Open Gates, Broken Promises: Inclusion Policies and Transgender Student Experiences at Gender-Selective Women’s Colleges

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ABSTRACT

Since 2013, over half of all gender-selective women’s colleges in the United States have adopted admission policies that outline varying biological, social, and legal criteria for who may apply to their institution. In effect, these policies opened the gates to admission, driven by the goal to be more inclusive to transgender applicants, especially trans* women. This dissertation examines if and how these policies enact missions of social justice, diversity, and inclusion through the informal practices, production, and regulation of gender on campus. How do gender-selective women’s colleges go from trans* admitting to trans* serving? Through a nine-month ethnography of trans* admission policies at two gender-selective women’s colleges, including 126 interviews with students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administrators; archival document analysis regarding trans* and queer history on campus; and participant observation of events and spaces on campus with trans* students, my objective is to describe the world that takes shape when gender and feminism become institutionalized, routine, and used as descriptions to both include and exclude. I contend that the impact of these admission policies is not limited to the application process, but rather the experiences of matriculated students are shaped by the gendered norms and discourses structured within the policies themselves. Findings suggest that despite the fact that these policies, formally, allow for transgender students to apply and enroll to gender-selective women’s colleges, institutionalized commitments to inclusion obscure and even intensify existing gender inequality, particularly for students who do not fit within normative ideals of the “right way to be trans*” including those who are low-income, non-white, and trans* men. Because the feminist missions of these colleges continue to reaffirm an ideal of cisgender womanhood on campus, the extent to which these inclusion policies were able to make fundamental structural changes in how gendered power, resources, and opportunities are distributed was limited at best. As such, this dissertation is a call to think about gender as an institutional product; not simply in terms of the politics that are attached to the experiences, bodies, and identities, but in the very constitution of gender as a social category. As an ethnography of how these categories become comprehensible, admissible, and livable, this dissertation complicates our understanding of how policies work, how gender is reinforced in the women’s college setting, and how to transform institutional practices through a trans* justice framework.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Since my graduation from Smith College in 2013, over half of all gender-selective women’s colleges in the United States have publicly adopted admission policies outlining up to fourteen different combinations of biomedical, social, and legal criteria for who may apply to their institutions. In effect, these policies define fourteen different ways to be a "woman" that honor both the experiences and identities of students as well as the histories, traditions, and missions of gender-selective women’s colleges. While I am proud of my alma mater for adopting such a policy, I have been struck by the ensuing tensions and debates that occurred among students and my fellow alumni about who belonged within our community. My time at Smith equipped me with new concepts, identities, and possibilities of what community means by being with people of other sexes, genders, races, sexualities, abilities, socio-economic statuses, and mindsets.

Gender in this feminist space, in other words, was about so much more than a singular common experience of biology. Hence, the trans* policy raised more questions than answers for me: How do my trans* peers experience the woman-centered atmosphere of gender-selective women's colleges? In what ways do these policies and other institutional practices support these students?

Through this dissertation, I sought to understand the experiences of trans* students enrolled in two gender-selective women’s colleges by mapping the implementation and impact of trans* inclusion on campus. I wanted to know how these policies—and gender-selective women's colleges more broadly—shape institutionalized feminist missions of social justice. Over the span of nine months, I spent time at two gender-selective women’s colleges, one with a policy that admits trans* women, men, and non-binary students and another that limits trans* admission to trans* women, and conducted 126 interviews with students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administrators; archival document analysis regarding trans* and queer history on campus; and participant observation of events and spaces on campus with trans* students. I found that despite the fact that these policies, formally, allow for transgender students to apply and enroll to gender-selective colleges, the institutional commitments to inclusion obscured and even intensified existing gender inequality particularly for students who do not fit within normative ideals of the “right way to be trans*” including those who are low-income, non-white, and trans* men. Because the feminist missions of these colleges continue to reaffirm an ideal of cisgender womanhood on campus, the extent to which these inclusion policies were able to make fundamental changes to support transgender students was limited at best, and violent at worst.

This does not suggest that there was no hope. Rather, students found ways to navigate these formal policies, resources, and spaces to create safer environments for their community, surviving and thriving in environments that were antithetic-to-hostile to their inclusion. As a result, I conclude that the implementation of a singular policy is not an adequate solution to full inclusion. Rather, we must consider how policy and practice may limit inclusion through intersections of race, class, sexuality, ability, and other axes of identity. As such, this dissertation is a call to think about how gender-selective women’s colleges can go from trans* admitting to trans* serving.
DEDICATION

For my trans* siblings:
This dissertation is our story. The story of our humanity, our existence, our resistance, our resilience. Keep shining and keep fighting.

For Calliope:
You started a revolution. You are a revolution. Thank you.

And for Jess:
There are not enough words in the world to explain how much you mean to me. My rock. My love. My life. My home. Thank you for everything and more.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one ever really talks about the emotional labor, the emotional toll, that doing ethnographic work does to the researcher and their loved ones. Obviously, the IRB is concerned with the emotional, mental, and physical safety of the participants—and rightly so—real harm can be, and has been, done to research participants that open their lives to an outsider who pries into the minute details of their lived experiences and opinions. No research methods course, no book, has ever prepared me, however, for the intensive love, labor, and exhaustion that a project like this has taken. It may seem cliché, but I honestly could not have done this work without the love, guidance, support, advice, and encouragement from so many people. Over the past 2,465 days, from my first day as a graduate student to my very last, no words can truly encapsulate all the thanks that I have for those that have been there for me along the way. I recognize that naming people means I run the risk of overlooking the significant contributions of many. If I miss anyone, I am deeply sorry; there is no excuse I can offer for this oversight. However, I hope that if I miss folks, those individuals grant me the same grace they have previously offered me throughout our years of friendship.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation committee, co-chaired by Sarah Ovink and Christine Labuski, and members David Brunsma, Claire Robbins, and Z Nicolazzo. True to theme with this dissertation, there is of course the formal thanks of dealing with deadlines and scanned signatures and providing feedback on this very long document. But there’s so much more to thank you for here. Sarah, you have provided me with the invaluable support and guidance (as well as templates) on how to be a productive and organized scholar and mentor. Through this project, BPS, and undermatching, I have learned so much from you about the field and who I want to be as a faculty mentor. Thank you. For Christine, for whom I will always cherish the question, “What does this say about X?” While such a question, in the moment, causes some anxiety, I am thankful for you always pushing me one step further, thinking abstractly with and through theory, making me always strive to be better and do better in my work. I am especially grateful for you, Dave, as you and your family have been there since day one. I keep thinking about that hot August day on the patio of The Cellar, having just met you and David Embrick to discuss the journal, where you dedicated half our meeting to how you could best support me as a scholar. I am forever thankful for all the conversations over beers, emails with one-word sentences, and constant encouragement as my Master’s chair and now dissertation committee member. To Claire. I am in constant awe of your perseverance and dedication to your students, even when times are hard. I am thankful for not putting me in your “no file” when I asked to meet you, randomly, to talk about higher education and again when I asked for you to be on the team. Your insight and passion keep me hopeful. And last but certainly not least, Z, who was my inspiration from day one, allowing me to realize that this project was possible. I still have the note from my meeting with Claire introducing me to your work, and I am so thankful for you taking the time, even with multiple time zones between us, to always take a phone call, even when I am in tears. I am so thankful for your mentorship, scholarship, and friendship. This is truly the dream team committee.

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Second, many thanks to the Virginia Tech Department of Sociology, Virginia Tech Graduate School, Virginia Tech College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, National Science Foundation, National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation, and Five College Women’s Studies Research Center for the financial and scholastic support of this project. It is with this support that I was able to extend my studies an additional year and put food on the table (well, Jess cooked, but still). More importantly, it is with this support that I had the opportunity to pay my participants, however minimal amounts, and to hire two fantastic research assistants—Nell and Violet, with the additional volunteer help of Josh. I am continually indebted to you three for all of your assistance, friendship, answers to my silly questions, and wanting to do this work with me. I know that an acknowledgement is not nearly enough to thank you for trusting me, helping me, guiding me. Know that I am always here for you.

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PROLOGUE

In the spring of 2013, Calliope Wong, an Asian American trans* woman, applied to Smith College—a women’s college located in Western Massachusetts. As Calliope wrote on Tumblr, Smith is a “superspecial [sic] place of ironedwilled and astonishing women” (emphasis added)—to be in the Smith community not only would affirm her feminist goals and ideals, but she would also be immersed within a community of women like her (Wong 2012). At the time of Wong’s college search, however, Smith lacked a clear admission policy for trans* applicants, or what Wong called “problematic unpolicies,” stating that only female (sex) applicants would be considered for admission and considered trans* students on a case-by-case basis (Wong 2012). It was suggested that her application would be considered to Smith by one of three methods: 1) submitting all application materials as female; 2) submitting online applications as male and submitting a paper application to Smith as female; or 3) submitting online application materials to coeducational institutions as male and, with the Common Application’s help, change gender markers for online application materials sent to women’s colleges (Wong 2012).

Upon following this advice, however, Smith rejected Wong’s application. Twice. First, it was returned because her high school’s guidance counselor used the wrong pronouns in her letter of recommendation. Corrected and returned to Smith, her application was once again returned because her optional federal financial aid (FAFSA) form indicating her sex (for selective service purposes, see Fogg Davis 2017) as male. As her rejection letter read,

Thank you again for your interest in Smith College… As you may remember from our previous correspondence, Smith is a women’s college, which means that undergraduate

1 Throughout this writing, the names of the institutions and participants within this study are pseudonyms chosen by the respondents. The only exception is when talking about names in published articles which serves to inform the context of this research, such as the case of Calliope Wong and Smith College. Calliope has since adopted a new name that I choose not to include here to respect her privacy.
applicants to Smith must be female at the time of admission. Our expectation is that it is consistently reflected throughout the application that the student is a woman. Upon reviewing your file, this is not the case. Your FAFSA indicates your gender as male.

Therefore, Smith cannot process your application. (Wong 2013)

Calliope published her experiences and communication with the college on the then-popular social media site *Tumblr*, which caught the attention of women’s college students, alumni, and news outlets around the world, sparking a social movement across women’s colleges to formally adopt admission policies for transgender women. Her story was shared by *MSNBC, Huffington Post, NBC, ABC, GLAAD*, as well as the *New York Times*, and she has since been awarded for her advocacy by the Dorothy Awards, named one of *Out Magazine’s OUT100*, and co-authored the *Model Admission Policy on Transgender Students* in collaboration with Trans Student Educational Resources.²

All too often, news outlets and scholars reduce Calliope’s experiences to her one moment of public vulnerability, forgetting that Calliope is a whole person with dreams, family, friends, and lived experiences. But this is not where Calliope’s story ends. Calliope enrolled at the University of Connecticut, graduating in three years as a pre-med English major and now is a medical student with plans on specializing in endocrinology. She has also successfully released a music album and enjoys spending her time drawing, improv, and spending time with friends.

Scholarship on trans* students often uses deficit or deviance models, narrowing in on the myriad forms of risk, violence, and harassment they face, and solely universalizing their experiences as a result of being trans* (Nicolazzo 2017; Catalano 2014). As I found in this research, while yes, these students are trans*, it may not be the whole, or even the main part of

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² Trans Student Educational Resources was founded by Eli Erlick, a trans* woman who, too, was denied admission to Scripps College, a gender-selective women’s college in California (see Erlick 2020).
their identity. Take for example, Josh. Josh (he/him) was one of the first participants who volunteered for the study. During his initial interview with me, he explained his gender as “Male...And I hate being trans*, I don't want to scream about it all the time? Right. It's not a personality trait.” And in many ways, Josh was right. He is a brilliant math scholar with the dream of getting his PhD in Math, active in the student-run theatre, enjoys biking, and an avid video gamer and graphic novel consumer. And yet, in many ways, Josh’s college experiences are still defined and shaped by his trans* identity. As a student at Athena, he stands out in stark contrast against the sea of women students as well as in opposition to the transgender student population on campus who largely identify as non-binary and use they/them pronouns. As he once shared, “It’s hard when you’re going around and sharing pronouns and it’s she/her, she/her, they/them, they/them and then me.” Throughout the academic year, Josh would go out of his comfort zone to attend events on campus with me as he searched for a safe space and sense of community on campus—one where his masculine gender identity did not define him as other.

This dissertation is about students like Josh, and their experiences at gender-selective colleges. Sure, it is about transgender admission policies. But it is also about what happens after admission. It is about the experiences of trans* students who were promised to be included, to be welcomed, to be wanted by a community and the ways in which they experience intensely

3 I use the pronouns and gender descriptions of the respondents provided to me, recognizing that pronouns and gender identity are more complicated than mere descriptive categories. For example, Ezra they or he) explained his gender and pronouns as, “I've been leaning a lot more towards he/him recently. I don't know if that's just in this environment or in general. I think especially in this environment, I find it especially affirming. You can talk about that more later, but short answer, leaning more towards he. Very content with they... Mm, I sort of vaguely identified as trans* masculine. Like I feel weird saying it was decisively as trans* male or trans* man. I've been more comfortable with that as an idea because in the past have been like, I'm not a man, I'm a boy. I've been more into like maybe I could just be a whole adult man someday, which is pretty interesting. But yeah. So in that direction.” I note the participants’ pronouns as they were indicated to me during our interview and confirmed during member-checking, listed in parentheses after their name in the text (unless multiple names are listed). When respondents indicate more than one pronoun, I use their pronouns interchangeably in my writing. Additionally, gender identification and pronouns can change over time. As such, some respondents may have since adopted new descriptions for their selves since this writing. An overview of all respondents’ self-descriptions and pronouns are available in Table 2.
gendered environments and how they find ways to survive and thrive. I challenge you, my readers, as well as myself as I write, how we can think about these students—Josh, Nell, Violet, Ezra, Owen, Hannah, Jake, and the other 118 participants—as whole beings.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be trans* in a woman’s college? Ezra (they or he) pondered this question as we sat in the college dining hall over the bi-weekly meal of breakfast for dinner. The recently re-decorated dining hall was a small three-room area with seating for approximately 80 people adjoined to the side of one of the residence halls on the Athena campus. The space still felt relatively new, with large framed artwork still sitting along the floor yet to be hung and a sterile smell of disinfectant. Signs around the dining hall instructed students how to behave within the space to keep it clean and safe, including swiping one’s ID card at the entrance, not bringing outside food or drink, keeping the plates and flatware in the building, and a chalkboard with detailed ingredient lists so that students knew what they could choose to consume. And yet, the space also maintained a sense of the original architecture before its renovation including a large bay window that overlooked the wrap-around porch and an old, yet broken, brick fireplace with a plaque memorializing the name of some otherwise forgotten alumna who donated money for its preservation.

Sitting in what had become our usual seats for a weekly Wednesday dinner, with a small two-person table nested in between the bay window and a radiator that always appeared to be on despite the temperature outside, we talked about Ezra’s experience applying to college. Ezra, a tall, white trans* masculine student, had applied to Athena, a gender-selective college, under the college’s transgender admission policy which allowed for the admission of self-identified women including transgender women but excluded applicants who identified as trans* men and non-binary. As Ezra explained,

I know that I definitely looked at like the policies very tentatively for what was going on with trans* students, especially at Athena. When I toured Athena, I think I went to the
bathroom. My mom asked the admission counselor, “So what do you do about people who aren't female but want to attend Athena?” Um, and the counselor basically said, “If you're willing to check female on the Common App, we don't care what you do once you're in”, which is certainly a way to be…I think it calls to attention how important Athena’s projected image is to them where they would never do something closer to what I believe Minerva is doing with their policies… where Athena, their legacy and image is based on being a women's college that they can't not be and say that even though their student body has shifted and is now distinctly, uh, if you're not a cis man population…I thought it was interesting that that woman had like such a, she was an important person to the college and was able to say with such certainty of like if you're willing to lie to some extent to fit Athena’s external standards, that there is a freedom within the space, which is I guess that holds true. Yeah. That relatively fits with my experience with being here as a[nn] openly trans* person…There were definitely like feelings where I was like kind of, I shouldn't have to do this. But on the other hand, this is how society is and it makes sense that I have to do this…[I had to] start sort of looking at it from that angle of like this isn't optimal, but yeah, this is the world that I have to lie in order to do things and function or maybe not lie, but like not be fully represented.

Ezra ultimately decided to “check female” on his application despite the fact that he did not identify as a woman, as he later explained he had been raised as a woman and Athena was an educational environment where he felt safe(r) as a trans* person. To him, applying as a female served as a means to an end, though he felt uneasy about his decision to not fully represent himself in his application. As Ezra detailed, Athena’s admission policy served as a symbol for inclusion, formally stating that Athena, as a gender-selective college, restricted its admission to
women, though this definition of womanhood was broad enough to recognize that womanhood is neither universal nor equivalent to only cisgender identity. And yet, it also presented a barrier to inclusion within these spaces by only providing two options to check—male and female. Within that context, Ezra checking female then is not so much a _lie_ as it is a non-choice (see Spade 2006). Check female and be considered. Check male and have your application rejected.

As of this writing in 2020, over half of women’s colleges in the US have such admission policies in place, defining over 14 different combinations of identity, legal, and bio-medical criteria in which trans* students must fit in order to be eligible for admission (see Table 1) (Boskey and Ganor 2019; Nanney and Brunsma 2017). As such, while Athena’s policy restricted admission to only self-identified women, other women’s colleges have articulated that the admission of trans* men and non-binary students fall within the purview and mission of a women’s college.

Here’s where we might typically take leave of Ezra. Once Ezra was able to overcome the admission barriers to Athena and enroll as a student, they should be afforded the same experiences, privileges, and outcomes promised of all other Athena students, regardless of identity.4 Especially at an elite college such as Athena, with a large endowment, far-reaching alumni network, and extensive educational opportunities, Ezra should, for all intents and purposes, be fine. And generally, they were. During our year together, Ezra was doing well academically, and had a steady job, good group of friends, a loving partner, and stable housing on campus. As they explained, “The simple answer is everything's okay. There's no like

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4 As detailed later, under Title IX federal policy, single-sex colleges may discriminate on the basis of sex at the time of admission, but not during matriculation, meaning that any student _enrolled_ in a women’s college cannot be discriminated against regardless of their identity (Heise 2019; Kraschel 2012; Morrison 2019).
malicious misgendering, there's usually just like, people don't know or it's a big class a lot of the time. And like the idea of my gender doesn't really come up.”

And yet, this was not necessarily the case for all trans* students. As Alder (ze/zir), a white transgender dyke at Minerva College, who wrote about transitioning in zir application, explained,

I would much rather get rejected than end up somewhere that wasn't, at least on the surface, um, committed to inclusion and equity work…Like there's a lot of trans* people here and a lot more every year and the admin is going to give you shit and you're going to get misgendered and it's gonna suck and there's going to be no recourse, but it's probably better here than it is anywhere else…If someone had been like “Minerva is a trans* paradise,” I would have been insanely skeptical and run away.

Unlike Athena, Minerva College has what has been termed—by media and students alike—a more “inclusive” transgender admission policy, openly admitting trans* women, men, and non-binary students. The only gender applicant Minerva does not consider for admission is cisgender men. And yet, as Alder notes, regardless of what the policy states, ze expected there to be at least some form of difficulty on campus, as no college can be a perfectly safe haven for trans* students—or anyone for that matter—and any college that positioned itself as one would be lying. In fact, trans* inclusion was widely variable across and within these two colleges; other students such as Josh and Devon were in and out of the hospital for mental health issues, Violet and Carter experienced difficulty finding community as queer trans* students of color, and Luca and Nell were overextended doing diversity and equity work. During my time at these two campuses, despite formal policies stating that trans* students were welcome, once admitted, trans* students faced additional barriers (as well as privileges) to inclusion within the
institutional community, raising the question regarding what these policies do beyond admission and what trans* inclusion looks like in practice. Put simply, borrowing Gina Garcia’s phraseology (2019), (how) do women’s colleges go from trans* admitting to trans* serving?

In this dissertation, I address this question through an ethnography of transgender admission policies at two gender-selective women’s colleges: Athena and Minerva. As opposed to analyzing or evaluating the outcomes of such policies, which would in effect measure whether or not they admit trans* students, I examine the discourses that emerge out of these policies to understand the ways in which inclusion is lived (or not) in the daily lives of transgender students within these colleges. As such, this dissertation is not merely a description of transgender students’ experiences in higher education, but centers these experiences to examine how gender categories become legible, admissible, and livable (Butler 2004; Spade 2015; Valentine 2007), complicating our understanding of how policies work, how gender is reinforced in the women’s college setting, and how to best support trans* students in these environments. Using nine months of participant observation of campus events and activities with trans* students, interviews with students, alumni, and employees, and archival textual analysis, I argue that institutionalized commitments to inclusion obscure and even intensify existing gender inequality, thereby failing to make fundamental structural changes in how gendered power, resources, and opportunities are distributed for the most vulnerable of transgender students, particularly for low-income, queer, non-white, and trans* masculine students. As such, I conclude that we must consider how policy and practice may limit inclusion through intersections of race, class, sexuality, ability, and other axes of identity in the production and regulation of gendered categories.
A Note on Terminology

Before writing any further, I find it important to first include a note on terminology used in this dissertation. When writing, sometimes we must use the very categories we seek to critique in order to name the inequalities we examine (Valentine 2007). Especially within the topic at hand—institutional and community identity, policy, and admission—modes of administrative governance produce what we come to think of as natural and neutral identities through the production of meaning for the categories they administer (Spade 2015). Drawing from Spade’s (2015) discussion of administrative violence, the categories of “womanhood” and “transgender,” through which students must read their selves, manage both the population and the distribution of vulnerability: “[They] reach into the most minute details of our bodies, thoughts and behaviors. The labels and categories generated through our disciplined behavior keep us in our places and help us know how to be ourselves properly” (p. 54). In other words, language is not merely a constellation of words—it holds disciplinary and productive power by which certain people are able to become culturally recognizable and therefore intelligible and livable, while rendering others abject or altogether impossible (Butler 2004). By classifying admissibility according to sex/gender, codified though the law, medicine, and access to other administrative systems, this governs the proper way in which one must be a “woman” or “trans*.” While identity categories are essential to articulating and locating people and groups, it is important to acknowledge that they are insufficient in capturing the fluid nature of gender identities, expressions, and embodiments that show up in various contexts (Butler 2004; Nicolazzo 2017).

