks of people who possibly understand their trans* identity and offer a space for trans* men to talk about their experience. Wyatt, a white, 22-year-old student, felt it was easier if less information about his gender history was known to others. "As far as my friends and stuff, I mean they—all I really asked from them was to just switch pronouns and switch names and then forget about it, and they were pretty good at that." In Wyatt's opinion, being an ally translated into asking few questions and having limited references to his life before he was a man, thus only embracing his current gender identity as a guy.

The literature on allies reflects participants' range of meanings for the term. Edwards (2006) notes, "there is little scholarship on the differing ways individuals aspire to be allies" (p. 42–43). In social justice education, social, political, and economic change are framed as actions brought about in concert with allies (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Washington & Evans, 1991). There are many different descriptions of allies and allyship, and the next section explores the meaning of allyship.

LIBERATORY CONSCIOUSNESS

Previous literature defines allyship as behaviors that seek to challenge oppression, make privilege visible, and attempt to empower those targeted by oppression (Ayvazian, 2001; Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006; Washington & Evans, 1991). In this definition, allies are assumed to be "members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership" (Broido, 2000, p. 3). I argue that allyship should not be framed in a binary model (us/them, oppressor/oppressed) because our identities are too complicated, multiple, and intersecting to hold firm in a range of situations. Instead, we should frame allyship in a way that considers allyship across and within identities.

A liberatory consciousness, described and defined by Love (2010) in *Liberatory Consciousness*, is a framework of allyship that has four components: awareness, analysis, action, and accountability. Love extends the notion of allyship as actions that occur across and within identity groups, with a focus on coalition and alliance building, which resists the "lone hero stance" (Thompson, 2008, p. 328). Liberatory consciousness should utilize four components: continuously engaging in learning (awareness), reflection and meaning making (analysis), steps toward a positive change or to right an injustice (action), and communication across and within identity groups (accountability). Using a liberatory consciousness model allows for a multilevel analysis and more comprehensive view of what it means to support trans* men (and potentially all trans* students) in college.

Trans* students cannot be expected, any more than students in any other marginalized community, to take responsibility for holding higher education professionals to appropriate standards of practice; those high standards can only be developed and enforced by those doing the work. Like with other marginalized populations, standards for trans* inclusivity call for more than a one- or two-hour training, although those may be useful to get some initial content and terminology. Higher education professionals who utilize values of inclusivity and social justice on their campus need to be intentional about their work to develop as allies to trans* students. A liberatory consciousness (Love, 2010) is a helpful approach to personal and institutional accountability because it offers everyone the opportunity to take on the role of liberation worker. A liberation worker is "one who is committed to changing systems and institutions characterized by oppression to create greater equity and social justice" (Love, 2010, p. 599). Instead of a stage model, Love offers basic behaviors that are "meant to serve as reminders in our daily practice . . . be continuously practiced event by event, each time we are faced with a situation in which oppression or internalized oppression is evident" (p. 600). Together, the four components of a liberatory consciousness (awareness, analysis, action, and accountability) provide a foundation to structure interpersonal development in higher education.

To work for trans* men's inclusion requires continuous commitment, individually and collectively, by faculty, staff, and students. A shift to liberatory consciousness for individuals at an institution reasserts how everyone is responsible for trans* inclusion at all times. Trans* inclusion cannot be accomplished by one designated expert or a one-time training. Instead, it places the onus on individuals to practice continuous self-development, to engage in learning, and to communicate within and across communities. A liberatory consciousness provides opportunities for individual events to raise awareness, to engage in analysis, to shape actions, and to examine accountability. Inclusivity practices, policies, pedagogies, and engagement look different at each institution based on location, demographics, student services, academic collaborations, institution type, and other factors; developing a liberatory consciousness requires people, as individuals and in their institutional roles, to ask themselves and their colleagues about goals that support trans* people, and then ask how they can do it better. There is no "one size fits all" approach to institutional change, and each college and university must consider specific institutional dynamics, limitations, and structure.