As I take up the question of how such inclusion policies are enacted on campus, what underlies this, then, are the ways in which the categories embedded within these policies set the terms by which people come to identify themselves and others as belonging to and included
within the institution. In other words, how the institutionalization of “inclusion,” “womanhood,” and “transgender” as categories enabled certain people to not only describe or explain non-normative genders, but also participate in producing the effect of those differences by effacing other categories (Valentine 2007). As such, in this section I provide information regarding the key terms used throughout this dissertation. These explanations are not meant to be complete nor a glossary of all terms relevant to this study, as it would be impossible to be exhaustive as well as irresponsible to suggest that these meanings are definitive. Rather, I use this space to think through the productive implications of these terms which I must use in order to examine them, highlighting the lack of clarity of such analytic categories that I take up.

*Gender-Selective College*

As discussed at further length in Chapter 5, one central question that arises with these policies amongst community members is the categorization of these colleges—what should they be called? In law, they are called single-sex institutions, while colloquially they are referred to as men’s and women’s colleges. To most, this difference may seem inconsequential and these terms may be used interchangeably. But, to understand the stakes of such terminology, take, for the sake of illustration, a popularly sold shirt in Athena and Minerva bookstores which jokes, “It’s not a girls’ school without men, it’s a women’s college without boys.” While the intent of this shirt was likely to discuss the infantilization of feminine institutions as a result of patriarchal power, it can also be interpreted differently, as there are boys and men at these colleges, teaching courses, in partnership with students, and enrolled as students themselves. So then, these may be women’s colleges, but they aren’t without boys or men. Respondents in my research grappled with this question at great length with little consensus on what we should now call these institutions, some calling for “historically women’s college” (akin to historically Black colleges
and universities, HBCUs) recognizing that they were originally built due to segregated access to higher education but now do admit people of other races/genders. Others contested this term, as it erases the very possibility that trans* people have always attended and been at these colleges, and instead called for other terminology such as “gender diverse” or “gender inclusive.”

I propose the language of *gender-selective* to refer to colleges that restrict admission on the basis of sex/gender to acknowledge that these colleges have always and continue to enroll students who are of different sexed and gender experiences regardless of the admission policy or identity of the college. By claiming that they are gender-selective, rather than gender diverse, however, I also acknowledge that these colleges both formally and informally must restrict admission on some level to exist, but also not necessarily *serve* students as they are admitted as a form of diversity and inclusion work.

*Policy, Practice, and Resource*

In this dissertation, I use Susan Marine’s (2009:4) definition of policy, “The way that women’s colleges codify, formalize, and endeavor to bring uniformity to institutional practice, and to thereby declare their official stance toward a population or issue.” As Marine explains, while policy can be described as both informal actions as well as statements that both individual actors and institutions employ when responding to situations, the focus on policies here is on formal institutional rules that document the official procedure regarding admission. While some colleges have made private practice or unofficial statements regarding admission, this does little service to trans* students as they are either treated inconsistently by differing practitioners within the same institution, are unable to easily access such information during the application process.

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5 As one employee explained, the term “admission” is preferred on campus: “We like to say we admit students one at a time, so we refer to our office, and our applicants in the singular rather than the plural.”
without outing themselves (which may also be unsafe), or the lack of information could be interpreted as “ambiguity of commitment” (Boskey and Ganor 2019; Marine 2009:210).

Therefore, institutional policies 1) are public through their being published online or otherwise easily accessible to students, 2) at minimum name the values and belief systems of the organization, and 3) delineate institution-wide or group-wide practices as opposed to on an individual basis.

This ethnography examines the formal admission policies of two women’s colleges, as well as the resources available to students and how informal practices may diverge from the intent and rules outlined within these policies. Through this, I discuss not only the text of the policy, but the “teeth” of such policy—how these institutions put these policies into play on campus to support trans* inclusion. Practices and resources include, but are not limited to, intake forms, images on campus, ID cards, health care, and training. As discussed below in the theoretical framework, drawing upon the work of Sara Ahmed (2012), by focusing on all three aspects—policy, resources, and practices—we can also focus on what follows from this use of commitment as a mode of subject constitution: what those words do (or not) as such ideas circulate within the community that is being described.

Sex/Gender

Perhaps because of the nature of this research, I hesitate to offer a discussion of sex and gender in fear of further reifying their multiple meanings, embodiments, and possibilities. The separation of sex, gender, and sexuality as discrete categories is often largely represented in scholarly and activist accounts as a progressive move towards more accurate (and distinct) representation of identity (see Butler 1990; Rubin 1984 for discussion). Yet, this differentiation
can also undercut the critical intentions of feminist, queer, and trans* analyses (again, noting that these three analyses are, too, not discrete). As Valentine (2007:16-17) asks,

Why [is it] that transgender identified people—and transgender identity, transgender community, etc.—are seen to be figures which can tell us something about a category of experience we call “gender,” but not about other kinds of human experiences that we call “race,” “class,” or most importantly, “sexuality”… By identifying transgender people as experiencing discrimination or violence along the axis of gender identity, or describing gender-variant people through the framework of transgender, how are other kinds of social experiences elided?

Drawing upon Rubin’s conception of the sex/gender system, wherein she describes sex/gender as “a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention” (p. 165), I use sex/gender throughout this writing to acknowledge that sex and gender are not separable. Especially in codified policies for transgender students, these environments draw upon notions of sex and gender together, focusing both on identity and biology; therefore sex and gender are lived through and within one another, making the notion of “single-sex” colleges interchangeable, often conflated, and complicated by the notion of “women’s college.” By using sex/gender, I take stock in these discussions by noting that the colleges and students within them simultaneously draw upon both terms, and that they are inseparable.

Further, following Nicolazzo (2017), I have chosen to use the asterisk after trans* as a way to signal the multitude of identities and identity categories used to refer to those of us who are trans* (with the exception of quoted text, which remains in the original) (Tompkins 2014). The asterisk, while debated within trans* communities, stems from computer Boolean phrases
allowing one to search any suffix on the end of the prefix trans- (transgender, trans* woman, transsexual, trans* masculine), evoking trans* as a method by which “it indexes discursive and intersectional formations of complex embodiment and personhood that must transcend their hegemonic formation, a formation impossible to live” (Noble 2012a:276). As a method, the asterisk provides a textual representation of the malleability of gender identities, expressions, embodiments, and performances that are inextricably intertwined with race, sexuality, ability, and other social locations. Included within this, I too acknowledge how the use of “cis” is not static nor a natural category referent. To avoid constructing a cisgender/trans* binary in relation to gender identity (Darwin 2020; Enke 2012; Garrison 2018; Nicolazzo 2017), I take care in my writing to note the implications of what binary gender distinctions—as codified in policy and practice—have on all people, and how sex/gender is used as a regulatory system of power.

Finally, recognizing that my own classification and use of these categories may diverge from my respondents, I use the names and pronouns chosen by the respondents and note any discrepancy in the text. I chose not to include a table or information in the text referring to the aggregated numbers of participants in particular identity categories. Quantifying gender into discrete categories can be important to make trans* identities visible within binary systems, and there is a growing literature of critical quantitative methods to make trans* count (see, for example, Baumle 2018; Currah and Stryker 2015a; Dockendorff 2019; Westbrook and Saperstein 2015). And yet, quantitative measures of trans* identity may also force “atypical configurations of identity into categories into which they do not quite fit—the proverbial square peg in a round hole” (Currah and Stryker 2015b:4). In this way, quantitative measures become another kind of normalizing administrative violence, reducing the complexities of lived gendered
identities and experiences into socially imposed categories. Rather, as Table 2 provides, I introduce the participants through the ways in which they describe themselves.

Inclusion, Identity, Organization, and Institution

These four terms—inclusion, identity, organization, and institution—are at the heart of this dissertation. While each could be defined individually, drawing on separate literatures, they are so intertwined in the following analysis that it makes sense that they are discussed together here.

From a very basic sociological standpoint, identity and institutions are positioned on opposite sides of a spectrum. Identity, an individual, micro-level trait, is generally understood as the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make a person or group while institutions are macro-level social arrangements that are created and maintained to govern actions. The term institution is also sometimes used interchangeably with “organization,” which, from a Weberian (1947) perspective, is a formal and rational structure within which people interact, consisting of bureaucratic functions such as division of labor, administrative hierarchy, rules of procedure, and formalized and neutral role relationships. Within this understanding, identity(ies) can be self-selected or imposed by others, intersecting, overlapping, situationally relevant or not, and determines membership—inclusion—to social categories, groups, and organizations based on a shared or differing sense of that organizing identity. Institutions, then, are the rules that connect an individual, group, or organization to a larger social environment.

My purpose here is not to provide an overview of how identity is developed, but rather highlight how identity is situated within and constructed by/constructs systems of power. In other words, personal identity is never just an individual choice, but rather is shaped by and experienced through social relationships with others and within social institutions. Take, for
example, gender identity. Gender identity is both ascribed by others (“It’s a boy!”) as well as a form of self-identity (“I am”) that is expressed through outward performances, known sociologically as doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987), and it is these constant reiterations of gender that *performatively* construct gender categories (Butler 2004). People are then held accountable by others by *determining* their gender, interpreting their performance and placing them into gender categories based on different socially relevant criteria whether that be legal, self-identity, or biomedical status (Hollander 2013; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). Gender, in this way, is never *not* done, but rather it is constantly *redone*, slowly changing and adapting in relationship to larger social understandings and recognitions of gendered possibilities (West and Zimmerman 2009). And yet, as trans* scholars such as Spade (2015) and Nicolazzo (2017:15) have noted, it is these moments that “[expose] the precariousness with which one can understand notions of community and alliances made among trans* people.” The entangled and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways individuals may identify, express, and embody gender—such that identity, expression, and embodiment may not “align”—are rooted within other identities such as race and class, larger groups, organizations, and institutions that depend on stable notions of gender to exist and distribute life-governing resources. Thus, how others read an individual’s gender and how that individual chooses to self-identify is potentially ruptured.

It is within this context that this study is situated. I argue that student identities and experiences are fundamentally shaped by the gendered structure of the college. That is, through the institutional context wherein gender norms and discourses are created, imposed, challenged, changed, and adopted, gender organizes the college experience and systematically disadvantages particular groups of students who do not conform (willingly or not) to these norms. That is not to suggest that trans* students’ experiences with sex/gender are identical—in fact, as Nicolazzo
(2017) describes, trans* people constitute a community of difference with different trans* identities, expressions, and embodiments—nor does it suggest that identity, expression, and/or embodiment is something one can necessarily force upon someone else. Rather, college experiences are shaped by the fit between individual characteristics and organizational characteristics, determined by the institutional sex/gender projects that attempt to define the organizational mission and identity. Therefore, inclusion not only is a matter of mere acceptance, the “once you’re here, you’re one of us” mentality; inclusion is constructed at the discursive and ideological level, wherein one fits within the larger community—who we are, as well as who we are not.

A point that I take up throughout this dissertation, at the most basic of levels, inclusion then must consist of visibility, tolerance, and legitimacy. But, I also think inclusion is more than that. Inclusion should be understood as never fully achievable, but a constant practice in redressing individual, structural, and intersecting inequalities to create environments where people not only survive but thrive.

**Theoretical Framework**

As I began this work, theorizations regarding transgender inclusion in women’s colleges had only begun to grab the attention of education and gender scholars. And yet, the current incarnation of the “woman question” (Noble 2012b; Riddell 1980; Whittle 2006) within women’s colleges could easily be seen as feminist history repeating itself; with new actors engaging in the same struggle to define the boundaries of common womanhood including women of color, lesbians and queer women, poor women, and trans* women. As Noble (2012b) explains, the fact that these debates perpetually reoccur does not suggest feminism’s successfulness, per se, but rather the performative production of gendered social identity: “Their
reiteration suggests that the field is haunted, forever grappling with the exclusions it self-generates. Such exclusions, as hauntings…return because they are what we relegate to the outside even as they are deeply central [to our very meaning]” (p. 48). What womanhood and inclusion are, what they do and do not mean, and who can (and does) belong to such categories complicates discussions of how feminism and gender-selective environments matter for transgender students. As such, in asking how transgender inclusion is regulated and lived in women’s spaces, these questions are guided by ongoing histories, debates, and conversations within trans/feminism(s), critical trans* politics, and organizational theories. In the section that follows, I discuss my theoretical framework that draws from these three perspectives to contextualize feminist gendered organizations, the (non)performance of diversity and inclusion, and trans* justice.

Trans/Feminism(s)

Trans*. Feminism. Though trans* studies and feminism seem to be caught in a continuously reiterated conflict with one another, contradictory and in opposition, I enter this dissertation with the conviction that, as Enke (2012:1) describes, “Feminist studies and transgender studies [can be and] are intimately connected to one another in their endeavor to analyze epistemologies and practices that produce gender.” Coined by Koyama in 1992 (Stryker and Bettcher 2016), trans/feminism is not simply the addition of trans* people to pre-existing feminist bodies of knowledge, a debate about whether trans* women are women (Serano 2013), nor is it merely about trans* people as a phenomenon (Stryker 2006). Rather, a trans/feminist perspective is a new iteration of understanding how sex/gender is normalized, regulated, and produces discourses of livability by centering trans* communities as the focus of inquiry (Bettcher 2017; Enke 2012; Koyama 2003; Preciado 2013; Serano 2007, 2013; Stryker and
Bettcher 2016). As Stryker and Bettcher (2016) explain, the slash between trans* and feminism marks a break between the two halves of trans/feminism to make space for a wider range of work that explores the many ways trans* and feminist work can relate to one another, providing a space for feminist perspectives on trans* issues and trans* perspectives on feminist issues, noting that these issues are often overlapping or the same. If trans* people are oppressed as trans* people and women are oppressed as women, then we need an account of at least two modalities of gender oppression, if not more, to accommodate individuals who are oppressed as women and as trans* people from an intersectional viewpoint (Bettcher 2014; Serano 2007). Trans/feminism extends and advances feminism as a whole through the notion that there are as many ways to be a woman as there are women (Koyama 2003).

To this end, trans/feminist scholarship and activism have been primary sites in contesting trans* exclusionary (or “gender critical”) feminism. Especially within U.S. and other Westernized countries, trans* exclusionary feminists have made strange bedfellows with political and social conservatives (not to suggest that they are political or social conservatives), both taking up the fight against trans* rights as their raison d’être (Bettcher 2017; Burns 2019; Earles 2017). Creating “moments of ideological collision” (Westbrook and Schilt 2014), the very existence of trans* people threatens and exposes not only the unreliableness of the body as a source of identity politics, but also the fallacy of women’s universal experiences and oppressions (Koyama 2006). As a result, trans* exclusionary discourse attempts to reassert a natural and essential binary, what Westbrook and Schilt (2014) call “gender naturalization work,” which

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6 Trans* exclusionary radical feminists, or TERFs, often refer to themselves as “gender critical feminists,” contending that TERF is an antifeminist and even misogynist slur (see Williams 2017). As Ahmed (2016:30) writes, “Of course, the implication of this expression is that trans activism (or trans existence) requires being gender uncritical, thus nullifying the long and varied critiques of the category of gender (including as a diagnostic category) made within trans communities.”
operates under the presumption that trans* people are not “really” the gender they claim to be and/or that gender identity does not exist. Consequently, trans* exclusionary ideology denies the livability of trans* lives, such that trans* men are delusional butch lesbians, trans* women are men, and that non-binary people do not exist, and claims that trans* people, and trans* women in particular, should be excluded from our purview of feminism as they are not “really” women.

For example, scholars Mary Daly, Janice Raymond, and Sheila Jeffreys have all published widely cited and deeply transphobic texts, full of paranoid accusations about trans* women threatening the physical safety of women. As Raymond (1979:104) infamously writes,

> All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist violates women’s sexuality and spirit, as well. Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception.

As Raymond claims, it is biology, not identity, that determines one’s gender. Unable to recognize trans* women as women within this logic, trans* women are thus rendered to be men who “pretend” or can only fantasize to be women in order to violate “real” women’s physical bodies, space, and ideological concepts of sex/gender and womanhood.

The result of such ideologies is both discursively as well as physically violent for those whom those comments are directed.7 Discursively, trans* exclusionary ideologies are meant to, for the lack of a better word, be exclusionary, rendering trans* bodies and people as impossible. As Hayward (2017) describes, such ideologies are an attack on the ontology—the beingness—of

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7 There are, of course, incidents within this tension of trans* exclusionary and gender critical feminists being the targets of violent rhetoric as well, especially as the terminology TERF is taken up uncritically. Such violence against trans* exclusionary feminists is seen as misogyny and violence by men because trans* women are not seen as women. Certainly, violent statements calling for TERFs to be killed is equally wrong and should be condemned. By listing such violence in exclusionary statements here, however, is to denote their difference: the violence in attacking one’s ideology versus their very existence (Williams 2017).
trans*, indexing a plot upon which trans* lives then become killable. Emboldened by such ideologies, trans* exclusionary feminists have attempted to murder Sandy Stone for being a member of the radical feminist Olivia Recording Collective (as a direct response to Raymond’s writing who calls Stone out by name), publicly assaulted trans* performer Beth Elliot at the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference as well as those who defended her, had Nancy Jean Burkholder removed from Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, mobbed a group of trans* inclusive Lesbian Avengers, have threatened the life of a 15-year-old teenage trans* girl with knives, arranged to have Sylvia Rivera beaten, and verbally harassed the National Press Secretary of the Human Rights Campaign Sarah McBride on film (Williams 2016, 2017). It was trans* exclusionary feminist ideologies that were used to inform the writing of a 1981 National Center for Health Care Technology report on transsexual surgery, which later officially made transsexual surgery ineligible for coverage from public insurance in the United States (Awkward-Rich 2017). It was anti-trans* Women’s Liberation Front (WoLF) member Julia Beck who was invited to speak as a witness at the hearings for the reauthorization of the Violence

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8 One participant, Marty, and I, had a long discussion during our interview regarding trans* inclusion and Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. While Marty and I disagree about MichFest policies and politics, I appreciated her insight and care about how the events were represented. Marty attended the festival for 13 years, explained that “A music festival in the woods of Michigan is not what is oppressing trans* people” and felt that the occurrence between Burkholder and the festival leaders was handled respectfully: “I am furious that the festival ended and I really mourn the loss of the festival every day...The festival had a particular focus and a particular intention. And one time one person was asked to leave and in a, you know, fairly respectful and appropriate way and not like just throwing them out into the street.” In our interview, Marty took concern with what my representation of the festival would look like, asking “I’ve seen it over and over and over again where misinformation about the festival and what the festival, how, you know, like the festival, what its intention was, how it handled things, et cetera, has been grossly misrepresented a lot. So please don't do that.” I grappled with how to represent the larger trans/feminist context of the study, especially with MWMF being one of the most famous and widely cited instances of trans* exclusion within women’s and feminist spaces. Ultimately I chose not to dive into the details of MWMF, only citing the fact that, yes, Michigan did have an explicit purpose for being a space for “womyn-born-womyn,” and yes, Nancy Burkholder was removed from the space for her identity. See Boyd (1997), Browne (2009, 2010), Earles (2017), Gamson (1997), Green (2006), Heaney (2016), Koyama (2006), MacDonald (2018); McConnell et al. (2016), B. Morris (1999, 2016) and P. Morris (2011) for information.
Against Women Act and equated trans* women to male rapists (House Committee on the Judiciary 2019) and it was Australian radical feminist Sheila Jeffries that went before UK Parliament in 2018 and called trans* women “parasites” (Burns 2019). And it is trans* exclusionary feminists who are again leading the charge against trans* people’s access to (particularly women’s) restrooms, prisons, sports, colleges, and shelters, and resisting reforms to the UK’s Gender Recognition Act. While certainly trans* exclusionary claims do not explicitly detail how to carry out such violence against trans* people—nor do they see their claims as violent (Dotson 2011)—and certainly violence against these feminists, too, has occurred and is unacceptable, such ideologies, once stated, have the repercussion of encouraging followers to take up the cause through constructed understandings of trans* people as violent threats, feminist or not.

It is in this manner that trans/feminisms take up violence against trans* women, and trans* women of color in particular. As Namaste (2009:20) argues, “A simple appeal to the prevalence of that violence does not, in my view, offer an appropriate model for understanding [the different ways social relations of race, labor, and gender intersect]. Theory is in the details.” Drawing upon, building upon, and in conversation with feminists of color who have and continue to expose the ways in which existing feminist categories and frameworks exclude the complexity and diversity of women’s lives—enacting an epistemic, ontological, and physical violence upon non-white, cis, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper-class women—Namaste and other trans/feminists encourage us to ask whether “woman” itself is a sufficient enough category to account for the various forms of oppression that all women experience (Stryker and Bettcher 2016). Snorton (2017), for example, documents how enslaved Black women have been used as medical experiments, reducing their bodies to black flesh and using their genitals to “prove”
Black women’s non-reproductivity, hypersexualization, and unfemininity. Theorizing transgender embodiment “in relation to the kinds of violence that inflect black and trans* life, only one of which is the violence of erasure, and for which that erasure is about not an absence but a persistent and animating presence” (p. 144), Snorton demonstrates how Blackness conditions the possibility for trans* modes of being wherein gender undergoes a radical disorientation for Black and blackened subjects. As Black trans* people are denied humanity, told and made not to exist through racialized and gendered violence, the logic of sex/gender is given coherence, thereby providing the white liberal transgender the possibility to move towards a politics of visibility and “inclusion.” As Hayward (2017) describes, the “transgender tipping point” that realizes the need and importance of transgender visibility and equality is built on and depends upon the bodies of dead and murdered Black trans* women who were denied such visibility and legitimacy. As such, drawing upon Spillers’s (1987) notion of “ungendering”—the idea that the dehumanizing conditions of slavery made the privileges of gender identity inaccessible to black people, such that Black women are denied their femininity—trans/feminisms takes up the question of for whom sex/gender self-determination is possible and for whom it is foreclosed.

This dissertation uses a trans/feminist framework to address who a woman is by examining the exclusionary assumptions within the category woman and responding that ‘woman’ is both made and experienced in a multitude of ways (Enke 2012). As Stryker and Bettcher (2016:7) write in the opening essay of the “Trans/feminisms” issue of Transgender Studies Quarterly,

Rather than cede the label feminist to a minority of feminists who hold a particular set of negative opinions about trans people, and rather than reducing all transgender
engagement with feminism to the strategy embraced by some trans people of vigorously challenging certain forms of antitransgender feminist speech, we should instead demonstrate the range and complexity of trans/feminist relationships. Rather than fighting a battle on the same terrain that has been contested...for decades, we should contextualize the battle lines within a far richer and more complicated world history of trans/feminist engagement.

An intersectional feminism, trans/feminism critiques faulty universalisms of feminism, and calls for the production of new sets of bodies, identities, political acts, critical practices, and new subjects of feminism through the lens of sex/gender, race, class, sexuality, and other modes of difference (Namaste 2009; Noble 2012b). Trans/feminisms begin with the assertion that by denying the importance—or even the very existence—of difference within an identity group, people in unmarked positions of privilege (such as cisgender) gain the ability to falsely universalize from their own experience, and marginalize, exclude, and erase those in less privileged circumstances (Koyama 2006). Because trans/feminism raises the question of whether it is sufficient to talk about sexual difference and sexism in singular, binary terms (Stryker and Bettcher 2016), my point in using a trans/feminist framework in this study is to provides a lens upon which the codification of “womanhood” in institutional policy and community identity can be understood as simultaneously diversifying the possibilities of womanhood all while limiting the category to only those who are recognizable in normative and universalizing guidelines. By taking up not only sex/gender as a point of analysis but also how sex/gender is constructed through race, class, and sexuality, I turn our focus against liberal (white) transgender projects about visibility, non-discrimination, inclusion, and equality to expose how these policies and institutional logics are predicated on the nonexistence of particular bodies—Black and trans*
masculine bodies—to constitute the “transgender tipping point” of inclusion for others (Hayward 2017).

**Gendered Organizational Theory**

Like individuals and communities, organizations, too, are gendered. While previous theorizations conceptualized organizations as neutral and rational, feminist scholars have noted how, as Britton (2000:419) writes, “Gender is a foundational element of organizational structure and ‘present in [its] processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power.’” Within gendered organizations, sex/gender differences are both present as well as produced within organizational structure and practices, creating hierarchies of control, meaning, and identity between different groups.

Institutions of higher education are no exception. Regardless of the gendered demographic composition of the institution, colleges and universities—coed and gender-selective alike—are gendered (Bilodeau 2007; Crowder 2012; Farmer et al. 2019; Lester, Sallee, and Hart 2017; McTavish and Thomson 2007; Nicolazzo 2017). Within education, there remain persistent gaps in access, experiences, and outcomes on the basis of sex/gender (DiPrete and Buchmann 2013; Jacobs 1996; Mickelson 2003; E. Morris 2011; Ovink 2016; Thorne 1993). Previous scholarship has largely, however, ignored gendered organizational theorizations for understanding these inequalities (with the exception of discussing faculty and administration) (Lester et al. 2017). Rather, previous scholarship has attempted to classify the emergence of these differences as a result of different individual and structural-level factors including differing academic abilities/interests, family background, inherent biological differences, socialization, economic incentives and returns, and gender role attitudes—explanations that cast gender
categories as static and predetermined variables that have a specified effect on certain outcomes (see, for example, E. Morris 2011).

Drawing on a gendered organizational framework, in this dissertation I push forward sociological concepts of sex/gender in education by focusing on the ways in which educational structures and practices (re)produce sex/gender categories and inequality. In so doing, I question the ways in which sex/gender gaps in educational access and experiences are a consequence of the interaction between individual and structural levels—recognizing that students embody and enact sex/gender for which they are held accountable by others, which in turn may be set up and reflected within structural practices, policies, and discourses of the institution.

When considering gender-selective women’s colleges in particular, it seems obvious that such institutions are inherently gendered to the extent that they are women dominated (Britton 2000). And yet, as Britton (2000) critiques, merely calling an organization gendered because of the ratio of how many men and women are present may obscure the historical process through which definitions of gender-appropriate norms and behaviors are shaped and leaves little possibility for change. Rather, she calls for a distinction between the sex composition of an organization and the processes through which organizations come to be seen as gendered with/by/for those with masculine or feminine characteristics and what those characteristics are; that is, what allows us to consider such organizations gendered in the first place and how these institutions define and police their gendered ideologies and populations. As such, we are urged to look beyond student demographics and look at the symbols, images, policies, practices, and

\footnote{Acker (1990) outlines five processes by which organizations are gendered: 1) the construction of divisions in space, allowed behaviors and power according to gender; 2) the construction of symbols and images that explain or oppose these divisions; 3) interactions between people of different genders; 4) personal identity and enactments/embodiments of gender; and 5) gender is implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures.}
interactions that create the set of meanings, practices, and actions that function to embed sex/gender into the organizational logic.

Take, for example, Farmer et al.’s (2019:2) examination of genderism, an organizational form of gender oppression wherein sex/gender is defined, constructed, and maintained as a binary “system of meaning and symbols, along with the rules privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use—for power and sexuality.” (qtd. from Wilchins 2004:40; see also Nicolazzo’s [2017] concept binary gender discourse). Interviewing ten trans* and gender expansive students across three gender-selective women’s colleges in the Southeast, they identified that students experience genderism through the spoken and unspoken expectations of roles, conduct, and appearance in an environment that lacked understanding of gender diversity, leading to hostile campus climates. As K, an agenderflux student, described,

I was assumed female based on their unspoken rubric of what that was . . . Against the rubric, individuals who existed outside of or between genders were either left alone or harassed by administration, depending on how close to the binary ideals of womanhood they were. (qtd. on p. 4, emphasis mine)

While these colleges were open to trans* and gender expansive people, operating as a space that people might assume would be “inclusive” or at least gender-neutral or blind, cultural manifestations of the gender binary discourse regulated everyone’s life. All students, faculty, staff and visitors were (re)oriented in both overt and tacit ways regarding how they should think about, present, and do sex/gender—as K describes, the “unspoken rubric.” Yet, it was trans* students such as Micah, who especially bore the brunt of enforced binary gender norms, forced into narrow categories of gender in order to have their basic needs met:
The [transgender] policy also serves to hunt non-binary individuals, for if a student begins exhibiting masculine behavior, or performing their identity outside of feminine gender norms, they are called in for questioning and they have their educations and scholarships threatened. (qtd. on p. 5)

As Farmer et al. describe, these oppressive experiences and encounters with administrative violence take an emotional toll on the most vulnerable of students, including feelings of institutional betrayal.

How, then, can we talk about the organizational move towards inclusion, diversity, and equality if such spaces reproduce inequality? One possible direction is the concept of feminist organizations.¹⁰ As opposed to patriarchal structures within traditionally bureaucratic organizations and a focus on the gendered composition within organizations, it is possible for organizations to promote less oppressively gendered environments (Britton and Logan 2008). As research has noted, feminist organizations have served a vital importance in advancing gender equality, including feminist bookstores, healthcare and childcare collectives, softball leagues, zines, and music studios, and have been key to perpetuating the development and spread of feminism as a social movement (see, for example, Britton and Logan 2008; Enke 2007; Martin 1990). So then, as Nicolazzo and Harris (2014:6) question regarding campus women’s centers as feminist organizations, “What defines a feminist space? If feminists are always already diverse and disparate, how does one go about marking spaces as feminist?” Martin (1990) contends that while there is not necessarily a universal formula in what makes an organization feminist, as some are hierarchical, bureaucratic, and for-profit while others focus on grassroots,

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¹⁰ See also Williams and Giuffre’s (2011) discussion of queer organizations.
collaborative, and non-profit structures, she offers up ten general criteria for what constitutes a feminist organization including:

1. endorsing a feminist ideology;
2. fostering feminist values of mutual caring, support, and empowerment;
3. having both an internal and external agenda that advances feminist goals;
4. striving for feminist outcomes for both participants and society;
5. founding, working in collaboration with, or contributing to the feminist movement;
6. consciously considering the organizational structure in terms of agency, decision making, and conflict resolution;
7. advancing organizational practices in light of these goals;
8. conscious of members and membership in terms of compensation, recruitment, advancement, and diversity;
9. scope, size, and scale of organizational activities; and
10. external perceptions of the organization.

As I discuss in the following chapters, in many ways, gender-selective women’s colleges have committed themselves to being feminist organizations, both in mission (first by creating educational opportunities for women and then shifting towards a focus on equity) as well as the policies, practices, and opportunities afforded to students. As Marine (2009, 2011a) found through her dissertation work, asking if women’s college employees thought that their institutions were feminist, the majority of participants emphasized the organizational aim of empowering students and preparing them to confront and challenge the sexism they can expect to face in their post-college life. Additionally, she found that those employees who identified as feminist were more likely to extend their perceptions of the feminist organization to be inclusive
of transgender students, extending the notion of *feminist* organization to be trans*-inclusive or even trans/feminist.

At the same time, however, others have noted the persistent racial and classed inequities and exclusions that feminist organizations can perpetuate (Acker 2006; Britton and Logan 2008; Scott 2005), producing what Bunjun (2010) calls a “hegemonic feminism.” By solidifying sex/gender as the ultimate oppression that feminist organizations work address, hegemonic feminism focuses on white, upper-class, cisgender womanhood while refusing to engage in an intersectional analysis of power and marginalizing certain issues and groups of people who do not belong to the imagined feminist community. As trans* inclusion within feminist organizations challenges this hegemonic feminist identity at the very root of their foundation—what constitutes the ‘woman’ within the woman’s and feminist space—this causes organizations to ask fundamental questions about their intentions and purpose. As Nicolazzo and Harris (2014) question, do feminist spaces “intend to be spaces that address issues related to females (sex), women and femininity (gender), or both” (p. 7)? If the definition of feminism within the organization depends upon a definition of sex/gender to exist, then the public knowledge of trans* individuals within the feminist organization theoretically threatens the very definition and operation of the space. As a result, the category *woman* and the organization itself is about reinforcing the collective identity and clear difference between men and women in a setting in which *woman* cannot stop making sense (Boyd 1997; Gamson 1997). In many cases, it is especially within feminist organizations that barriers to trans* inclusion occurs, as Caplan-Bricker (2019) notes, “resistance to rethinking the meaning of ‘woman’ can be strongest in the most avowedly feminist spaces” (para. 23). Thus, this leads to a divergence between the formal
commitment of the feminist organization and the actual practices that occur in creating a feminist space.

As Lewis and Diamond (2015) detail, organizations function through the interaction between the *ostensive* (the formal narrative of how things *should* be done) and the *performative* (how the routine is actually performed). While the ostensive aspect appears to outline fair and legitimate processes that lead to equitable outcomes, there may be divergence in the performative practices of the organization that counter the expressed values and mission of the organization (Ahmed 2012; Ashworth, Boyne, and Delbridge 2009; Lewis and Diamond 2015; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Sykes, Schneider, and Plank 2009). Further, Ahmed (2012), drawing upon Butler (2004), details that the *performative* is not merely an act of *doing* (e.g. performance), but rather the reiterative, citational, and productive practice that brings the organizational body that it describes into existence. For example, throughout my research (and as I discuss further in Chapters 5-6), students would, of their own accord, call institutional practices such as the “pronoun round” “performative.” The purpose of the pronoun round was to construct an environment wherein pronouns and gender identity are not assumed while being inclusive of trans* people. And yet, at the same time, students’ description of this practice as performative also suggested that the practice did *not* actually create inclusion, but rather served as a way for the institution to laud itself for its efforts without enacting any real change, as people did not use the pronouns trans* students claimed while the institution continued to use “she/her” to refer to the entire student body. Therefore, organizational policies and practices, too, can be nonperformative, in that they do not bring about the effect in which they name, but do the naming *as if* they were performative. Put simply, the name comes to stand in for the effect. Though an examination of diversity and inclusion work, for example, Ahmed contends that
organizational documents, once written, acquire lives of their own—they circulate, move around, and are taken up by different actors. Therefore, organizations can make symbolic commitments to diversity work without actually having to make significant structural change. A commitment to diversity, then, is just that—a statement of commitment (naming) without actually doing the work of or to bring about diversity. As such, this requires us to recognize that an equality regime can be an inequality regime given new form, maintaining what is supposedly being remedied (Acker 2006; Ahmed 2012; Berrey 2015; Thomas 2018, 2020).

Applying this understanding of performative organizational processes, the creation and enactment of genderism/binary gender discourses can be interpreted as naming and constructing spaces in which particular bodies can be read as either “at home” or as “strangers” (Ahmed 2012). Despite, or perhaps because of, commitments to gender inclusion, the pervasiveness of institutionalized gendered discourses points to some bodies more than others, marking, excluding, and potentially rendering “unlivable” who do not conform to the organizational logic and categories of normative sex/gender outlined in these commitments (Butler 2004; Enke 2012; Johnson 2016; Spade 2015; Valentine 2007). As Enke (2012:11) writes, “By having a name, performing a recognized demographic category… we also reckon with the fact that we exceed every possible legible node… sometimes so much that the institution literally has no place for, or violently misplaces, such subjectivities.” As such, I take up organizational theory to discuss how institutionalized understandings of sex/gender becomes associated with certain bodies, (non)performatively shaping how the university comes to appear and function as a gendered organization, and how the organizational realm may be the place to look for how policies structure and reproduce vulnerability for trans* people.
Critical Trans* Justice as Practice

The solution to these persistent inequalities, however, is not a singular point of arrival marked as “inclusion” or series of best practices that are adopted in order to “accommodate” trans* students (Nicolazzo 2017). To suggest otherwise treats trans* students as the problem that must be fixed, the solution to which is the organization, rather than examining the ways in which the organizational structure must change. I understand trans* justice as a continued practice, a practice of resistance, a practice of collaboration, and a practice that centers trans* people in their liberation. As such, I use critical trans* politics (CTP) to frame my approach to policy and practice, resisting the continued overinvestment in the idea that trans* people must fit into normative sex/gender categories and that accommodations for trans* people are an adequate means of overcoming sex/gender inequality.

As Spade (2015) writes, this model of critical justice critiques seemingly neutral systems to understand how they invent and produce meaning for the categories they administer, and that those categories manage distribution of life chances. That is, critical justice frameworks examine how administrative governance is performative: “Through this lens, we look more at impact than intent. We look more at what legal regimes do rather than what they say about what they do. We look at how vulnerability is distributed across populations, not just among individuals” (p. 10). Similar to theorizations by Ahmed (2012), wherein disparities arise from taken-for-granted processes and interactive patterns among organizational actors, CTP can be understood as both a theoretical framework and methodology to imagine possibilities beyond formal recognition and inclusion.

While trans* policies may be identified as a key area of intervention within an inclusion and equity framework, a CTP framework leads us to focus on the ways in which such policies
produce systematic norms and regularities that make trans* peoples’ lives administratively unlivable. For example, as I discuss in the next chapter, trans* admission policies at gender-selective colleges can be seen as an important solution to admission barriers for individual trans* students. And yet, a CTP framework leads us to recognize how these policies are embedded with rules for inclusion/exclusion that are governed by sex/gender classification on ID, sex-segregation of key institutions and resources, and access to gender-confirming health care (Fogg Davis 2017; Nanney 2019). As Spade (2015) contends, the equity strategy relies on individualistic approaches and solutions to bias and discrimination while maintaining the larger social structure as is. A CTP framework, however, exposes the limits of formal equality and nondiscrimination policies for trans* populations, just as critical race, disability, and feminist theories do for policies related to race, ability, and gender more broadly.\(^{11}\) Rather than relying on the law and policy as a solution, transformative change arises by centering those most directly impacted by harmful systems and moving beyond the politics of recognition and inclusion towards liberation.

Consequently, CTP allows us a lens to examine the ways in which policy has limits, and to center trans* students’ experiences and voices in collaboration with one another. After all, if these policies are meant to help trans* students, it follows that students themselves deserve a say in what those policies look like. In previous work, Kari Dockendorff, Z Nicolazzo and I (2019) applied Spade’s (2015) framework of trickle-up activism to envision possibilities for what we termed *transformative policy change*. We wrote,

\(^{11}\) This is not to suggest that CTP is separate from critical race, disability, and feminist theories or that it does not address race, ability, and gender. Rather, CTP draws from and builds upon these critical theories to organize around intersecting identities while centering trans* people in the analysis.
Furthermore, when educators are revising policies, it becomes imperative to recognize the ongoing contingent nature of these policies. In other words, policies must always be understood as incomplete and open to change. They must also be seen as necessary and insufficient to upending the ways gender binary discourse frames postsecondary education (Nicolazzo, 2017b). In other words, policies are a necessary element of imagining more liberatory college campuses, but are insufficient in and of themselves to do the work of gender liberation… Provocatively, we suggest that perhaps more important than the content of new policies themselves is the process by which these policies are developed… If we hold true to these values, we can recognize trickle up policy development as an ethic and a practice rather than a moment in time that gets left behind once done.

As Spade (2015) instructs, such a transformative approach includes policy reform, but it does not center it. Rather, if, as Ahmed (2012) contends, institutional policies and commitments to inclusion are symbolic and do little to change the institutional structure, CTP leads us to constantly reflect and evaluate the ways in which policy is always already invested in trans* subjection.12

As such, in this dissertation I draw upon a CTP framework to think through the ways in which inclusion policies are not mutually exclusive from lived experiences of exclusion, isolation, and violence—physically, symbolically, and administratively. Spade (2015) ultimately contends that the target of trans* resistance should be the dismantling of systems of violence, or what one participant, Violet (all pronouns but she/her), told me via text,

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12 Spade (2015) uses subjection to capture the complexity of how power works. Rather than a top-down, oppressor-oppressed unidirectional model that the term “oppression” represents, Spade reminds us that power manifests in interconnected, contradictory sites where regimes of knowledge, ways of being, and practice circulate and take hold.
Not to be that person buuuut, tear it all to the ground. Seriously tho, here’s the thing. All these things built are within the institution per queer/trans* rights. In all those interviews I did not hear one story about a riot or something along those lines, the most serious thing is where there was a peaceful protest and Athena lashed out at the students. These institutions are chilling bc they haven’t been reminded of where the power lies and that’s the problem… whatever grassroots stuff happens will be able to stand the test of time and hold the institution accountable in all senses of the word that includes like throwing a rock through a hundred year old window or saying fuck it and trash talking the college at every turn...There needs to be a demystifying of the institution for starters. Students need to see no matter what, the employees of the institution are not your friends, they do not want the best for you, they don’t care. Obviously treat them with respect, but at the end of the day the politeness around trying to work with these institutions is because of this mystifying power/image of the institutions themselves. Nothing gets done because every four years absolutely new people come in and every year the work gets wiped off because of the lack of history sharing.

While I value the queer radical possibilities of “throwing a rock through a hundred-year-old window” and dismantling the system to its foundation, I also recognize the limits of such possibilities. I do not believe that getting rid of gender-selective colleges will solve gender inequality,¹³ nor do I believe that these colleges no longer serve an important purpose for both cis and trans* students alike. In many ways, both from empirical research as well as my own

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¹³ Fogg Davis (2017) offers a contrasting opinion, stating that all single-sex colleges should become co-educational. He contends that the exclusion of a gender from admission is not necessary for colleges to address the legitimate goal of gender inequality. “Our sex identities are relevant to the diversity goals of colleges, but their institutional relevance should be explained by particular colleges, rather than assumed” (p. 109). Rather, he argues, colleges can and should be co-educational and feminist colleges, akin to HBCUs. See also Kraschel (2012) for an affirmative legal opinion on maintaining single-sex while being trans* inclusive.
experiences at these colleges, I have come to value the power of the gendered environment of these colleges and the outcomes that they produce, and I too think the existence of these colleges is radical in itself. But, I also believe that these colleges—as feminist institutions—can do more. As one speaker at an Athena event told the audience, “We critique the college because we love the college.” Rather than tearing it all down so that they no longer exist, I point to CTP as a radical reorientation, thinking about the very structure and practices of these colleges, thinking through how policies are created, as well as by whom, and how centering trans* populations fits within the larger mission of these colleges. It is this way that we can both keep these important and historic institutions, but also allowing them to live up to their fullest radical potential as intersectional trans/feminist colleges.

**Framing the Study**

As represented in Figure A, these frameworks work in a fashion not at all unlike that of a Venn diagram, independent and yet intersecting with one another. Together, these three theoretical perspectives are intertwined throughout the dissertation, informing every step of the process from the formation of the research questions and data collection, to analysis and writing. The center of the study’s framework takes concern with the production and regulation of gender norms, categories, inequality, and how that is unevenly distributed amongst populations. Trans/feminism provides the context wherein we examine these tensions particularly within women’s and feminist communities, while gendered organizations locate the organizational processes and policies that both redress and reproduce discourses of sex/gender. Critical trans* politics then offers a reorientation through which we can understand how seemingly neutral (though actually encoded) systems structure access to resources and livability in accordance to these norms, and ways in which we can re-envision trans* justice. Together, these three
frameworks work together to construct a lens used to think about sex/gender as an institutional product; not simply in terms of the policies that are attached to experiences, bodies, and identities, but in the very constitution of sex/gender as a social category (Valentine 2007).

Research Questions and Rationale

Through this framework guiding the study, I asked three research questions, focusing on the production, impact, and regulation of gender categories through gender inclusion policies within gender-selective women’s colleges:

1. Do women’s colleges institutionalize sex/gender? If so, how?
   a. Does transgender inclusion challenge and/or reinforce discourses of womanhood on campus? If so, how?
   b. Does transgender inclusion challenge and/or reinforce gender inequality on campus? If so, how?