Awareness

Awareness requires noticing and knowing that trans* students exist and learning more about their experiences. As a component in the development of a liberatory consciousness, awareness is not always easily attained. Awareness, in a liberatory consciousness framework, requires an awareness of the existence of trans* men (and trans* students) at colleges and universities, and includes knowing about common, anticipated, student needs; awareness means anticipating obvious needs of trans* students and meeting those needs. Participants in my research spoke of a desire for accessible information about institutional policies and resources for trans* men, and all trans* individuals, because rarely should policies differ for people with various trans* identities. One way to enact awareness is to include trans* issues in the information the institution provides about policies and practices in all avenues of institutional communication (websites, pamphlets, signs, etc.).

Analysis

"Analysis means considering the range of possible activities and the results that each of them is likely to produce" (Love, 2010, p. 610). Those who engage in trans* education that addresses the complexities of trans* identities and experiences will be able to understand how allyship is not a "one size fits all" framework. Trainings, workshops, speakers, and events can provide opportunities for analysis, cultivate critical thinking, and allow individuals and groups to ask important questions about institutional policies, practices, and assumptions that impact trans* men's inclusion. Faculty, staff, and students can benefit from coupling the awareness of experiences of trans* men on campus with intentional educational efforts that offers opportunities for analysis. Participants in my research pointed out that they did not necessarily feel their trans* identities were addressed in "safe space" or "safe zone" trainings or educational efforts.

You know, GLB issues are everywhere and, you know, safe zone stickers are for GLB but there's not a whole lot of trans stuff. Like they've got the upside down triangle for gay men and that has come

to incorporate lesbians as well and trans does have a symbol, but you wouldn't know it by looking around. 'Cause it's nowhere to be found and that bothers the hell out of me. (AJ)

AJ's frustration with the current "safe zone" on his campus, echoed by other participants, noted a need for more specific trans* identity trainings and education. Participants' experiences suggest a need for colleges and universities to assess the efficacy of "safe space," "safe zone," or other ally development program offered on campus, the goals of those trainings (changing behavior or changing consciousness), and whether they encourage critical thinking and coalition building.

Intentional conversations must occur about how trainings incorporate (or do not incorporate) student voices and whether those methods are tokenizing and exploitative of students who participate. Moreover, educational opportunities should provide opportunities for participants to engage in analysis via reflection.

Analysis also invites questioning methods of demographic data collection. Forms that require students to report their gender and only offer male/female or man/woman as gender choices are problematic for trans* students. Forms that allow students to name their own gender demonstrate an institutional awareness of trans* students' existence on campus. Some forms may not need to ask about gender at all.

Action

Overall, participants' descriptions of the levels of support they received focused on individual staff or faculty encouraging participants to take action with their support. Some actions institutions can consider include the creation of trans* inclusive policies such as gender-neutral housing options (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis et al., 2005; Beemyn, Domingue et al., 2005). Decisions about policy implementation are dependent on institution size, structure, location, and many other institutional variables. Not all participants were invested in self-advocacy or trans* advocacy, and not all participants wanted or desired to have others know of their trans* identity. Action by allies relieves trans* students from the burden of shouldering all of the advocacy work.

One of the most common institutional changes participants in my research requested was an increase in gender-neutral or gender-inclusive restrooms. Participants sometimes had to travel across campus to access a restroom that was labeled as gender-neutral or endured potential violence from using a gendered restroom. Restrooms are a necessity for all people, and the increased numbers and visibility of gender-inclusive restrooms will benefit more than just trans* students (Chess, Kafer, Quizar, & Richardson, 2008).

The material needs of trans* men, such as accessible and inclusive restrooms, are potential action sites for campuses to engage in trans* inclusion. Areas to consider for trans* men's inclusion have been covered in prior literature (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis et al., 2005; Beemyn, Domingue et al., 2005), but they deserve to be repeated in the hope that mentioning them will spark awareness and lead to intentional actions:

- Examine (and possibly change) any policies on attire requirements, from informal suggestions about interview-appropriate clothes to policies addressing student athlete travel attire
- Hire and train health services practitioners about trans* patient identities and potential health needs

- Create and publicize the location of gender-inclusive restrooms and bathrooms
- Perform a review of trans* inclusion in residence halls, from housing assignments to room locations and amenities that are accessible for trans* students
- Assess educational efforts on trans* identities and policies
- Examine and create policies about gender marker and name changes for internal institutional documentation that considers legal requirements or medical provider approval; preferred name on classroom rosters; and athletics policy for trans* student-athlete inclusion
- Investigate academic curriculum to ensure that it attends to trans* identities as more than anomalous or abnormal genders
- Develop support for helping trans* students complete financial aid forms that meet government requirement guidelines and address issues of Select Service Registration requirements for males
- Explore legal institutional requirements for documentation and identification, which can vary based on institution type and relevant state laws
- Evaluate campus specific traditions (such as Homecoming), and whether those events replicate exclusion or reflect an environment of trans* inclusivity