2. How do inclusion policies/practices impact trans* students’ academic and social experiences on campus?
   a. What, if any, barriers to inclusion do trans* students experience on campus?
   b. How, if at all, do transgender students thrive and survive on campus?

3. How do women’s college students, faculty and staff, administrators, and alumni conceptualize belonging to the institutional community?
   a. In what ways do women’s college students, faculty/staff, and alumni articulate the purpose and mission of women’s colleges?
   b. In what ways do women’s college students, faculty/staff, and alumni understand trans* inclusion as a part of this articulated mission?
In answering these questions, this study addresses three research concerns. First, previous sociological research on education has documented that gender identity impacts educational outcomes (see, for example, Armstrong and Hamilton 2014; E. Morris 2011; Ovink 2016; Thorne 1993) but has generally relied on binary models of masculinity and femininity (Bilodeau 2007), overlooking the experiences of trans* students. While femininity and masculinity are socially constructed, trans* individuals subvert binary distinctions of sex/gender by situating themselves in both, in between, or outside the dichotomy (Bilodeau 2007; Nicolazzo 2017). Consequently, as postsecondary institutions of all types increasingly implement changes to address trans* students’ needs, educational researchers and higher education practitioners must continually return to the question of where transgender students “belong” in the university as a key intervention in institutional diversity and inclusion (Nicolazzo 2017). In response to this gap, while ample narratives of trans* experiences at co-educational and women’s colleges have been documented in popular media and there is a growing literature on trans* students in education, little academic attention has been paid to transgender students within the gender-selective institutions. Because students coalesce around gender-selective colleges to create and challenge sex/gender together, these institutions are particularly important in understanding trans* student experiences within postsecondary education because the very structure of the institution depends upon some notion of sex/gender in order to exist. In other words, in order to be a college for women, these institutions must find a way to define and subsequently maintain that the students within the institution are women. As trans* student visibility increases within these institutions, we must examine whether and how trans* students belong within these gender-specific environments, leading us to also find ways to better include and support these students as a whole.
Second, this project asks how *diversity and inclusion* as an institutional process can be and is about simultaneous analyses of race, class, sex/gender, ability, and other identities of inequality. Drawing upon critiques of the language of diversity posed largely by feminists of color, an intersectional feminist analysis shifts our focus from individual and separable axes of identity (sex/gender, race, class) towards critical insights into the mechanisms of power. In other words, while concerned with identity, an intersectional analysis is not intended to merely combine individual identities “[strung] together by commas” (Tillapaugh and Nicolazzo 2014:116). Rather, key to intersectional analysis is the governing strategies through which particular identity categories are arranged in a hierarchy. Ahmed (2012:14) explains, “A body can be a meeting point. A concern with meeting points requires that we attend to the experiential: how we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others.” And yet, Ahmed (2012) continues, diversity and inclusion have become shorthand for intersectionality, marking a “happy point” in which all differences matter, suggesting “a harmonious empty pluralism” in order to manufacture an impression of cohesion and difference (see also Bell and Hartmann 2007; Thomas 2020). As a result, the meaning of intersectionality has become blurred. But it is in this blurriness that Ahmed (2012) encourages us to enter our analysis, examining the relations and arrangements that give meaning to particular categories, bodies, and experiences, and what is enabled (for some) by the very restriction of categories compared to others. As such, this

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14 As intersectionality as a concept has become a feminist buzzword, with its meaning and use inconsistent and challenged among feminists (K. Davis 2008, McCall 2005), others have called for the use of assemblages (Puar 2005). Assemblage theory in this context seeks to destabilize identity categories and locate them within particular historical contexts. In other words, as Puar argues, assemblages take concern less with what people *are* and focus more on what relations and arrangements that give meaning. Ahmed (2012:218, note 12) takes concern with this point, however, as such work depends on a “a good theoretical object (and even a hope technology) by being contrasted with intersectionality, which becomes a bad object.” Put simply, the intersectionality/assemblage distinction is converted into a progress narrative, wherein intersectionality is understood as stasis and assemblage with movement. While we can problematize the language of intersectionality as a mode of governance, Ahmed points us to focusing on what possibilities are enabled (for some) or not by the very restriction of categories in the first place.
dissertation is just as much about race, class, and sexuality as it is about trans* identities, people, and experiences within the gender-selective women’s college context. Using an intersectional framework, this dissertation offers a critical examination of what policy does by focusing on what terms such as “diversity” and “inclusion” may mean and/or obscure by referring to particular categories (and what those categories mean) over others.

Finally, this dissertation questions the relationship between policy and practice in redressing inequality. All-too-often are policies recommended as best practices to address trans* inequality, including the creation of single-stall or all-gender restrooms, non-discrimination language, or the development of “safe” spaces on campus. While it is not bad to have such policies, and in fact they are important because they articulate the shared values, commitments, and priorities of a school community and make some meaningful and material differences in students’ lives, I argue that they must not be the end goal. The implementation of policy as a “best practice” overvalues the impact of inclusion, creating “one-size-fits-all” remedies that uphold the institution as the solution to inequality as opposed to the source. Individual solutions such as single bathrooms or residency floors imply that all other spaces on campus as not safe, not for trans* students, obscuring the intention of the policy in practice. Moving beyond policy as our conclusion and taking policy up in our analysis means asking ourselves about the environments and practices that policies can create; even good intentions may be complicit in furthering inequality. As Nicolazzo (2017) contends, this leads us away from the mythical notion that we can ever fully achieve inclusive practices and demands that we see our work as being about practice, process, reflection, and self-evaluation. In turn, by taking policy up as a starting point rather than my conclusion, I question how we can build towards futures where all students are safe and empowered to explore gender in these environments.
In sum, I argue that when we try to understand what is “gendered” about “gender inclusion” we need to keep the organizational context of gender with its multiple embodiments and identities in mind. That sex/gender is not only lived, but also is constructed through organizational discourse is often so automatic that we are not consciously aware of the ways in which gender inequality manifests. Even in well-intentioned environments, practices and policies can simultaneously promote inclusion and oppression. With regard to transgender inclusion in gender-selective colleges, then, despite the fact that these colleges, formally, allow for transgender students to apply and enroll, institutionalized commitments to inclusion that are premised upon gendered logics and discourses can obscure and even intensify existing gender inequality.

Overview of Dissertation

In what follows, I begin by locating my study within the history of gender-selective women’s colleges. Chapter 2 discusses how these colleges were founded as feminist projects to advance access to education for women, but also how this elite education was largely restricted to only white upper-class women considered “properly educable”. This provides a historical context in which I begin to situate current discussions surrounding transgender students within gender-selective colleges, and within longstanding historical debates regarding trans/feminist boundaries and communities more broadly.

In chapter 3, I detail the comparative nine-month ethnographic methods I undertook to answer my research questions including 126 interviews with students, alumni, staff, faculty, and administrators, archival research on the history of diversity issues and policies on campus, and participant observation of campus spaces and events with trans* students at Athena and Minerva.
In this chapter, I also discuss the ethical implications and challenges of conducting ethnographic research with trans* students and locate myself within this study.

My dissertation includes two analytical chapters. Chapter 4 examines the ostensive functions of gender-selective women’s colleges today. In this chapter, I take up previous research that has argued that women’s colleges are feminist institutions as a starting point, exploring the ways in which trans* inclusion understood as part of this feminist mission. While the majority of respondents stated that “of course” trans* inclusion in these colleges should occur, I question why and how these fit within the organizational framework of these colleges, focusing on the ways in which feminism is centered on campus.

In Chapter 5, I shift focus to the performative functions of these colleges, centering trans* students’ experiences with community and belonging on campus. I focus on both the positive experiences as well as the negative—and sometimes violent—that my respondents experienced, particularly after the adoption of these policies. Additionally, I discuss how trans* students lead the charge in the shifting tides of gender-selective college policies and practices, both formally through student government and student protest, as well as informally through community networks and spaces on campus. And yet, this does not suggest a monolithic or entirely inclusive community—I also discuss the social hierarchy within these spaces and how inequality and exclusion can be reproduced.

Finally, in chapter 6, I provide a discussion of the implications from this research. Guided by my critical trans* framework, while this dissertation is focused on the development of inclusive policies, I find it imperative to end this dissertation with a call for exposing, exploring, and enhancing the process through which policies are created and practiced, which should make those policies all the more robust. I conclude by centering the recommendations positioned by
the respondents themselves, in their own words, in how to make life livable and full on these campuses, to create trans/feminist environments of collaboration and support, and to foster communities of inclusion.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present an overview of the previous literature that provides the context for this study. First, I draw from education and historical literature specifically regarding the founding, histories, and outcomes of women’s colleges. Through this, I discuss how the creation of women’s colleges has always been a feminist project by creating access to education for women and challenging essentialist notions of what women are capable of. And yet, this does not suggest that early women’s colleges were equitable or inclusive; as I discuss, the founding of these colleges as an organizational field was largely premised on exclusion not only by sex/gender, but also on the basis of race, class, and sexuality. As such, the feminist project of women’s colleges produced a particular kind of properly educable woman, a legacy that has both been challenged and yet also continues today.

Second, I use this historical backdrop of women’s colleges to understand contemporary discussions of transgender students within these colleges. Reviewing the limited, yet emergent, literature on the topic, I discuss the legality of admitting and enrolling transgender students under Title IX, trans* student experiences on these campuses prior to the adoption of admission policies, and previous institutional support and continued administrative barriers as these policies were adopted.

Together, these two literatures provide the context in which this study enters: how organizational missions, structures, practices, and images transition to include (or not) diverse populations in a setting that is predicated on exclusion in order to exist.

Articulated Missions: Access and Equality

Today, women apply, enroll, and graduate from higher education at higher rates than men (DiPrete and Buchman 2013). Why are women’s colleges important if women can access higher
education (through co-education) and are academically thriving? The history of the women’s colleges in the United States reveals that they are institutions that have survived by creatively adapting to the changing societal needs, norms, and requirements of women’s education (Harwarth, Maline, and DeBra 1997; Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009). From their earliest of foundings in the 1800s to their height—nearly 270+ in number during the 1960s—and today, women's colleges have invented and reinvented their educational and institutional purpose, which has both been shaped by prevailing sex/gender norms of the day (and as discussed, race, class, and sexuality), as well as serving as a catalyst for changing those norms (Marine 2009).

In this section, as opposed to a comprehensive or linear history, I provide a genealogy of what Breese (2000) refers to as the “organizational field” of women’s colleges. I describe how the current context of gender-selective women’s colleges and trans* inclusion originated through the articulation of these colleges’ institutional purpose as it relates to gendered norms, knowledges, discourses, and domains of objects that motivate our contemporary concerns.

*Idiosyncratic Beginnings, Feminist Organizations*

As historians of early women’s education have documented, the founding of women’s colleges was intimately tied to prevailing societal trends, needs, and roles, wherein gendered and racial segregation was legally and morally permissible based on the beliefs of biological and intellectual superiority/inferiority (Horowitz 1984; Overton 2013). Educational institutions prior to the late 18th century largely excluded women because women were considered to be physically and "'intellectually inferior—incapable, merely by reason of being a woman, of great thoughts. ... Her place was in the home'" (Tidball et al. 1999:4-5; see also Jones 2014). While daughters within families of economic means were educated at the primary school level, women’s potential future reproductive role as mothers largely barred their access to education.
beyond that of informal socialization of household chores, feminine hobbies such as music and crafting, and childcare responsibilities. Articulating a need to educate mothers (ideals of “republican motherhood”) as well as training women for socially acceptable occupations as teachers, an increased demand for women’s access to higher education led to the creation of women’s colleges, though this was directed to and experienced by almost exclusively white women (Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009).

As women’s colleges were founded, they took multiple shapes and forms, depending on the guiding purpose and social context in which they were located. Some schools, such as Mount Holyoke and Vassar, were founded following the seminary model, where standards of personal conduct, discipline, and rigorous curriculum were emphasized in order to “alter [women’s] consciousness” (Horowitz 1984:4). Such schools began as single-buildings often in rural settings or on country estates, keeping students and faculty physically segregated from the outside world akin to asylums, creating strict disciplinary monitoring of students’ behaviors through close teacher-student relationships. Others such as Smith, Radcliff, and Bryn Mawr focused on creating environments that would “help [women] in their search for self-knowledge, abiding principles, a broad cultural background, and honest, orderly processes of thought and methods of approaching situations (Newcomer, 1959, p. 60)” (qtd. in Marine 2009:8). Such colleges adopted campus structures that simulated family life through cottage-like dormitory systems located in towns and expected that students would be “protected by the patriarchal order of the New England town...students would keep their femininity” (Horowitz 1984:5). And still other women’s colleges were founded in response to other social needs such as those that were religiously-focused that called for gender segregation and religious piety (such as Saint Mary’s and College of Notre Dame of Maryland), colleges such as Hollins or Sweet Briar located in the
South and were influenced by the need to develop women’s gentility and improving (white) social status for marriage, while others such as Bennett and Spellman\textsuperscript{15} are colleges dedicated to the specific advancement of Black women (DeBra 1997; Horowitz 1984; Perkins 1997).

Despite such idiosyncratic beginnings, one thing that all these colleges shared in common was a dedication to providing women access to a liberal arts education equal to that which was denied to them in men’s institutions (Breese 2000; Harwarth et al. 1997; Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009; Miller-Bernal 2000; Tidball et al. 1999). As the founder of Smith College, Sophia Smith, wrote in her will, it is “with the design to furnish my sex means and facilities for education equal to those which are afforded now in our Colleges for young men” (qtd. in DeBra 1997:4). Such a commitment was a pioneering move to challenge conservative beliefs about women’s academic capabilities—women were equally capable of critical and abstract thinking in fields such as philosophy, mathematics, and the sciences. As Breese (2000) explains, this shared collective orientation produced an institutional linkage between these colleges, creating a generic identity of the women’s college, united by common missions, sustaining histories, and organizational routines in relationship with other women’s colleges: “Women's colleges and universities, it could be argued...created a legitimate educational category providing a kind of collective normative order while masking variation in competencies and task performance among the member institutions” (p. 19). In other words, despite different origins, women’s colleges became

\textsuperscript{15} As Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1982) documents, single-sex education was uncommon for Black communities because of limited resources for the establishment of Black institutions, therefore it was more economical to educate men and women together. Guy-Sheftall catalogues four Black colleges for women, two of which have since become co-educational: Bennett, Spelman, Barber-Scotia, and Huston-Tillotson. She writes, “Though the majority of Black women have been educated in co-educational institutions, single-sex colleges for Black women, all of which have been located in the South, have provided unique educational experiences for those women who have chosen [them]... High on the list of priorities at both institutions has been the training of Black women for leadership roles, though the training of teachers was their earliest mission” (p. 279-280). Recently, Mills College in California has been designated the only single-sex college that is also a Hispanic-serving institution (Mills College n.d.).
a unified institutional category through their organizational mission, and as such they were able to collectively foster environments that were committed to the education and success of women.  

_Feminist Exclusions_

A collective mission that includes and fosters the development of women, however, requires an understanding of who were considered properly educable women. While the history of women’s colleges was rooted in the goal of increasing women’s access to education, it would be misleading to suggest that such access was available to all women. Reflective of their larger social environments, many women’s colleges exhibited anything between prejudice to outright discrimination of particular groups of women on the basis of race, class, and sexuality (Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009; Perkins 1997; S. Weber 2014). Such exclusions both drew upon and reinforced prevailing normative ideologies that defined womanhood not only on the basis of sex/gender, but also along the intersecting axes of other identities of difference. Women’s access to education, then, should be understood as a particular _kind_ of women’s access to education—properly educable women’s access—and their legacies of exclusion impact these campuses today. Below, I discuss different forms of exclusion in the early years of these colleges, focusing on the institutional response to diverse populations.

_Race_

From their early foundings in the 1800s to the 1960s, approximately 500 Black women graduated from the Seven Sisters women’s college consortium over nearly a 100-year period

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16 Tidball et al. (1999) outline six attributes of the "women's college ethos" that create this organizational field, including 1) involving total collegiate environment; 2) ensuring opportunity to study in all fields; 3) critical mass of women's role models; 4) demonstrating principle of networking; 5) place and time for deep and lasting friendships among women; 6) generosity of women.

17 The Seven Sisters colleges included Wellesley, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Vassar (now co-educational) and Radcliffe (subsumed by Harvard University).
Black women were not explicitly barred from these private, elite, and predominantly white women’s colleges in the Northeast, but were “strongly advised not to apply” (Perkins 1989, 1997). Perkins (1997:719) explains, “It was easier for a Black male to gain entrance into a White men's college than for a Black woman to enter a White women's college … White women's colleges were ‘unyielding’ in their opposition to admitting African American women.” While such colleges now claim institutional pride in graduating their first students of color including memorializing the accomplishment with campus holidays dedicated to learning about diversity and naming buildings or programs after the notable alumnae, such as Hortense Parker (class of 1883) at Mount Holyoke and Otelia Cromwell (class of 1900) at Smith, there is little mention of the serious negative experiences these students had on campus, rendering them present, but not included—not unlike the experiences of trans* students today.

In one of the few historical writings on race within women’s colleges, Perkins (1989, 1997) documents that the first few Black women who were admitted to women’s colleges in the early 20th century were probably not recognized as Black because photographs were not required for application, or if they were recognized, Black students were admitted in token numbers (see also Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009; S. Weber 2014). The few Black students came from elite, highly educated families with parents in professional occupations and were light in complexion, therefore passing as white women both in terms of color and status. For example, as Perkins (1989, 1997) describes, during the late 1890s-early 1900s, there were few educational opportunities for women, and even fewer for Black women. Thus, the goal was to prepare them

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18 S. Weber (2014) documents that Hortense Parker Day was not recognized until 2009 and is the result of student of color activism on campus, while Otelia Cromwell Day began in 1989.

19 No literature to date discusses the history of non-Black students of color at women’s colleges. As Smith, Wolf, and Morrison (1995:248) state, “Missing from the majority of studies on women’s colleges is information about the differential experiences of Women of Color.”
to enter the higher classes of Black American society. In a move to establish the educational legitimacy of Black women, authors and scholars began to refer to Black women as “ladies,” signaling class, refinement, and, by extension, embodiment of the properly educable woman role, proper for continuing education (Perkins 1997). Aligning with economic ideologies of the properly educable woman, Black women from prominent families sought out education at women’s colleges and were willing to endure racial hostility including forced segregation in housing, dining and other activities at women’s colleges for purposes of intellectual growth and entrance into a world of White power and privilege (Perkins 1989, 1997).

For example, in 1913, controversy erupted over whether or not Smith should house Carrie Lee, a Black student, after her assigned white roommate from Tennessee refused to room with her (Horowitz 1984; Perkins 1997). While Smith had formally begun admitting Black women in the 1880s, Black students had been required to live off campus or as servants in the dormitories. Smith sought out advice regarding their policies for Black students, relying upon its peer institutions to fortify a collective mission regarding diversity and inclusion and the properly educable woman. Many of the schools sympathized with Smith’s problem. For example: Vassar openly confessed to learning that they had admitted Black students only after graduation; Mount Holyoke trustees had voted to not admit Black women in 1845; and Bryn Mawr advised Black students to attend elsewhere “on account of the student herself and on account of the life in the College Halls” (qtd. in Horowitz 1984:155) thereby acknowledging the hostility on campus and the institution’s unwillingness to address it. Only Wellesley stated that it did not discriminate in admittance or housing, though the college maintained a policy for segregated housing until the 1950s. Ultimately, Lee’s parents contacted the NAACP and board member and Smith alumna Ruth Baldwin succeeded in changing Smith’s housing policy in October 1913 after learning that
Smith had no official policy on racial segregation in housing but that such decisions were determined on a case-by-case basis (S. Weber 2014). The Smith case is particularly striking in the way that the institution confronted their racist policies and practices (and the divergence between the two). Only through public outcry, institutional comparison, and pressure from alumni did these informal, case-by-case approaches to the inclusion of students of color change.20

Since then, Black and students of color have, *formally*, gained greater access to white-dominated colleges in the 1950s with *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which ruled that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional, as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance. Black women and other women of color, however, continue to challenge the ongoing manifestations of racism and race-based exclusion found on campus. For example, scholars have found that while the rate of Black girls and women enrolling in and attaining higher education degrees is growing, they simultaneously experience heightened surveillance and policing in educational systems due to harmful stereotypes about Black femininity (or the rejection of Black women’s femininity altogether) (L. Jackson 1998; M. Morris 2016; Ropers-Huilman, Winters, & Enke 2013; Vaccaro 2017; Winkle-Wagner 2009). For example, Kinzie et al. (2007) find that Black and Asian students are less engaged and less satisfied at women’s colleges than White students because they encountered race-based stereotypes, tokenizing, microaggressions, and low expectations from peers and faculty (see also L. Jackson 1998, Vaccaro 2017). While such findings are not necessarily unique to women’s

20 S. Weber (2014:120) writes, “I am wary of making historical equivalences between different axes of marginalization; however, it is notable that each of the above conditions…are at play in Smith’s (lack of) approach to the inclusion of transgender women.”
colleges and can be found across institutions of higher education more broadly, L. Jackson (1998:371) contends that although women’s colleges provide a safe space for women’s gender identity to grow, they “fail to support these women’s efforts to experience the connection between their race and gender.” In other words, within the women’s college context, students’ intersectional identities are reduced to singular and separate entities—the institution focused on sex/gender empowerment while using students’ racial diversity in their narrative of diversity and inclusion without making any structural changes—and as a result, the mission of the women’s college does not extend equally to all students.

As I discuss in the findings, the historical and continued marginalization of Black women in these colleges creates a lasting legacy. As Black bodies, especially Black women’s bodies, have always been denied their gender, these stereotypes and assumptions get built into the predominantly white women’s college culture, thereby treating Black and students of color as tokens of diversity and/or threats to the feminine community. As these colleges become trans* inclusive, such racialized gendering creates a battle of dualities that play out, particularly for trans* students of color for whom visibility and inclusion is conditional, over how their bodies are read and disallowing identifying as Black and trans* (or any sex/gender) simultaneously (Noble 2013).

_Socio-economic Status_

Early admission to these colleges were, with noted exception of Mount Holyoke and some Southern women’s colleges (Harwarth et al. 1997; Horowitz 1984; Perkins 1997; S. Weber 2014), only accessible to those of higher economic and social status, and it was not until after the second World War and the increase of co-education and financial aid that higher education became a more affordable reality for people. Of those Black students who attended these elite
schools, many came from elite backgrounds, with highly educated and professional families (Marine 2009; Perkins 1997). As such, when talking about socio-economic barriers and exclusions within the women’s college context, this discussion is just as much about race as it is about class, leading to, as I discuss in the following section, gendered and sexualized anxieties about the role and impact of educating women.

While women’s college early founders intended to enroll women of the middle-class to prepare them for teaching occupations, by the 1890s the woman’s college clientele were in large part members of the wealthy strata who had no intentions of employment after college (Horowitz 1984). As Joseph Taylor, founder of Bryn Mawr once stated, the purpose of the college was to educate “the higher and more refined classes of Society” (qtd. in Horowitz 1984:127). With the goal of attracting daughters of the upper-class, colleges implemented rigorous academic programs such as philosophy, Latin, and religion, emulating courses available at the elite all-male Ivies such as Harvard, Yale, and Brown, and also began to provide social activities drawing upon elite culture such as clubs, teas, dances/balls, athletics, and dramatics. Constituting what one Vassar student called “The Life” (Mason 1903; Hamilton-Honey 2012; Horowitz 1984), what emerged at these colleges at the turn of the 20th century was simultaneously the opportunity for women’s scholarly rigor and the entry of the leisure class. Some schools such as Bryn Mawr, for example, even attempted to limit its education to the upper-class by instituting varying fees which provided affluent students access to the better and larger single-rooms or suites with fireplaces, as well as giving enrollment preference in the order in which students applied, including those whose mothers’ placed their names in for consideration as early as their birth. Additionally, through mixers with unofficial elite men’s school “partnerships”—such as Barnard and Columbia, Radcliffe and Harvard, Smith and Yale, and Mount Holyoke and
Dartmouth—it was assumed that students attending women’s colleges would be well-educated and prepared for marriage in an elite family, nicknamed the “Mrs.” degree (though, as I discuss in the section below, these realities were not necessarily realized). As Jacobs (1996; see also Horowitz 1993) details, while the opportunity for education provided women expanding employment opportunities, by the 1920s, most women college students sought out marriage through their education—meeting their prospective partners in college as a social setting of similar education and class level.

As a few studies have noted, however, the primary difference between those students who married and those who did not during or after college was social class. Horowitz (1984, 1993), for example, reconstructs the social hierarchy at Vassar, explaining that “swells” were on top. To be a swell required economic wealth, as well as particular social experiences, networks, goods, and a focus on advancing in the world through the patrimony of their future husband as wives, mothers, and gracious hostesses and guests. “More serious” students—called “grinds” or “freaks”—on the other hand focused on their academics and came from lower-class backgrounds. In pursuing careers, these students were more likely to delay marriage or reject it altogether, as they desired to, and were likely accustomed to, earning their own wages and saw college as a stepping-stone to advanced career opportunities. Similarly, students at Smith were originally permitted to sort themselves in housing arrangements, thereby creating cliques that embedded themselves in residential groups and have spatial form to distinctions within the student body. Hamilton-Honey (2012), in examining three students’ archived scrapbooks

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21 For example, the 2003 major motion film *Mona Lisa Smile* documents such tensions at Wellesley College in the 1950s, covering topics of academic rigor, marriage, sexual liberation, and women’s career opportunities. In non-fiction literature, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which is widely cited for helping spark the second-wave feminist movement, is a survey of Friedan’s Smith College classmates (class of 1938) during their 15th anniversary reunion. The text discusses the dissatisfaction of highly educated women as housewives, calling it the “problem with no name.”
documenting their enrollment and residence in one such building, argues that students used material consumption such as clothing and fashion, dormitory decorations, and indulgence in food as measures of social class. Those who were able to “keep up” with current trends, primarily white students, engaged in more lavish lifestyles, allowing them to maintain a place in the social hierarchy of campus. As she writes, “‘The Life’ generated an atmosphere in which female students were permitted to indulge their desires for food, clothing, and knickknacks in the name of physical health, the reputation of their families and the school, and individual satisfaction” (p. 387).

Consequently, many women of lower economic means struggled—and continue to struggle—to access a sense of belonging in these environments. With relatively high tuition price tags, costing around $400 in 1879 ($7,898 in current dollars) and upwards of $43,000-55,000 in 2018 (Horowitz 1984; Women’s College Coalition 2020), low-income students have to participate in work-study to afford schooling, performing domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning for more affluent students on campus (Horowitz 1984; Lee 2016). Socially, as I discuss in the findings, those who are unable to keep up with current social trends, owning particular brands, or unable to afford various social experiences such as vacations abroad or second (or third) family homes, have greater difficulty feeling like a member of the community, rather than at the service of other, more affluent students. Describing the normative, elite image of these colleges, Lee (2016:69) for example details how, in one orientation about money at one women’s college, such messages of empowerment and leadership further isolate lower-income students:

As a final anecdote in her discussion about spending, she talked about her hairdresser, who says that at the beginning of the semester lots of students come in with their friends and their parents’ credit cards, and they get a cut and a dye and buy shampoo and they
spend three hundred dollars... It’s hard to miss the glaring difference between a world in which the idea of only spending what you have available is completely foreign and in which a three hundred dollar hair cut and color is “maybe a little too much” but possible, at least at the start of the semester, and the financial positions of students coming from low-income and working-class families. The presentation of these examples as normal, as though the anticipated reaction is a knowing nod, communicates implicitly what the understood reality of the presumed typical Linden student is.

Ultimately, Lee (2016) continues, this is part of the challenge for elite institutions: “How can they be both a place that needs to explain what a budget is and a place that feels like it makes sense to low socioeconomic status students?”

As such, the history, reputation, selectivity, and structures of these colleges, as well as their current student composition, communicates and constructs a specific institutional identity of who their students should be and what experiences they should have. As I’ve noted elsewhere (Nanney 2019), for trans* students in particular, the inclusion policies on campus are encoded with messages and expectations of social class from the cost of legally or medically transitioning to the social and cultural capital about how to navigate such policies. Like the low-income “freaks” before them, for low-income trans* students, such a reality of inclusion becomes nearly impossible, unable to access the capital or goods to render them as “properly” trans* on campus. Those who do not fit within this image are thus pushed out of the institutional community as anomalies and contradictions to the institutional image, exacerbating distinctions between students despite formal inclusion.
Sexuality and Gender

In large part, the historical resistance to admitting and graduating Black and lower-income students at women’s colleges was rooted in anxieties regarding a threat to femininity and a hypothetical “race suicide” (Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009; Overton 2013; Perkins 1997). Women’s colleges posed a particular threat to continued white dominance, as educating women encouraged them to pursue careers and delay marriage and reproduction while limiting opportunities to meet prospective husbands, while also providing opportunities for Black and low-income women to advance in society. Additionally, due to their often-remote segregation, close relationships between women formed, creating fear and anxiety surrounding women’s sexual impropriety and lesbianism. As Harwarth et al. (1997:5) quote: “Most of the opposition was less concerned with whether education was good for women than whether educated women were acceptable to men.” Thus, the institutionalized shift towards desiring students from elite families and emphasizing marriage was a direct response to such anxieties, attempting to reconcile and preserve women’s (white, heterosexual) femininity and reproductive roles. Recalling, once again, that Black women have historically been denied their femininity, their bodies used as props to suggest their reproductive and sexual inferiority (Snorton 2017; Somerville 2000), and that lower-income students were less likely to marry (Horowitz 1985), these colleges justified their exclusionary policies and practices to limit the number of Black and low-income students entering the upper ranks of society. In other words, Black and low-income women were rendered “not feminine” enough to accomplish the mission of the women’s college. Consequently, the femininity in which these colleges sought to promote and protect was largely white, upper-class heterosexual femininity, and the colleges took to heart a mission to limit sexual and gender nonconformity on campus.
For example, the very structure of early colleges sought to maintain and reproduce gendered and sexualized hierarchies that kept women feminine and heterosexual. Overton (2013) and Horowitz (1984) document that the architectural layout of women’s colleges was structured to mimic a woman’s proper role in society. In fear of the intimate and secluded quarters that the single-building that early women’s colleges such as Mount Holyoke created and the cottage/homestead style of the early Smith College campus, women’s colleges moved towards quadrangle-style residences, akin to Harvard’s dormitory system to discourage intimacy between women. The residences housed identical single rooms lining a long corridor, described as “cell like,” forcing socialization from upstairs bedrooms into public parlors on the main floor. Similarly, heteronormative ideals regarding dress and public appearance were ingrained in school policy, where college authorities limited the wearing of “masculine” attire to occasions only when no men were present and no photographs were permitted (though students kept personal photographs in scrapbooks later archived detailing these practices) and students were required to change into dresses for dinner and gowns for formal occasions. As Horowitz (1984:163) writes, “Exposure threatened to reveal the most carefully guarded secret of the women’s colleges, that in a college composed only of women, students did not remain feminine...In a society in which gender differences attributed aggression, strength, and directness to men, the “all-around girl” of the women’s college learned how to act as a man.”

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22 Dr. Jill Ker Conway, President of Smith College from 1975 to 1985, found such discussions “tiresome,” arguing that the obsessions of ‘women’s nature’ have masked efforts to contain young women’s intellects and, perhaps less explicitly but more potently, sexuality. “[A]ny grouping of women without men...couldn’t be normal. Ergo it was deviant, and since women were defined by their bodies and not their minds and talents, it had to be sexually deviant, and the course of study had to intellectually weak” (Conway 2001:122). Similarly, one employee in this study once told me, “Never did I think who sleeps with who would be such a big part of my job.”

23 During my own enrollment at Smith, rumor had it, though I was never able to confirm, that the stairs in the main academic building “Seelye Hall” were shorter height from standard staircases as to not “jostle” women’s ovaries.
Tracing historical trends of romantic and sexual desire at Smith and Mount Holyoke from student and institutional archival records, S. Weber (2014) explains that despite or perhaps confirming public anxieties, these colleges have always been a haven for romantic and sexual exploration with other women (see also Horowitz 1984; Faderman 1991; Inness 1994; Marine 2009). In their early foundings, romantic friendship was both permissible and welcomed, as it was seen as “practice” for showing affection towards one’s future husband (S. Weber 2014). Such friendship was common between an under-class and an upper-class student, where the younger student is “crushed” on the other, sending flowers and finding various ways to communicate her affection and admiration (Horowitz 1984). Because such friendship was seen as asexual, it was not that uncommon for the two to be able to express love in writing, kiss, and cuddle in bed together. Suspicion arose, however, when such relationships did not additionally involve romantic interest in men or if the students were “overly” affectionate and displayed masculine behaviors (S. Weber 2014). As the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in 1882 reported, the committee held in “their strong opinion that the one thing which damaged the health of the girls seriously was ‘smashes’—an extraordinary habit which they have of falling violently in love with each other, and suffering all the pangs of unrequited attachment, desperate jealousy, &c &c, [sic] with as much energy as if one of them were a man” (qtd. in Horowitz 1984:65). Evoking anxieties over both sex/gender and sexuality norms, overly queer behaviors rendered students as men, in effect, “unsexing” women (Horowitz 1984).

24 Others such as Smith-Rosenberg (1985) and Wells (1978) have documented same-sex relationships between female faculty at Wellesley and Mount Holyoke. Solomon (1985:162) explains that the relative openness about women’s romantic friendships disappeared by 1920: “In the homophobic reaction that followed…women distanced themselves from female intimacy, now viewed as “abnormal.” In the 1930s…[a girl]…might be expelled…for having too “intense” a relationship with another woman.” For stories of lesbian and gay experience at Vassar, see MacKay (1992).
As a result, charged by biomedical and psychological models that determined sexuality to be deviant or an illness, queer life on campus was pushed largely underground for fear of harassment, assault, and expulsion from the 1920s well into the 1990s (S. Weber 2014). For example, in 1975, an anonymous student under the name the Astronomer penned a letter in the Mount Holyoke student newspaper: “What I want to know is how many others on the MHC campus are lesbians. I look for you in the night; we are like stars. They can’t be seen during the day, but I know they’re there” (qtd. in S. Weber 2014:39). As one of my own participants, Marty (she/her), who was a student at Minerva during the same period described, “No one could find out or they'd put us in a mental hospital… There was a lesbian support group that had just started…but we were terrified to have anything to do with that. We didn't go anywhere near that. We were totally closeted.” During this time, out or suspected queer students experienced an increase of harassment from fellow students and resistance from their institutions. Smith, for example, segregated queer students into similar residences on campus so that heterosexual students were not forced to room with queer students (S. Weber 2014). Similarly, MacKay’s (1992) respondents recalled instances of isolation and alienation, signs advertising queer events being ripped down, graffiti in bathroom stalls and library carrells, and homophobic slurs in passing at Vassar.

Influenced in part by sexual liberation social movements within the local community and the nation, and in part due to the shifting feminist mission of these colleges, queer life increasingly became more visible and tolerated on campus over time. As Marty (she/her) recalled, “By that spring, it was like everybody was coming out. This was spring of ‘77.” In 1979, Bryn Mawr hosted the Seven Sisters/ Ivy League Lesbian Conference, illustrating the growing prominence and visibility of queer groups at other Seven Sisters and the idea that there
would be enough interest among the various Seven Sisters to generate an entire conference around lesbian students’ lives (S. Weber 2014). Across women’s college campuses lesbian student organizations and women’s centers—which later expanded to include LGBTQ+ more broadly—were formed, lesbian feminists were brought as speakers on campus, and women’s studies departments were formed as a result of student activism and advocacy on campus. As S. Weber (2014:62) writes, “By the early to mid-2000s, the presence of queerness at the Seven Sisters had largely been established not only as entrenched, but also as something to revel in and celebrate. Voices opposed to same-sex desire on campus became more of a shamed minority.” Campus climates increasingly incorporated LGBTQ+ culture and students into the community, with events such as Drag Ball and campus memorials held in remembrance of homophobic events on campus. Notorious within these spaces became the role of the Big Dyke on Campus (BDOC) giving popularity to the most visible and sexually active of butch lesbians on campus, and the Bisexual/Lesbian until graduation (BUG/LUG) wherein students were encouraged amongst their peers to explore their sexuality during enrollment. As many of my own respondents stated in their interviews, the perception of their campus as queer was one of the reasons they were drawn to apply in the first place, finding these spaces as safe, welcoming, and empowering for members of the LGBTQ+ community to be out and proud on campus.

According to one institutional survey at Smith, for example, 60% of students identify as LGBQ+, which is not necessarily shocking given that Smith is located in Northampton, MA which is nicknamed “Lesbianville, USA” and has the most lesbian households per capita in the US, complete with a Pride store and rainbow walkway in the center of town (Feinberg 2018; Penelope 2013). Taken as a moment of pride, Mount Holyoke has similarly been called the

25 Including, interestingly, notable trans*exclusionary feminist Mary Daly at Smith in the early 1980s.
“Western Massachusetts Marxist Lesbian Indoctrination Camp” by conservative Right bloggers, in which students have made t-shirts and buttons of the slogan (McCain 2018).

While the current era of LGBTQ+ visibility and celebration at women’s colleges has been hard-won, this does not suggest that there is universal acceptance or inclusion by students, alumni, or the administration for queer life on all women’s college campuses. Colleges with religious affiliations such as Judson College in Alabama (also noting its Southern location), for example, have requested religious exemptions from the Department of Education to be able to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation (Anderson 2015). Even at colleges that are considered “queer” tolerate or friendly—even in some cases utopic, as Marine (2009) finds—queer visibility and inclusion is determined largely in accordance to the living legacies of exclusion on campus. As I discuss in the sections below and in the findings, just like those students involved in romantic friendships in the early year of women’s colleges, queerness on campus is enacted and embodied through the intersections of masculinity, class, and whiteness. As a result, Black and other students of color, low-income students, and feminine/femme students are rendered invisible on campus, while those students who embody or perform some form of masculinity—both in terms of sexuality and/or sex/gender—are rendered threats to the institutional community and are subject to social and institutional exclusion.

**Lasting Impacts**

The genealogy of early women’s colleges poses a paradox: on the one hand, they were founded with institutional idiosyncrasies, but formed an organizational field through their shared mission of providing access to higher education in an environment that was otherwise denied to women. While this feminist organizational structure was groundbreaking in its own right, these colleges too reproduced and maintained prevailing social inequalities in the name of “tradition.”
Today, discrimination on the basis of race, socio-economic status, and sex (though this is complicated within the gender-selective context, as discussed more below) in higher education is now formally illegal, and gender-selective colleges have increasingly diversified their student populations (Miller-Bernall 2012; Sax 2015). However, the legacies of discriminatory structures and practices still haunt the halls of these colleges today. Exclusion—both formal and informal—prevails within gender-selective women’s colleges and is not merely a part of a problematic past.

For instance, in the months leading up to my own fieldwork at two of these colleges, a scandal broke surrounding Smith College wherein an unidentified janitorial worker called the campus police on a Black student who was sleeping on the couch in the residential hall living room. As the caller stated to the dispatcher,

I was just walking through here in the front foyer of Tyler Hall and we have a person sitting there laying down in the living room area over here. I didn’t approach her or anything but um he [sic] seems to be out of place … umm … I don’t see anybody in the building at this point and uh I don’t know what he’s doing in there just laying on the couch. [Emphasis added] (Smith College 2018)

As the caller describes, a Black student is seen as out of place on campus. And yet, by switching pronouns from the feminine “she/her” to the masculine “he/him,” the caller not only draws up on discourses and ideologies of racial belonging, but co-constructs this through a gendered lens wherein the Black student is denied her femininity and therefore is doubly out of place on campus. This gendered racialization therefore constructs both blackness and masculine identity as an ideological and physical threat to the campus community and identity. Following this incident, campus administrators took deliberate and calculated steps to address student concerns
and demands including the creation of a residential working group regarding affinity housing, the
development of bias training for staff and faculty, and a “diversity” day with workshops and
trainings. Ultimately, the campus investigation found “no fault” on behalf of the employee due to
lack of evidence of racial bias, though the campus has continued developing new programming
and support systems, as if acknowledging that the campus environment was indeed not safe or
welcoming for all students.

While such an incident was certainly not isolated to Smith’s Campus, as similar moments
of exclusion have occurred at other colleges as well as within American society at large, it
could be argued that it was the construction of the idealized student embedded within the history
of gender-selective women’s colleges that set the stage, shaping the contours of similar
boundaries as these colleges deliberate the presence of transgender students today. This is not to
suggest that racial and gendered issues are separate—rather, they intersect. As the unidentified
caller interchanged the pronouns of the student from she to he, the caller articulated that a Black
woman does not fit the idealized image of the “properly educable” woman—she in fact does not
embody the idealized femininity of a white woman. By claiming that she was out of place, the
employee further identified that there were appropriate and inappropriate spaces that particular
bodies belonged—a Black, masculinized body did not belong in the shared and public area of the
“home” that was the residential building for women. Harkening back to the experiences of those
earlier students such as Carrie Lee, low-income students who performed work study, and
LGBTQ+ students forced in to separate housing, it was in a similar spirit in which the student in

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26 This incident is rooted in a larger systematic White Supremacist culture of higher education and in the US more
generally. Similar events have recently occurred at colleges such as Yale (Takei 2018), Ball State (Asmelash and
MacDonnell 2020), University of Texas at Austin (Martinez and Imam 2018), and Colorado State College (Levin
2018). Meanwhile, some students, such as at Wellesley College, are petitioning to not call the police in non-life-
threatening events due to this violence (Paulsen and Kelly 2018).

27 The student at the time of the incident had a shaved head and is of a dark complexion.
this scenario was able to formally access the college, but in practice did not fit within the purview of who belonged within the institution.

As the evidence thus suggests, Black women, women of lower socioeconomic classes, and LGBTQ+ women have all experienced exclusion from women’s colleges at different times and in different, as well as intersecting, contexts. As a result, the current policies and practices on campus, whether hidden or publicly stated, demarcate clear boundaries around who these schools considered to be their ideal students, reflecting and building upon their larger histories of exclusion.

_Better Dead than Co-Ed_

After the turn of the 20th century, aided by changing social attitudes, increasing availability of occupational opportunities, increased financial assistance, and lowered barriers to higher educational institutions, higher education expanded rapidly and women enrolled in postsecondary education in record numbers (Harwarth and Fasanelli 1997; Horowitz 1984; DiPrete and Buchmann 2013; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004, 2006; Tidball et al. 1999). Women’s enrollments increased from around 141,000 in the early 1900s to over one million in the mid-1950s (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006), and women made up approximately 35% of college graduates by 1960 (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004). As the demand for women's higher education increased, women's colleges rapidly grew in size and number to a height of between 215-280 institutions in the 1960s (Tidball et al. 1999; Wolf-Wendel 2002).

Yet, with increasing access to coeducational higher education after the passage of the Morrill Land-Grant Acts, Title IV, and Title IX, women’s colleges began to face declining enrollments and financial difficulties in the late 1960s (Alperstein 2001; Langdon 2001; Hewitt 2015; Malkiel 2016; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004, 2006; Miller-Bernal 1989; Tidball et al.
1999; Wolf-Wendel 2002). Because most women’s colleges were understood to be *elite, private,* and *feminine*—which could be translated as *exclusive, expensive,* and *inferior*—fewer women took interest in women’s-only education when offered the opportunity to attend cheaper private and public college options. As Marine (2009:11) writes, “Separate... rarely meant equal.” By being denied access to the best colleges in the country, which were coded masculine by way of previously being men’s colleges, women’s colleges — no matter how excellent in quality — were seen as second-best (Horowitz 1984; Marine 2009; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004, 2006). By 1955, slightly more than 75% of all higher educational institutions were coeducational, and nine out of ten women attending higher education were enrolled in coeducational institutions (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004). Today, only 39 women’s colleges remain open, and enroll under 1% of all college-aged women (National Center for Education Statistics 2018, 2019; Renn 2014; Women’s College Coalition 2020). Meanwhile, women comprise the majority of higher education, at 56.5% of the overall student population in 2018, with nearly 46% of women enrolled in higher education being women of color (National Center for Education Statistics 2019) (See Figure B for more information regarding postsecondary institutions by gender).