Actions that demonstrate trans* inclusivity in practices, policies, pedagogies, and engagement look different at each institution based on location, demographics, student services, academic collaborations, institution type, and other factors. Trans* inclusive actions are developed using a liberatory consciousness to recognize and anticipate problems, engage in analysis about how to address those problems, and take action to remedy them.

Accountability

Accountability requires “that individuals accept accountability to self and community for the consequences of the action that has been taken or not taken” (Love, 2010, p. 600). Ren described how his institution put student’s pronouns on class rosters, as a good example of a trans* inclusion to address (and resist) assumptions about students’ perceived gender based on name or appearance. However, Ren’s example simultaneously demonstrated the cost of virtual equality when he noted that faculty rarely utilized the pronoun information on rosters. Ren’s example demonstrates how action without the other components of a liberatory consciousness can be problematic. For Ren’s institution, the practice of trans* inclusion was not the problem, but rather the problems were the effort to make faculty aware of the information, the opportunities for analysis of gender assumptions of students, and the accountability to ensure the information was appropriately utilized. The inclusion practices for trans* men are important for all trans* students, as are the mechanisms to ensure those practices meet the needs of trans* men. In the case of pronouns on course rosters, the lack of accountability was evident in the faculty’s failure to utilize the system that had been created. Well-intentioned policies that are not practiced consistently by all faculty and staff can serve to perpetuate a climate of minimal support. The burden for change still remains on the shoulders of many individual trans* students, for many participants, to educate and serve as support for their allies.

While we do not take responsibility for another’s thinking or behavior, accountability means that we support each other to learn more about the ways that the internalized domination and internalized

subordination manifests itself in our lives, and agree with each other that we will act to interrupt it. (Love, 2010, p. 603)

The importance of accountability cannot be overstated. An accountable ally does not stop at providing a minimal level of support and expect to be rewarded with appreciation. The absence of high expectations of allies and institutional inclusion may be a strong indicator of an absence of accountability.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of my participants document continuous disappointments with trans* inclusion in their institutions, or of expectations kept so low that participants were satisfied with token gestures or mere absence of violence. Within a liberatory consciousness framework, awareness, analysis, and actions would be performed with a practice of accountability beyond any individual trans* student doing self-advocacy.

A liberatory consciousness approach could shift trans* men's reliance from the virtual accountability, such as that described by Vaid (1995), to an actual transformation for the entire institution. The change toward a liberatory consciousness could help shift trans* men's low expectations and help them become empowered members of the campus community who work in collaboration to make trans* inclusion an institutional value. Using a liberatory consciousness framework to engage in trans* inclusion requires simultaneous work on multiple levels (individual, institutional, and cultural), and offers a framework for individual staff and faculty member to effectively engage in social justice work prior to any institutional infrastructure of trans* inclusion.

NOTES

1. In the literature listed, most trans* men are referred to as FtMs (female-to-male), trans men, and transsexuals.
2. For examples of literature that uses the LGBT moniker but does not attend to trans* identities, see Herbst and Malaney (1999), Renn (1998), Schueler, Hoffman, and Peterson (2009), and Woodford, Kolb, Durocher-Radeka, and Javier (2014).
3. Spade (2008) referred to the use of the LGBT moniker as "LGBfakeT" to reinforce the silencing power of the moniker. See Mayo (2014) for a critique of education policy and the use of LGBT moniker.
4. I use LGBT Resource Centers as a general title for cultural centers that address issues of gender and sexuality inclusion, support, education, and advocacy on campus, given variations in the name of these centers from campus to campus (Sanlo, 2000).
5. For more information on student affairs, as a field, please see NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education at <http://www.naspa.org/about>.
6. All participants chose their own pseudonym. Two participants chose James, and I have called them James and James2, indicating the order of interviews, not importance. The participant named "Deciding" never decided on a pseudonym.

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D. Chase J. Catalano, Ed.D., is an assistant professor in the College Student Personnel (CSP) Program at Western Illinois University.