Such a reversal in college enrollments and rapid decline of single-sex education required women’s colleges to take action in order to remain relevant, competitive, and open. As Miller-Bernal and Poulson (2006:375) write,

> The major challenge for women’s colleges...is the firmly entrenched norm of coeducation that exists at all levels of our educational system, from primary school to higher education. Most people in the United States today do not think of single-sex education as

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28 Only 6 men’s colleges remain today. Three colleges—Morehouse, Wabash and Hampden-Sydney—stand alone, while three colleges—St. John’s, Hobart, and Yeshiva—are coordinate schools maintaining close relationships with a nearby women’s college. The College Board also recognizes multiple religious vocational institutions (to become a priest or rabbi) as men’s colleges.
an option. They barely think of women’s or men’s colleges at all, and when they do, they associate them with the past when men’s and women’s sphere were more separate in all aspects of life. Such beliefs create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Women’s colleges deployed a series of strategies that keep them functioning today, including close relationships with area colleges (such as the Five College Consortium in Massachusetts that includes Smith, Mount Holyoke, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Hampshire); incorporating co-educational graduate, adult, off-campus, or January learning programs; extending financial aid and recruitment beyond elite “feeder” high schools; and offering innovative approaches to education such as a focus on women in STEM or nursing programs (Breese 2000; Hewitt 2015; Langdon 2001; Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2004, 2006; Miller-Bernall 2000; Tidball et al. 1999). Additionally, organizations and meetings, such as the Cedar Crest Conference of 1969 and the Women’s College Coalition, were established, creating a network of administrators and institutions that were explicitly dedicated to the study and support of women’s education as an organizational field (Tidball et al. 1999).

But perhaps the most important strategy that emerged during this time, that remains the strategy today, was one of institutional image. No longer do gender-selective women’s colleges focus on women’s access to education; rather, they have (re)articulated the organizational purpose to focus on educational and social equity (Langdon 2001). Recognizing that yes, women enroll and graduate at higher rates than men in higher education overall, this shift turns attention to the qualitative inequalities within higher education and post-graduation that women disproportionately face including major choice and persistence, quantitative skills and reasoning, career advancement, equal pay, work-family balance, sexual harassment and assault, and leadership opportunities, thereby shifting these colleges from “women’s colleges” to “colleges
for women” (Breese 2000; Hewitt 2015; Langdon 2001; Tidball et al. 1999). Primarily locating themselves as organizations specializing in feminism, gender-selective women’s colleges have marketed their unique structure as one that offers women a superior form of higher education. As Miller-Bernal (2000) hypothesizes, the radical power of gender-selective women’s colleges is that women’s environments encourage collective and individual appreciation for and self-identification with feminism as a source of gender empowerment. In fact, she found that by the end of their senior years, 74% of women’s colleges students considered themselves a feminist in contrast to 46% of women at coeducational institutions. As she concluded, “the supportive yet challenging environments for which women’s colleges are renowned do make some demonstrable differences” (p. 284). That difference is a dedication to what Tidball et al. (1999) later define as “taking women seriously.” Because men and women must compete for the same opportunities in coeducational settings, creating a “chilly campus climate” where systematic inequalities favoring men prevail (Tidball et al. 1999), to take women seriously is to be explicitly dedicated to the advancement of women in a gender-aware, gender-focus, and gender-supportive atmosphere for the “historically disadvantaged gender” while advocating for new ideas about who women are and what they can do (Kraschel 2012).

Between the 1970s to the early 2000s, a plethora of academic research on women’s colleges focused on quantitatively measuring the benefits of gender-selective colleges to justify their existence and excellence. As previous research has found, students who attend women’s colleges experience greater achievements and gains in cognitive areas (intellectual development, involvement, academic self-confidence, and academic ability), non-cognitive areas (self-esteem, confidence, leadership development), and overall satisfaction than women at coeducational institutions (Bigler and Signorella 2011; Kim and Alvarez 1995; Kinzie et al. 2007; Miller-
Bernal 2000; Sax 2008, 2015; D.G. Smith et al. 1995; Stabiner; Wisner 2013). For instance, Kinzie et al. (2007) found that women’s college students were more likely to report engaging in higher order thinking, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and greater understanding of diversity than women at co-educational colleges. Independent of institutional selectivity and size, women’s college students report greater gains on almost every measure tested than women at coeducational colleges (Kim 2001, 2002; Kim and Alvarez 1995; Kinzie et al. 2007; D.G. Smith et al. 1995). Post-graduation, half of women’s college alumni (51%) earn a graduate degree compared to 27% of women at coeducational institutions, and 81% of women’s college students felt that their college prepared them well for their career compared to 65% (Kratzok and Near 2014; Lennon and Day 2012; Stoecker and Pascarella 1991; Tidball et al. 1999). Women’s college graduates are two to three times more likely than women graduates from coeducational institutions to be cited in national registrars for career achievement such as *Who’s Who in America*, as well as comprise 20% of women in Congress, and 33% of women on Fortune 1000 boards (Kratzok and Near 2014; Tidball 1973, Tidball et al. 1999).

As I discuss in Chapter 4, gender-selective women’s colleges additionally cite the supportive institutional environment that leads to these outcomes, focusing on empowerment, leadership, opportunity, diversity, and community. For instance, the Women’s College Coalition notes in their report “Why a Women’s College?” that women’s college students feel safer and more empowered to explore masculine-dominated fields, with women’s college students 1.5

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20 There have, however, been critiques as to how to measure and assess differences between students at women’s colleges and co-educational colleges, as the question arises whether the samples are self-selective and higher-achieving students choose to attend women’s colleges. See Bigler and Signorella (2011); Kim and Alvarez (1995); Kinzie et al. (2007); Langdon and Gioveango (2003); Miller-Bernal and Poulson (2006); Oats and Williamson (1978); Rice and Hemmings (1988); and Signorella (2015) for more. Additional critiques of single-sex education, such as J. Jackson (2010), take issue more so with the nature of sex segregation, contending that such separation reessentializes sex differences.
times more likely to major in STEM. Similarly, nearly all gender-selective college students (95%) were involved in extracurricular activities compared to at coeducational institutions (84%), wherein women (almost)\(^{30}\) always are the president of their class or club (Kratzok and Near 2014). A simple Google search “why a women’s college?” results in dozens of articles from *Buzzfeed* to *US News* that cite the benefits—social, economic, and academic—of attending these schools. As the Women’s College Coalition reports,

If you get goose bumps when you hear about the woman who founded an institution or organization, if annual baccalaureates and weekly teas sound like, well, your cup of tea; if you ever thought about pursuing a career in business or science and hated being the one girl in your AP statistics or economics class; if you come from a big school and want a college where you can actually get to know your classmates, or if you go to a small school and want your college community to be similarly close-knit, then there might be a women’s college for you. (Kratzok and Near 2014:9)

Such reports focus on debunking myths such as “you’ll be unprepared for the real world” and “everyone becomes a lesbian” and turns attention to the documented benefits and positive outcomes from attending these colleges.

Other institutions with smaller endowments and that are lower ranked than the Seven Sisters, however, do continue to struggle with enrollments. In February 2020, during the writing of this dissertation, Columbia College in South Carolina announced that it would begin admitting men as a co-educational college by fall 2020 (Columbia College 2020). As Carol Moore, Columbia President, stated, “Enrollment has been dwindling for all women’s colleges and times

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\(^{30}\) As Padawer (2014) documents, there has been controversy over whether or not trans* masculine students at gender-selective colleges should be allowed to be in such positions of leadership, “taking away” opportunities for women in an environment where women are supposed to be empowered.
change, cultures change, students want different kinds of things, and certainly students are looking for different kinds of opportunities” (Scott and Davis 2020). Other colleges such as Bennett and Sweet Briar considered closing due to financial turmoil within the past decade, but were saved due to alumnae intervention, raising $9.5 million and 12 million respectively (Bennett College 2019; Joutz 2018). In campaigns such as #StandwithBennett, the colleges rearticulated the founding commitments of the college and the contemporary strengths of being a college focused on women’s (and in the case of Bennett, Black women’s) leadership. As Sweet Briar’s website states, “Everything we do — everything we have done for 116 years — is focused on developing ‘women of consequence.’ Our graduates become exemplary leaders who take charge of the complex world around them with confidence, courage and grit” (Sweet Briar College 2019). While the evidence of such efforts is yet to be seen, is very possible that this new feminist image is working, as women’s colleges have reported an uptick in applications since the 2016 election that have only grown over time (Jaschik 2018).

The juxtaposition between the traditional and contemporary purposes of women’s colleges situates these institutions through the invention and reinvention of prevailing sex/gender norms. On one hand, these colleges draw upon their historical missions of access as guidance and view this inclusion as a contemporary mission of equity (Langdon 2001). Also, in order to provide education for women or about women, this depends upon some defined notion of womanhood. Allow me to be clear, women’s colleges have in many ways moved beyond their early practices, policies, and anxieties surrounding proper womanhood as determined by Victorian-era notions of femininity. They embrace the fluidity of who women can be, both in

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31 As Jaschik (2018) reports, and discussed further in Chapter 4, this is likely because of women’s colleges are being perceived as “safe spaces” regarding sexual harassment, feminism, and for LGBTQ+ and populations of color in a country that in 2016 “elected” a racist and sexist President.
terms of abilities, occupations, and interests as well as in terms of intersecting identities including race, sexuality, and religion, and recognize that femininity and womanhood are a strength (Sax 2015). And yet, they also continue to depend upon and produce ideologies of womanhood in order to exist. In other words, in many ways these colleges remain the same—opening the gates to new populations, but only if those populations conform to the pre-established institutionalized mission and structure.

This tension between tradition and present, access and equity, thus provides the grounding for the current context of gender-selective education today. As I discuss in the next section, while trans* and gender non-conforming students have always been present at these colleges, the historical anxieties of femininity and coeducation—wherein these colleges are better off dead than coed (Brymer 2011)—have created a lasting legacy of exclusion and erasure. While gender-selective women’s colleges have transitioned to formally allow trans* students to access to these colleges, they have yet to become trans* serving.

**College in Transition**

By segregating education for women, gender-selective women’s colleges must define “womanhood” through relational juxtaposition to maintain their very existence: as different from men. As Cohen (2012:690) writes, “This process of defining gender often determines who is allowed into and excluded from ‘single-sex’ settings—a process through which educational environments may reify false gender binaries and keep educational communities from realizing gender equity.” Indeed, women’s colleges have always faced challenges to the woman question and were not initially inclusive of women of color (Horowitz 1984; Miller-Bernal and Poulson

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32 Though such language might not have been used to identify as “transgender” themselves and noting that there is no historical record of trans* people at women’s colleges prior to the 1990s, though this is likely resulting due to lack of institutional recognition or support.
2006; Perkins 1997), women of varying economic means (Harwarth et al. 1997), and lesbian and queer women (Marine 2009; S. Weber 2014). This suggests that the woman within women’s college has always been up to institutional interpretation, to be distinguished not only from men, but also from other women based on intersectional identities. With the increased visibility of trans* students in higher education, gender-selective colleges have again become a central site for discourse surrounding the boundaries of womanhood, rooted in the histories of these exclusions. Because such colleges rely on bounded conceptions of sex/gender to determine who can and cannot be eligible for admission, the enrollment and matriculation of transgender students pose a challenge to the college’s identity, re-raising questions that were central to their earliest founding regarding the ways in which womanhood is defined and codified: what is a woman, how do we determine that our students are women, and how does this fit our mission? In what follows, I discuss the small, but growing, literature on trans* students within college, and how institutional policy and resources to accommodate this student population stems from these questions.

Trans* in College

As I discuss in Chapter 4, trans* students desire to attend gender-selective institutions for a number of reasons, from wanting to be in an environment where feminism is a central organizing logic, to feeling safe and empowered to explore gender, or because it is the best alternative option to coeducational institutions. While trans* students are relatively highly educated, with nearly 87% of trans* people have at least some college education (Grant et al. 2011), a prevalent theme in the small body of research is that trans* students face significantly negative experiences of violence, isolation, fear, harassment, and hatred on the basis of their sex/gender throughout matriculation (Nicolazzo 2017), thus leading most research to focus on
policy and practice as a solution (Catalano 2014; see also Lange, Duran, and Jackson 2019 for state of the field of LGBTQ+ in education research). For example, reports have found that between 24-35% of trans* students have experienced verbal, physical, or sexual harassment or assault due to their gender identity or expression (Grant et al. 2011; James et al. 2016; Rankin et al. 2010). Additionally, as the 2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People documents, these forms of harassment vary in kind as well as intersectionally, with trans* respondents of color and trans* feminine and gender non-conforming students experiencing harassment such as derogatory remarks, explicit exclusion and isolation, bullying, and sexual assault at higher rates compared to cis men and women and trans* masculine students (Rankin et al. 2010). At the institutional level, barriers to full participation for trans* students persist widely, including denial of gender-appropriate housing (20%) or on-campus housing altogether (5%), and denial or loss of financial aid/ scholarships due to gender identity (11%). As a result, this harassment leads to heightened rates of dropout for trans* students with nearly 15% of trans* respondents leaving college because of harassment while another 15% due to financial barriers (Grant et al. 2011).

Mistreatment and financial barriers in educational institutions then compounds towards negative later-in-life circumstances, creating systems of vulnerability for trans* populations. For example, the National Transgender Discrimination Survey has found that income level is correlated with experiences of harassment in college, with nearly 70% of trans* people who have incomes of less than $10,000 reporting harassment, physical or sexual assault, and expulsion in school, compared to 55% of those who earned over $100,000 (Grant et al. 2011). Trans* students who experienced harassment and assault were half as likely to earn $50,000 or more compared to those who did not have those negative experiences. Additionally, nearly 40% of those who
dropped out of college due to harassment participate in sex work or other underground economy labor while 19% are unemployed, 22% have been incarcerated, and 48% currently or have previously experienced homelessness. These social impacts also take a significant toll on physical health of trans* populations, with 35% of those who experienced harassment having used drugs or alcohol to cope with mistreatment, 51% attempted suicide, and 5% live with HIV, eight times the national average.

In response to these disparate experiences in education, institutions have increasingly adopted trans* inclusive policies and resources as a solution. Recent indexes have documented that 1,055 colleges and universities (25% of degree-granting institutions) include language within non-discrimination clauses that include gender identity and expression, 269 colleges have gender-inclusive dormitories or floors (6.3%), 259 institutions allow for name changes on official registrars (6.0%), 200 have at least one gender neutral or inclusive restroom (4.7%), 88 include gender affirming care in student insurance plans (2.0%), and 41 allow for pronouns to be listed on class rosters (1.0%) (A. Davis 2018; Campus Pride 2018; Dirks 2016). Other recommended policies and practices that are considered “best practices” for trans* inclusion include athletics policies, offering gender affirming health care on campus or referral programs, creating LGBTQ+ centers and organizations, and offering training resources for faculty, staff, and incoming students (see, for example, Beemyn et al. 2005; Campus Pride 2018; Rankin et al. 2011). Trans* admission policies, too, fit within this framework, creating a pathway for trans* students to apply and enroll in gender-selective colleges. While these policies and practices are important first steps to supporting trans* students, as I discuss below, they also present two shortcomings. First, these policies often fail to be created with intersectional barriers in mind, thereby reproducing inequality for trans* students on the basis of income, race, or ability.
Second, when taken at face value, seemingly gender-inclusive policies may do little to increase the life chances of trans* college students because they do little to address the structure of the college itself. In other words, because these policies and practices are seen as desired ends rather than the start of conversations regarding trans* inclusion (Nicolazzo 2017), the college is presented as the solution to individual trans* students’ problems rather than the source of inequality. As trans* students apply and enroll in gender-selective colleges, seeking out these campuses as welcoming and supportive spaces as promised by the presence of the admission policy, inclusion may become an illusion, and trans* students may find that a far different reality exists on campus.

Applying to Gender-Selective Colleges

At first glance, it may seem obvious that gender-selective colleges are intended for a specific sex/gender only, and therefore only those who identify with the specified sex/gender may attend. And yet, for individuals whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not match, this forces gender-selective institutions to confront how they restrict admission—on the basis of sex and/or on the basis gender. The legality of transgender inclusion at single-sex institutions is ambiguous at best, with contradictory guidance provided by the federal government and courts, largely leaving interpretation up to individual institutions.

When considering (trans)gender discrimination and educational access, scholars turn to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 which mandates that any educational institution that receives federal funding cannot discriminate on the basis of sex (Heise 2019; Kraschel 2012; Morrison 2019). While most applications of Title IX have focused on athletics and sexual assault protections for women and girls, Title IX has also been upheld to protect transgender people as
early as 1997 in *Miles v NYU*, implying that Title IX protects against discrimination of not only against the disadvantaged sex, but against disadvantaged genders as well. However, Title IX also includes an exemption allowing private colleges to restrict admission on the basis of sex *only if* the sex-based exclusion serves a “compelling governmental interest” in ending gender discrimination and inequality. As outlined by Sidhu (2008), this authorizes single-sex colleges to limit admission to men or women only so long as the exclusion meets five criteria: (1) it does not perpetuate archaic sex stereotypes, (2) it intentionally and directly assists a sex in a manner related to disadvantage, (3) enrollment must be voluntary, (4) the institution must not include members of a non-disadvantaged sex, and (5) the single-sex exclusion must not last longer than the discriminatory conditions. In applying these criteria to the question of transgender admission, Kraschel (2012) concludes that Title IX cannot be the basis for trans* exclusion at single-sex institutions because admitting transgender students directly assists in addressing historic and prevailing (trans)gender inequality.

In 2015, the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) under the Obama Administration, which oversees Title IX implementation, released a Dear Colleague Letter which offered further clarification on this matter. The Letter instructed that the rights and protections guaranteed under Title IX extend to include gender identity and presentation in any educational institution that receives federal funding. These protections extended beyond admission to include enrollment, wherein transgender students are to be “treated consistent with their gender identity” (U.S. Department of Education 2015:2). Though the letter has since been recalled under the Trump Administration, this guidance temporarily suggested that trans* students are protected.

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33 In *Miles v. NYU*, graduate student Jennifer Miles brought a Title IX sex harassment suit against her professor. NYU claimed that Miles was not protected under Title IX because of her trans* woman identity, but the court rejected this defense because she “was subjected to discriminatory conduct while perceived as female” (qtd. in Kraschel 2012:468).
from discrimination on the basis of their sex and gender (Peters, Becker, and Davis 2017). And yet, the letter also provided a clause that allowed single-sex institutions, particularly women’s colleges, to exclude transgender students:

Single-Sex Schools. Title IX does not apply to the admission policies of certain educational institutions, including nonvocational elementary and secondary schools, and private undergraduate colleges. Those schools are therefore permitted under Title IX to set their own sex-based admission policies. *Nothing in Title IX prohibits a private undergraduate women’s college from admitting transgender women if it so chooses.*

[emphasis added] (U.S. Department of Education 2015:3-4; see also Morrison 2019).

Without clear guidance on Title IX, this leaves us back at the starting point regarding whether or not transgender inclusion at gender-selective colleges is legally permitted.

Since there are no mandates in Title IX restricting single-sex colleges from admitting trans* students, but single-sex colleges can also opt not to, the decision ends up being left to each college to define their intended student population: education for which women/men? This has largely been accomplished through the adoption of institutional transgender admission policies. According to Marine’s (2009:4) definition of policy—the way colleges “codify, formalize, and endeavor to bring uniformity to institutional practice, and to thereby declare their official stance toward a population or issue”— admission policies go beyond that of statements of affirmation or non-discrimination to explicitly define potential applicant’s eligibility based on their sex/gender. I and others (Kett 2015; Nanney and Brunsma 2017; Boskey and Ganor 2019) have previously taken up these policies to identify that, despite the overall push towards creating admission policies for transgender students, these policies end up varying widely from

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34 See S. Weber (2016) and Drew (2018) for an overview of student protests leading to policy changes.
institution-to-institution (see Diamond, Erlick, and Wong 2015 for model policy, and Table 1 for summary of existing policies). For example, Mount Holyoke College’s (2014) admission policy, which has been lauded as the “golden standard” and “most inclusive” of admission policies (Kett 2015; Nanney and Brunsma 2017; S. Weber 2016), states:

The College values each student’s development, both academically and personally, and recognizes that self-identity may change over time…

The following academically qualified students can apply for admission consideration:

● Biologically born female; identifies as a woman
● Biologically born female; identifies as a man
● Biologically born female; identifies as other/they/ze
● Biologically born female; does not identify as either woman or man
● Biologically born male; identifies as a woman
● Biologically born male; identifies as other/they/ze and when “other/they” identity includes woman
● Biologically born with both male and female anatomy (Intersex); identifies as a woman

The following academically qualified students cannot apply for admission consideration:

● Biologically born male; identifies as man

The policy then goes on to detail, in question-and-answer format, how the Mount Holyoke “remain[s] committed to its historic mission as a women’s college”, the matriculation of trans* students, and the logistics of applying.35

35 The Mount Holyoke website has since removed this FAQ page and has replaced the policy information with the following on the admission website: “Mount Holyoke is a women's college that is gender diverse and welcomes applications from female, trans* and non-binary students.”
In contrast, schools such as Converse and Bennett Colleges have adopted more restrictive policies:

If a currently enrolled, undergraduate student in the women’s college initiates sex reassignment from female to male (as defined by the College below) at any point during enrollment in the women’s college at Converse, the student will not be permitted to continue attending the undergraduate women’s program at Converse beyond the conclusion of the term in which Converse determines that sex reassignment has occurred. The College considers sex reassignment to have occurred when an undergraduate student “self identifies” as male and initiates any of the following processes: 1) hormone therapy with the intent to transform from female to male, 2) any surgical process (procedure) to transform from female to male, or 3) legally changes state or federal gender identity with the intent of identifying as male. If sex reassignment (as defined above) occurs during any academic term, the administration reserves the right, based on the best interest of the student and the College community, to decide if the student will be permitted to continue living in college housing for the remainder of that term. (Converse College 2017)

Hollins University, which adopted the first transgender exclusive policy in 2006 as a result of a student referendum, recently changed their admission requirements in 2019 to include trans* women and remove the matriculation requirement, citing other school policies such as Barnard as influential in their decision to alter their policy (Kennett 2019).

In previous research, I have analyzed these existing policies, and found that there exist over fourteen different combinations of who may or may not apply and matriculate at gender-selective institutions on the basis of legal status/documentation, biology and medical transition, and self-identification (Nanney and Brunsma 2017; see Boskey & Ganor 2019 for updated...
analysis). At the time of this writing, at least six women’s colleges admit trans* men (and another 5-6 admit trans* men “with legal documentation that still indicates female sex”) and approximately another 18 admit non-binary applicants, many of whom must additionally identify as women or have female documentation. Nearly all women’s colleges with policies admit trans* women either on the basis of self-identification, documentation, or on a case-by-case basis.

Additionally, all but three women’s colleges—Bennett, Converse, and Stephens College—will allow transgender students graduate regardless of their identity. Similarly, of the only three men’s colleges (Morehouse, St. John’s, and Hobart Colleges) that have similar policies, all admit trans* men and allow students to transfer to the college’s affiliate women’s institution should the student transition to identify as a woman (see Table 1 for more information).

And yet, even post-inclusion policy adoption, significant administrative and intersectional barriers to admission remain for transgender students, particularly trans* women. For example, Scripps College (2015) “accepts all applications who indicate their legal sex as female submitted through the Common Application.” As I (2019; see also Fogg Davis 2017) previously have argued, however, the required sex question on the Common Application presents only two options: male or female, with an optional box provided below that reads “If you would like the opportunity, we invite you to share more about your gender identity below.” Previous iterations of the Common Application site included icons providing more information regarding the question, but these were removed in 2016 (Fogg Davis 2017). As such, applicants must decide for themselves what definition of sex the application requires—legal, biological, assigned—and how they fit within that definition. In some instances, the requirement for legal sex, as outlined within the Scripps policy, perpetuates biomedical barriers to admissions, as the majority of ID-issuing agencies require proof of having undergone some form of gender-
confirming health care—though the majority of health insurance programs consider gender-affirming healthcare to be “elective,” which means that this is often paid out-of-pocket by the patient (Cummings and Spade 2014; Fogg Davis 2017; Nanney 2019). Thus, despite seeming to be an equitable solution to filtering potential applications, the institutional practice of using the Common Application becomes another barrier for prospective trans* students. Put simply, inclusion policies that only focus on the bio/legal/social aspects of sex/gender disadvantage those who cannot access the normative expectations of the “right way to be trans*” that are set up in such guidelines and practices.

*Attending Gender-Selective Colleges*

Once admitted, the physical presence of transgender students in a “women’s space” as well as the discursive presence of transgender students within a “women’s community” further challenges the notion of how these colleges not only accommodate such students, but fully *include* and *serve* them. While trans* students choose to apply and enroll at such colleges for a multitude of reasons, it is not to change the identity of the school. Rather, trans* students seek out gender-selective education because they want to be present in an environment with such a mission in order to feel safe and empowered to explore gender. This leads us to think about the very structure of the gender-selective college—the practices, images, language, policies that students are exposed to and the shared experiences and outcomes that they are supposed to walk away with.

It is important to note that while the discourses surrounding trans* admission has focused primarily on admitting trans* women, most accounts of trans* enrollment at women’s colleges
have focused solely on trans* men and masculine students. As S. Weber (2014) documents, while trans* women are present at these colleges—both before and after the admission policy debate—they occupy a tenuous space, far more “under the radar” than one would initially expect, either as a matter of safety in response to resistance of their inclusion or because, simply, they are women in a women’s environment. Trans* masculine students, however, have been at the forefront of these debates for decades, as they no longer (or may have never) identified as women but are present in a women’s space. Popular media, especially, has taken interest in trans* masculine students at women’s colleges, grappling with these anxieties such as the 2005 Sundance docu-series TransGeneration which followed the experiences of Lucas, a trans* masculine student at Smith College (Marine 2009; Schneider 2015; S. Weber 2016), and articles such as “Women’s Colleges and Ex-Women” (Grasgreen 2011), “When Girls Will be Boys” (Quart 2008), “Male, Female or Neither?” (Chen 2010), “When She Graduates as He” (Brune 2007). As Padawer (2014: para. 11-12) reported in her article New York Times article “When Women Become Men at Wellesley:”

Today a small but increasing number of students at those schools do not identify as women, raising the question of what it means to be a “women’s college.” Trans students are pushing their schools to play down the women-centric message...What’s a women’s college to do? Trans students point out that they’re doing exactly what these schools encourage: breaking gender barriers, fulfilling their deepest yearnings and forging ahead

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36 To date, no scholarly research has examined the experiences of trans* women enrolled in these colleges. The only exceptions to this include first-person narratives available in popular media and online such as Ninotska Love at Wellesley College (Love 2017).

37 TransGeneration provides a particularly interesting and illustrative case, as Smith College revoked the documentary makers’ access to film on campus half-way through the series, presumably because of fear of backlash due to institutional exclusion Lucas continuously highlighted or to attempt to deny/erase from the public eye the fact that there are trans* men at the women’s college.
even when society tries to hold them back. But yielding to their request to dilute the focus on women would undercut the identity of a women’s college.

While Padawer initially appears to present an important philosophical question about what it means to be a women’s college—a question that Caplan-Bricker (2019) took up again only recently and what I take up in this dissertation—her article simultaneously points to trans* masculine students as antithetical to these colleges, vilifying them for calling for institutional change to meet their needs. Interviewing cis students who “feared [of] being denounced” for their trans* exclusive opinions, Padawer and others evoke the notion that trans* masculine students contradict the mission of a college for women in order to justify their opposition to trans* masculine inclusion.38

In response to such anxieties, a number of trans* masculine students and alumni of gender-selective colleges have, metaphorically and literally, come out to provide first-hand accounts of their reasoning behind applying and attending gender-selective colleges and their experiences on campus (Catalano 2014; Johnston and Campbell 2019; Moyer 2016; S. Weber 2014, 2019). As Ezra (they or he), who introduced this dissertation, described, trans* masculine students come to women’s colleges either in search of a safe space because of their gender identity or because they have not yet come into their trans* identity and transition during matriculation (Erlick 2020; Farmer et al. 2019; S. Weber 2014). For example, in the recent volume Trans People in Higher Education, Caden Campbell (Johnston and Campbell 2019) details his experiences as the first out trans* masculine student at Sweet Briar College: “I could

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38 As one employee in this study described, “If some women come in and they do want to transition and they start doing it but it’s not disruptive to the school and to the mission, then so be it. We have to respect that. But if someone who’s really twisting and bending the whole system to, maybe, undermine our mission. Because our mission was still, we’re a women’s college. Look, someday that may not be but that’s what we were dealing with and we have to respect that.”
stay at Sweet Briar; purely for the reason that I had checked the box when I applied indicating that I was a ‘woman.’ I felt selfishly relieved. I was happy that I did not have to leave the place in which I had come to recognize this part of myself” (p. 10). Other masculine students, such as Kai, who was interviewed in a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education entitled “Who is a Women’s College For?” described, it is because of the feminist mission of the college that he was drawn to Mount Holyoke:

“Spaces that are not centered around women are centered around men, and that can create a toxic environment for learning,” he says. It wasn’t until he came to Mount Holyoke [that he learned to]... “acknowledge my own privilege as a masculine-presenting person,” he says. He’s become hyperaware of the way male voices attract attention, and he thinks about the advantages he may have over his classmates when he graduates into the world as a man — themes I heard over and over from trans students who, off campus, “pass” or are read as cisgender. In response, he says, he tries to prioritize listening to women — in classes, in social settings — over being heard. (Caplan-Bricker 2019: para. 31)

As Kai noted, being at a women’s college has made him aware of how to be a man. It was in these environments that he could feel safe and supported to explore gender in a feminist way that countered hegemonic masculinity while centering and empowering women. At the same time, however, many trans* masculine students have also noted that these colleges are not perfect. Reed Wetmore (2015), for example, documented his transition while at Smith on the online video sharing website YouTube. In a video called “Being a Man at a Women’s College,” Wetmore describes the simultaneous feelings of support from friends on campus after coming

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39 As Josh (he/him) noted during my fieldwork, Reed’s videos were one of the first ways he learned about trans* life at gender-selective colleges and served as an important resource for him throughout his own time transitioning at Athena.
out, as well as apathetic to hostile treatment from other students, staff, faculty and administration: “My experience was not that I was unwelcome… I didn’t want to change anything about how the college represented women and empowered women… I just wished that my identity as a trans* man, as a trans* person and as someone who didn’t identify as female was more acknowledged” (Wetmore 2015: 6:55 min). As Reed described, despite support by friends and peers, he still experienced hostility on campus from staff and faculty, as his male presentation was understood as antithetical to the college mission.

As I discuss in Chapter 5, the anxiety surrounding trans* men and masculinity on campus is rooted in women’s colleges' anti-Patriarchal mission, which then gets co-opted and understood as anti-male. Constructed in contradistinction, in relation, and in opposition to femininities, masculinities are a form of gender embodiment, expression, style, and performance that are intertwined with other factors (such as class, race, and sexuality) that often refer to male bodies, but are not necessarily determined by male biology (Abelson 2019; Catalano, Wagner, and Davis 2018; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Gottzen and Straube 2017; Halberstam 1998a, 1998b; Jourian 2017a; E. Morris 2011; Pascoe 2007; Schilt 2010; Stein 2018). While it is likely that the anxiety within women’s colleges largely surrounds the fear of hegemonic masculinity, an ideal type of behaviors and rules that perpetuate men’s domination over women, such bifurcation and essentialization of masculinity/men and femininity/women erases the multitude of gendered possibilities that all students may embody—cis and trans* alike. As critical masculinity scholars have noted, masculinity is a system of power relations between men and women as well as amongst different men; as such, there is a plurality of masculinities that make sense in only hierarchical and contested relations with one another (E. Morris 2011; Pascoe 2007). As such,
men enact and embody different configurations of masculinity depending on their positions within the social hierarchy of power and social contexts.

For example, Schilt (2010) exemplifies how trans* men may access some forms of social, economic, and human capital post-transition within the workplace. She found that after transitioning, trans* men on average experienced a pay raise, as well as were offered more respect, authority, and competency, even if they remained in the same job. She argues, however, that access to this masculine privilege was largely based on whether others perceived them as cis or trans* men, as well as on intersections of race, height, and other aspects of difference. Trans* men who were not on hormones, for example, were treated as women with constant slippage into “she/her” pronouns, while trans* men of color were subject to intersecting norms and stereotypes such as “passive Asian men” or “aggressive and angry Black men.” Rather, it was often stealth trans* men, those who their peers did not know were trans* because they transitioned prior to employment and/or were determined to be cisgender men, received the most social benefits. While this differing treatment and masculine privilege highlights how social inequality between women and men is very much alive, the fact that men of color, particularly Black men, and trans* men who did not pass as men do not experience these same privileges shows intersecting racial and gender hierarchies among men are still present (Abelson 2019). As such, reducing trans* masculinity to a singular narrative of power flattens the varied experiences with gendered power that exist. Rather, trans* masculinities scholars such as Abelson (2019), Catalano (2014), Jourian (2017a), and Stein (2018) highlight how trans* men can mobilize hybrid and transformational masculinities, allowing for the incorporation of some subordinated masculinities as well as femininities, and may do so because they wanted to combat their
privilege directly as informed from their time being treated as women or their other intersecting social positions.

Within the gender-selective women’s college context, as Wetmore (2015) quoted above documents, students whose sex/gender is either denied or put into question according to the institutional identity have to grapple with a sense of belonging through this entanglement of sex, gender, and sexuality. Because gender-selective women’s colleges have articulated a mission dedicated to the eradication of gender inequality vis-a-vis a centralization of femininity and womanhood—noting that this, too, is embedded with intersections of race, class, and sexuality—the presence of masculinity on campus threatens the organizational logic upon which these colleges exist. As a result, this creates what Hart and Lester (2011; see also Jones 2014; S. Weber 2014, 2019) describe as hyper/invisibility on campus, wherein trans* students, particularly trans* masculine students, simultaneously are invisible and hypervisible within the college community. For instance, these colleges promote the institutional identity of a “college for women and women’s education” by centering womanhood through actions such as using “she/her” pronouns to address large groups of students or using images of only women in brochures and online.40 While this might be both expected at a gender-selective college and is, in fact, a radical act to represent the diversity of womanhood and femininity on campus, a tension also arises wherein those who do not conform to the “ideal” student image—those that either are masculine or men—are written out of the college community by not being pictured.

40 In 2003, the Smith College student body voted, by a slim majority, to change language in student-body generated documents to use gender-neutral pronouns. All official campus materials from the administration, however, still use she/her pronouns. Other colleges have followed similar suit (see Freitas 2017; Marine 2014; Perifimos 2008; S. Weber 2014). Mount Holyoke (2018), on the other hand, has published a guide for pronouns and gendered language on campus, asking staff to refer to “Mount Holyoke students” rather than “Mount Holyoke women.”
Simultaneously, masculine students also experience hypervisibility by standing out against the backdrop of a college for women, making them seem like strangers in their own home (Hart and Lester 2011). As Ahmed (2012) contends, when things (such as womanhood) become institutionalized, they recede into the background, revealing those who stand out or who do not belong. For example, while seemingly menial, trans* masculine graduates must grapple with the issue of the campus bookstore only selling items with the feminine “alumna” or “alumnae” on them. As some participants of this study, such as Jake (he/him), half-joked, “I feel more comfortable wearing an ‘Athena Dad’ sweatshirt than an alumna one.” As Jake describes, because of the institution’s continued use of the feminine alumna/ae, he feels like he is put in a tough position wherein either his trans* identity is outed or he is forced to lie and say his sweatshirt belongs to his partner or mother, because no one who looks like him—a tall white, balding man with a goatee—would be expected to have gone to Athena. Both in the following chapters and within other academic and popular media accounts, trans* masculine students have documented time and time again about being treated as a stranger because they stood out on campus, relaying problems that marked them as hypervisible in residential hall bathrooms, residential rooms, campus events, graduation, or in class. While these students described that they came to campus because they believed in the college’s mission and wanted to contribute to the community, they faced resistance from peers and the institution’s administration because they were considered antithetical to the campus community.

Similarly, Morrison (2019) examines the intersections of gender and race at gender-selective Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (see also Fogg Davis 2017). Drawing on the case example of Morehouse College, the only men’s HBCU with a trans* admission policy, Morrison discusses how institutional identity at gender-selective colleges is
rooted in racial norms and hierarchies. Known for historical tensions surrounding queer sexuality and gender non-conformity on campus (The Advocate 2003; Dworkin 2009; Patton 2014), Morehouse promotes that its purpose is to graduate students that fit the “Morehouse man” brand—well-educated Black men who “demonstrate acuity, practice integrity and exhibit agency...commit to brotherhood...[and] strive to lead consequential lives” (Morehouse College Strategic Plan n.d.). Used as a symbol for the crucial on-ramp to the black elite by distancing from stereotypes and presumed inferiority (Demby 2013; Patton 2014), the ideal Morehouse Man is an identity that is grounded in normative gendered, racialized, and sexualized images about the “respectable” Black man, and is both promoted and in many ways enforced by the institution. For example, the Morehouse Office of Student Conduct oversees a student etiquette policy complete with a dress code (adopted in 2009), wherein students are expected to “dress neatly and appropriately” both on campus and off-campus college sponsored events. Violators of this policy are subject to being denied access to class, formal sanctioning, and expulsion. The policy stipulates that “appropriate dress” includes no hats or do-rags, sunglasses, grillz, jeans at institutional events, pajamas or sweats, or sagging jeans. This policy also used to include an additional provision prohibiting clothing associated with femininity such as dresses, tunics, purses, and heels. In both cases, these rules are used to construct the notion of a respectable, heterosexual black man in opposition to the criminalized, thug, or “violent” Black man as well as effeminate and queer. When Morehouse reconsidered its admission policy in 2019, ultimately deciding to admit and matriculate students identified as men while asking trans* women and non-binary students to leave the institution (see Milan 2019; Villa 2019), this policy decision can be understood in the context of the Morehouse Man brand and what constitutes black masculinity—and in fact, heading it’s press release about the policy as “Morehouse College
Reaffirms Dedication to Educate and Develop Men.” As Morrison (2019) argues, because Morehouse is “the only institution that is dedicated to the development of Black men” it serves the mission of the college to “accommodate the spectrum of Black men who want to embody all that Morehouse stands for” (qtd. on p. 106). Because sex/gender has historically been less available to Black populations, rendering Black men and women as masculine (Snorton 2017), institutions such as Morehouse serve an important purpose to providing an avenue to Black male students—both cis and trans*—to feel safe and supported on campus and to explore multiple forms of masculinities.

Noting the gender-selective HBCUs with trans* admission policies are few in number (Morehouse, Spelman, and Bennett), most trans* students seeking out a gender-selective education attend predominantly and historically white gender-selective colleges for women. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the discourses and structures of sex/gender on these campuses are rooted within notions of white womanhood and femininity. As a result, trans* students’ interactions and sense of belonging is mapped within these discourses of both gender and race. S. Weber (2019), for example, finds that it is white trans* masculine students that enjoy sexual and social benefits and privileges at women’s colleges. As S. Weber describes, sexual identities and practices are arranged in a hierarchy of stratification, determining visibility, desirability, and popularity, predicated upon markers of visible queerness that becomes a liability to the institution such as masculine mannerisms, sexual attraction to women or other trans* students, short or ambiguous hairstyles, tattoos, particular styles of clothing, and having top surgery and/or being on testosterone (see Catalano 2014; Johnson 2016; Moyer 2016). As I discuss further in chapter 5, however, while I do find similar patterns of this hierarchy that S. Weber lays out, I contend that access to and visibility within this hierarchy is not in spite of the institutional
identity but *because of* the norms and discourses that the institution promotes, leading to potentially negative and violent experiences on campus. While there is space at gender-selective colleges to identify and express sex/gender in a multitude of ways, especially beyond the coded text of admission policies, social belonging becomes contested for trans* students based on intersections of race, class, and sexuality. In other words, bodies that stand in stark contrast to the institutional image of womanhood are afforded capital amongst fellow students for queering the institutional identity. Meanwhile other students are unable to access such forms of capital because they seemingly blend into and affirm the institutional commitment to diversity of womanhood or because they are seen as ideological and physical threats to the campus community. Particularly for trans* men and Black trans* students, it becomes difficult to access social capital and belonging on campus—*despite being hypervisible on campus*—because the intersections of their gender identities cross the metaphorical line in the sand into which they are denied all forms of femininity and belonging on campus. Consequently “the thing that gets called ‘the transgender community’ is not really community that has space for them” (S. Weber 2019:197).

Despite trans* students’ experiences of exclusion, erasure, and violence, overall, trans* students have reported significantly more positive experiences and feelings of support at gender-selective colleges than students at co-educational colleges (Freitas 2017). This may be a result of increased efforts on behalf of individual faculty, staff, and administration to address the needs of trans* students on campus and to create a gender-safe environment. In 2018, for example, Mount Holyoke released the guide “Supporting Trans and Non-Binary Students,” wherein faculty are instructed to address groups of students as “Mount Holyoke students” instead of “Mount Holyoke Women” and avoid referring to *the two* genders. Other policies and practices taken on
campuses have included offering gender-neutral restrooms and trans*-specific residences or living learning communities; providing trans*-informed health care and insurance; allowing for name changes on registrars, ID cards and diplomas; conducting Trans* 101 trainings for employees; and creating dedicated student spaces with staff directors such as LGBTQ+ resource centers on campus (Marine 2009).

While some employees remain ambivalent towards accommodating trans* students, unsure of how trans* students fit within the mission of gender-selective colleges (Marine 2009, 2011a), the impact of colleges and individual employees articulating commitments to the well-being of trans* students cannot go understated (see Marine 2009; Nicolazzo 2017; Siegel 2019). As scholars have noted, establishing a sense of belonging within an institution is a key feature of a student’s matriculation and success, particularly for non-majority students (Berger 1997; Marine 2009). Considering the degree to which trans* students can experience exclusion and violence as a result of their identity (Grant et al. 2011; Rankin et al. 2010), the ways in which institutional and interpersonal systems support trans* students, especially in gender-selective environments, matters.

As gender-selective colleges seek to grow and expand their educational mission to be inclusive of some of society’s most marginalized members, trans* students’ increased recognition on campus coincides with trans/feminist debates that arouse panic surrounding trans* presence on campus (Marine 2009; S. Weber 2016). As such, the ostensive function of these policies grants formal access, but the performative practices by both the institution and community members may create support systems for some students in some aspects on campus while simultaneously perpetuating barriers for others through the enforcement of gendered discourses and binaries between sex/gender, man/woman, masculine/feminine, and cis/trans*.
These social pressures, paired with the policies and practices of colleges that subtly or overtly enforce sex/gender discourses on campus, create problems for transgender students potentially leading to threats to student safety, denial of their ability to self-identify in academic and extracurricular activities, adverse mental and physical health, and poor performance or withdrawal from the institution (Bilodeau 2007; Marine 2009; Nicolazzo 2017; Rankin et al. 2010). Certain “band-aid” policies and practices such as transforming one restroom per building to be gender inclusive, allowing trans* students to have single rooms on a case-by-case basis, or arguably trans* admission policies accommodate trans* students while also distinguishing that they 1) differ from the majority student population and thus 2) are problems that need fixed so that they fit in the pre-existing structure. As a result, simply amending policies is not enough to address the inequalities that trans* students face within gender binary structures. Like policies addressing other student populations, such as financial aid or mandatory sexual assault reporting, while important, they can still perpetuate harm for their intended populations—indebting students into institutional labor or subjecting survivors to relive their trauma within unsafe systems such as the police. When we focus on a single problem and not on the larger contextual educational environment, negating the fact that the identities embedded in these policies are always intersectional, we are inviting students into broken systems.

As one student noted on Twitter in late 2017, in response to Spelman’s newly adopted trans* admission policy, for example:

Spelman College is NOT ready to admit [trans] students. Regardless of what “studies” have been done, Spelman is not safe for queer folx/ Let alone Black trans women.

Spelman has no idea what to do with situations, there are no mental health profs

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41 Tweet by Bello Bioni (@Keo_Gogh) on September 5, 2017. This Twitter account has since been deactivated.
knowledgeable on - / -trans* health. There are no physicians knowledgeable on trans health. Teachers/faculty/staff have OPTIONAL LGBTQIA+ training/ As well as public safety. Can we think about what being stopped by public safety is going to do to trans women?... Other women’s* institutions have been admitting trans/ Gender queer folx for years & now Spelman feels the pressure and has made a hasty decision without first making sure that campus is ready.

As the student notes, in comparison to, or perhaps because, other women’s colleges had been admitting trans* students for “years”—regardless of whether or not they are actually creating inclusive environments on campus—Spelman’s policy announcement was rushed without preparing the college with adequate infrastructure to support trans* students to thrive in the institution (a similar critique of Minerva as I discuss in my findings). Evoking what A. Davis (2018) terms engendering reputation, wherein an institution’s response to transgender issues on campus is more a means for improving a college or university’s prestige than for meeting the needs of their students, the student critiques Spelman’s motivations for trans* inclusion as one for reputation rather than actual inclusion. Especially noting the heightened risk of police violence that trans* women of color are likely to face, the student argues that such admission policies, while solely focusing on sex/gender, could create negative impacts particularly for poor and Black students on campus. While Spelman might have had the right intention with its policy, the performative practices of the institution puts trans* students at risk.

As students coalesce around gender-selective colleges as spaces to create and challenge gender together, it is important to understand the ways in which inclusion policies and practices impact students’ lives in order to create environments where students feel safe and empowered to explore their gender. What is needed, consequently, is a critical examination of how these
seemingly inclusive administrative policies and practices do, shape, and regulate the categories for the students they are meant to assist (Spade 2015). Tracing the historical foundations of women’s colleges, understanding that despite their feminist founding and mission, I argue that they have always been invested in the exclusion of those who are not rendered “woman” or “feminine” enough. Thus, the legacies of exclusion endure on these campuses today, forever haunting the contemporary administrative structures and practices of women's colleges because such exclusions are deeply central to the very meaning of these colleges in the first place. As gender-selective colleges formally become trans* inclusive, what then takes shape when sex/gender and feminism become institutionalized, routine, and used as descriptions to both include and exclude, and for whom are such possibilities are altogether foreclosed?
CHAPTER 3: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A POLICY

In an era when “diversity,” “inclusion” and “intersectionality” are buzzwords on college campuses, and gender-selective women’s colleges, in particular, expand their notion of womanhood to include (some) trans* people within their institutional mission, the question arises regarding trans* student experiences within these environments. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the experiences of trans* students enrolled in gender-selective women’s colleges with trans* admission policies in order to understand whether and how these administrative policies and practices —and gender-selective colleges more broadly—institutionalize diversity and inclusion in the name of their feminist missions (Ahmed 2012; Spade 2015). My aim was to map the development, implementation, and impacts of reimagined “womanhood” in light of these policies and how students negotiate their belonging to these (re)gendered spaces (Nicolazzo 2017).

In this chapter, I detail my research methodology. First, I provide a restatement of my research questions. Then, I detail the three data collection methods that comprise this ethnography of a policy: archival data analysis, semi-structured interviews, and nine months of participant observation. Using a grounded theoretical framework, I follow with an overview of my research analysis and coding scheme that led to the development of the subsequent themes that comprise the two analytical chapters of this dissertation. Finally, I discuss the ethical implications of this research, including my own positionality and relationship to the project, data limitations, and data generalization.

An Ethnography of a Policy

This study addresses the following three research questions:

1. Do women’s colleges institutionalize sex/gender? If so, how?
a. Does transgender inclusion challenge and/or reinforce discourses of womanhood on campus? If so, how?

b. Does transgender inclusion challenge and/or reinforce gender inequality on campus? If so, how?

2. How do inclusion policies/practices impact trans* students’ academic and social experiences on campus?

   a. What, if any, barriers to inclusion do trans* students experience on campus?

   b. How, if at all, do transgender students thrive and survive on campus?

3. How do women’s college students, faculty and staff, administrators, and alumni conceptualize belonging to the institutional community?

   a. In what ways do women’s college students, faculty/staff, and alumni articulate the purpose and mission of women’s colleges?

   b. In what ways do women’s college students, faculty/staff, and alumni understand trans* inclusion as a part of this articulated mission?

To address these questions, I conducted a nine-month ethnography of trans* admission policies at two gender-selective women’s colleges: Athena and Minerva.

Like other forms of ethnography, institutional policy ethnography as a methodology consists of an established set of norms that guide research practice. In particular, Harrison (2018) outlines four key components of ethnographic research as a research and writing tradition that differentiates from other field-based qualitative research: ethnographic intent, holism, empathetic research, and ethnographic comportment. As he describes, ethnographic research has an intentional dedication toward understanding, describing, interpreting, and comparing culture. Through in-depth and “thick” description (Geertz 1973), including sustained observations and
first-hand experience, ethnographic researchers aspire to experience the feelings, thoughts, and situations of the people in which they interact and contextualize findings to understand the specificity of cultural meaning. As Harrison (2018) details, while not all ethnographers necessarily agree nor endorse the ideologies of the communities they work with (see, for example work on hate groups such as Blee 2003), such research seeks to explain and humanize the cultural perspectives and practices of different groups. Finally, Harrison advances previous understandings of ethnography by contending that contemporary ethnographers have an ethical obligation to be critically aware of their positionality, familiarity with ethnography’s problematic genealogy, and be accountable for one’s conduct throughout the ethnographic process. Taken together, these frames outline an ethnographic research methodology that serves to understand and describe social worlds while remaining grounded in historically informed and future-oriented reflection throughout the duration of the research process.

While these four attributes do not necessarily provide a clear definition of what ethnography is or the methods by which is it practiced, Harrison encourages us to embrace the blurriness of these methodological boundaries: “Ethnographic modes of understanding and documenting social life insist on dynamic blends of spontaneity and thoughtful consideration, ambition, and humility, as well as creativity and resolve” (Harrison 2018:189). In so doing, such framing pushes sociological research on policy towards a more humanistic approach. As opposed to policy analysis and evaluation (Marshall 1997, 2000; Shaw 2004), a policy ethnography serves as an important corrective to sociological studies that are all-too-often narrated through top-down, decontextualized, and universalizing discourses that fail to account for how people affected by policy experience policy (DuBois 2009; Walford 2001, 2003). As Matus (2019:1-2) explains:
The prevalence of education policies understood as directed to specific identities; therefore, as partial and segmented (e.g., policies for women, policies for migrant populations, policies for the disadvantaged communities, policies for disabled people, etc.)… it is critical to question the ways policies produce social problems and the kinds of research we are using to transform the inescapable circuit of inequality… We are in urgent need of new research practices to document practices, discourses, materialities, and their relations to question the production of inequalities. This is a claim for those possibilities we as researchers have to open up new methodological horizons when imagining different objects of study.

As such, an *ethnography of a policy* draws upon ethnographic methodology to provide focused, “thick,” and “on-the-ground” descriptions of the day-to-day institutional practices and discourses that emerge as a result of a policy’s implementation. A form of D.E. Smith’s (2006) institutional ethnography, which describes institutional situations in detail and analyzes how people’s actions and interpretations make these situations recognizable as particular kinds of institutional contexts, humanistic-centered policy approaches begins oriented with the standpoints of people to understand how they experience the policies they are subjected to, and how these policies impact their lives. It is in this manner that institutional policy ethnography is an ethnography *of* rather than *for* policy (DuBois 2009). In other words, the analysis of policy focuses on how the everyday lives of people connect with ruling relations, instead of focusing on the systems themselves in a top-down manner. Policy should not be taken up as merely the solution to social problems, but rather policy ethnography begins from a standpoint of the everyday world and considers policy as a potential source of—though perhaps only one dimension in—the production of inequalities (Becker et al. 2004; DuBois 2009; Matus 2019; Nichols and Griffith
2009). By studying the underlying meaning-making practices, relationships, and concrete acts by which a policy comes into being and, in the words of Sara Ahmed (2012), “lives a life,” policy ethnography allows us to inhabit the world created by institutional policy, following policy around as well as those actors who create and are impacted by such policy, accounting for what policy does or does not do (DuBois 2009; Walford 2001, 2003).

To do this, ethnography creatively employs a number of research methods to examine social life including, but not limited to, in-depth participant observation and fieldnotes, interviews, and textual analysis. In the sections below, I discuss the research design of this ethnography, outlining the steps and procedures I undertook to collect and analyze data.

**Research Design**

The data for this study came from three sources: participant observation with trans* students at two gender-selective women’s colleges; interviews with students, alumni and employees; and textual analysis of archival data.

*Ethnographic Participant Observation*

Central to ethnographic research is participant observation, also known as “field research.” Because ethnographic research is committed to observing the everyday experiences of other people, this requires integration and *immersion* within the key sites and scenes of such cultural activities. As Goffman (1989:125-6) describes, field research involves “subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation.” Within ethnographic observation, the field researcher oscillates between varying
degrees of participation and observation, engaging in the local community to gain first-hand experience and understanding of the local context.

Following field methods outlined by Bailey (2018), Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2001), and Pink and Morgan (2013), I spent nine months at two gender-selective colleges—Athena and Minerva. I employed a short-term ethnographic approach, spending three to four days on each campus per week, focusing on central locations on campus wherein students interact the most—student centers, libraries, gyms, LGBTQ+ resource centers, dining areas, and other common spaces. Much of this time was spent by myself—observing how people interact in the space, what objects were around and the setup of the space, what people were doing or talking about. This often took the form of me working on my computer or reading a book, switching back and forth between taking notes and doing other work or eating, just as the others around me took part. Participant observation also took place with participants as they went through their days, which included, but was not limited to, my observing participants during meetings, social gatherings, and other public spaces to which participants granted me access. Throughout the year, I attended school events and programs that students identified as central to the “college experience” including campus tours, orientations, convocations, speaker series, and school holidays. As the year continued and my relationships with students deepened, I was increasingly invited to “hang out” as well—getting dinner or coffee, attending plays and recitals, going

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42 While it is generally suggested in ethnographic training manuals that longer durations of observation lead to greater understanding of local communities, Pink and Morgan (2013:352) explain that ethnography need not be characterized through long-term engagement with other people’s lives, and as such short-term engagement within the field is not merely a marker of inferior ethnographic research due to time or funding constraints. Rather short-term ethnography as a distinctive field method involves “intensive excursions into their lives, which use more interventional as well as observational methods to create contexts through which to delve into questions that will reveal what matters to those people in the context of what the researcher is seeking to find out.” In other words, short-term observation is not a “quick and dirty” method wherein data collection is incomplete and rushed, but rather consists of a close, intensive, and intentional focus on the detail of everyday practices.
dancing and to birthday celebrations, organizing student interest groups and protests, and meetings with college administrators. Similar to Nicolazzo’s (2017) ethnography with trans* students, in much of these observations, time was spent both deliberately discussing trans* student identity and experience, while also sharing time with participants having informal conversation, allowing us to get to know each other better. In this sense, I became an insider to student life on campus, giving me a well-rounded understanding of trans* student culture and how participants developed a sense of belonging on campus—which may or may not be explicitly regarding their trans* identity.

Because ethnographic fieldwork is rarely linear, the generation of fieldnotes from these observations occurred at different times and locations, and through multiple methods. One primary method that I particularly found useful is to digitally record my fieldnotes through the recording app _Otter_ on my phone. I used this method in part due to the long hours spent driving back and forth between field sites, which provided ample time to think audibly about my observations as well as personal, methodological, and theoretical notes identifying preliminary themes and questions, as well as in part due to the late hours spent with students (who don’t often seem to know what a reasonable hour to sleep was). With some observational events starting at 10:00pm or later, I found it difficult after a full day of work to remain awake and type detailed notes but also did not want to forget important details that a delay in writing that sleep would cause. As such, digitally recorded fieldnotes allowed me to get the “first round” of my immediate thoughts onto paper, upon which I was able to return and further develop at a later time.

Further, short-term ethnography encourages innovative research techniques through the use of continued digital engagement when not in the field. Due to the multi-sited structure of this
study, digital literacy of college-students, and the vastness in understanding “diversity and inclusion” and the ways in which a policy may live—which is not bounded to just the geographical clustering of buildings on campus, but rather reaches into neighboring towns, affiliate institutions, and online—the use of digital ethnographic methods also proved particularly useful. While not necessarily physically present in the field, I would be able to engage and observe events through live video feeds of institutional events as well as following student social media engagement online including “following” hashtags and student-run groups or pages (such as meme pages). This use of virtual media and images produced both rich archival data for an intensive analysis and the ability for me to continually review the data as an ongoing form of re-engagement with the materials and context. Further, using video and social media as a way to engage within the field would also help to invite participants to reflect on their tacit ways of knowing and behaviors in subsequent interviews. I discuss these materials further below under archival analysis.

Interviews

To supplement my observations, I additionally conducted 126 formal, semi-structured interviews with students, faculty, staff, and administrators, and alumni. My objective through these interviews was to formally explore participants’ understanding of the phenomena and patterns that emerge throughout my time in the field and from archival materials.

With these groups of interest, I constructed three interview protocols. Students and alumni were asked similar questions pertaining to their background that led them to their institution, experiences on campus, and opinions regarding the state of gender-selective women’s colleges and diversity and inclusion. Alumni interviews also further discussed their experiences within the alumni community and their opinions on the state of their alma mater since
graduation. Employee interviews asked questions regarding their role and responsibility in their employment, their training, access to resources, and responsibilities supporting diverse students, as well as their future goals for the institution. Over 175 hours of interviews were recorded, each lasting between 20 minutes to 3 hours, averaging at an hour.

Archival Data

Dorothy Smith (2006) contends that incorporating texts into ethnographic practice is essential to be able to reach beyond the locally observable into the social relations that permeate and control organizations. At the beginning of this project I had hoped to work through materials specifically regarding the development of the admission policies on campus, but the archival policy at both institutions required that any document coming from the office of the president to remain “restricted” for 25 years and those from the board of trustees for 50 years. Similar to what Joynt and Schilt (2015) describe within the title of their article “Anxiety in the Archive,” this restriction led to one of the biggest challenges of this data collection: not knowing where trans* history might show up. Additionally, most archival material on these campuses depended upon what people donated as well as what the college archivists found relevant to keep—as such, much of the dearth in explicit materials on trans* life could have resulted from trans* alumni who did not feel safe sharing information about this marginalized population, outing themselves or friends, or having donations be rejected so as to not document trans* history on campus.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, I worked closely with the college archivists to discuss potential sources that discussed trans* life on campus, leading to a major breakthrough in the research process: trans* life on campus showed up both formally as well as informally in multiple ways. Put another way, trans*

\textsuperscript{43} Additionally, there is a lag in receiving materials and having them ready to be viewed. Through my working relationship with the archivists, I was able to sort through one large donation about an early working group and trans* conference at Minerva that had yet to be processed or viewed by others.
life was (and is) both, using the phraseology of Jo Reger (2011), everywhere and nowhere on campus. Trans* life would emerge both through dedicated collections on trans* issues as well as elsewhere, such as files on building records or student protests. As a result, I ended up spending over 50 hours in the archives at both Minerva and Athena, sorting through collections on LGBTQ+ and transgender-specific student organizations, faculty and administrative working groups on diversity issues, campus climate surveys, LGBTQ+ and women’s resource centers, campus events and symposia, campus protests, building records, campus founding documents, year books, and a donated student project of 40 video interviews of trans* students and alumni about their campus experiences.

Athena did, however, have what was called a “magic file” available for viewing, which consisted of printouts of online news articles, Facebook pages, and similar documents on recent discussions on trans* issues on campus. Because of the relative recency and publicity of the issue at hand, this led me to additionally collect my own archival documents. With the help of my research assistants, we collected flyers, newspapers, brochures, and other physical documents that documented campus life, as well as digital materials such as website pages, student handbooks, chat forums, Facebook pages and other social media accounts, and mission statements. We additionally spent time in the campus LGBTQ+ resource centers, where old organizational files, flyers, banners, and other primary documents had found a home outside of the formal institutional archives. Finally, throughout the year, students with whom I worked closely with would send me—via email, Facebook, or text—items that they felt were relevant to the project such as class papers, protest documents, emails, memes, pictures, text threads, or screenshots of online conversations. Together, these primary documents provided simultaneous analysis into the campus life at the school-level, by looking at formally curated materials, as well
as at the student-level through materials that were generated, collected, and shared by students themselves, thereby allowing me to compare the student and “official” narrative of women’s colleges.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

With IRB approval at my home institution and the two institutions of study, I collected data between August 2018-May 2019. In this section, I discuss my data collection methods, focusing on participant recruitment, site entrée, and data analysis. Rather than discussing my methods for each data source separately, I discuss them together, as many methods overlapped and contributed to one another.

**Site Entrée**

Prior to data collection, I spent my first month in the field doing what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) define as "casing the joint," a method by which a researcher becomes familiar with the research setting and those who are part of the environment, as well as allowing students to become comfortable with and begin to trust the researcher prior to data collection. During this month I became familiar with the campuses by attending interest meetings and orientations—in effect orienting myself to the institution.

I found it relatively easy to enter the larger public spaces of these two colleges, in part due to my age (during the time, I was nine years older than first-year college students) and youthful appearance. As one of my early fieldnotes during Minerva’s orientation stated, “The audience was abuzz with youthful students and their parents, talking about which orientation activities to attend, where to get lunch, and shopping lists for their rooms…During the presentation, the speaker asked us to turn to our neighbor and introduce ourselves, an ‘event we’ll be doing a lot of.’ And yet, I found myself questioning—should I state that I am an
observer, or should I pretend I am a student? I could do either and likely get away with it.”

Oftentimes at events, I found myself grappling with this conundrum—on the one hand, I wanted to be in student spaces, and looking like a student would easily help with that entrée, but on the other hand, I also did not want to appear like I was “sneaking” in or being untruthful about my intentions of being in the space. Early on in my notes I questioned what I should wear and what social media presence I should have. I even revived my college *Tumblr* page, which, as Josh, Nell, and Violet all pointed out to me, only aged me more, and that I should, instead, create a “finsta” or “fake Instagram” account and watch *TikTok* videos. Similar to Laura Hamilton during her research of a women’s college dormitory floor (Armstrong & Hamilton 2014) and Liz Lee during her research of a women’s college (Lee 2016), I found myself trying to “blend in” as much as I could, including cutting my hair to match the popular queer “chop” that students commonly partook in as well as putting buttons on my bookbag such as pins of the schools mascots and from various students events throughout the year and wearing a regular queer uniform of skinny jeans, boots, and flannel.

This questioning about fitting in led me to think about the appropriate role of researchers in ethnographic field sites and interviewing within and across groups. I ended up taking a middle position similar to that of “older sibling” or “young alum,” where students and I would interact as friends, which would also lessen the risk in which students would have to either out themselves or indicate that they are part of a research study. And yet this “older” status also allowed me to maintain some sense of distance as a researcher wherein I could offer them assistance, mentorship, and guidance. For example, during Athena’s spring protest and student demands surrounding diversity on campus, I was asked by Blue (they/them) to attend the meeting with other trans* students and assist crafting the list of demands, offering information
gathered from my research as well as from my own experiences as a student and alumni of a gender-selective women’s college.

What ended up being key into entering trans* spaces in particular, however, was the trust and recommendation of campus gatekeepers.\textsuperscript{44} Because of longstanding histories and current research practices that have caused real harm to trans* people (see Hale 2009; Stryker 2006, 2017), and especially in the context of these colleges, wherein students continually experienced broken promises and were hurt by institutional actors, it was especially important for me to be cautious of ways in which my methods could lead to discomfort or risk for those participating in the study. As such, during my “joint casing” month, I met with key students, alumni, and employees as identified by a trusted faculty co-sponsor at Athena, that would then help verify my authenticity in doing this work and identify myself to others about the research (see Winkle-Wagner 2009 about sponsorship). Finally, this gatekeeping took form through something so simple, that I feel that it is often overlooked in research methods: \textit{I showed up}. I showed up for student recitals, plays, presentations, and organizing meetings. I showed up at the hospital and the airport. I showed up for the students, signifying that I care(d) about their lives beyond the context of the study; I care(d) for them as human beings. As Luca (he or they) once relayed to me, “This is something that you put your heart into and your work into and your time into...The fact that this even was a concept that you pursued is such a big deal. Because like who else is

\textsuperscript{44} That does not suggest, however, that all respondents and I either saw eye-to-eye or trusted me. During my initial reaching out to key campus gatekeepers, for example, one trans* alumni described my work as “super weird if not legitimately violent” because they assumed my own identity as not a member of the trans* community. Similarly, I invited any student or alumni to participate in an interview, regardless of their identity or opinion on the matter, inviting those who disagreed with trans* inclusion to participate. However, in such instances, I made it clear during the interview that I do not agree with such a positioning and the purpose of this research was to center trans* people and call for support of these communities.
doing it? Who else is doing this work?...I wouldn't be participating if you didn't come up with that. Like we're helping each other, you know? And I think that's the best part about people with big dreams. Because like you can dream big together.”

Participant Recruitment

After students’ fall breaks, I began recruitment by distributing calls for participants via email, flyers, and social media to these key informants, through various campus offices, departments, and student groups, and announcing the study in classes and at campus events, welcoming students to participate in a study about “trans* experiences and feminism on campus.”

In order to be included in the study, participants had to fit the following criteria:

1) Affiliated with either Athena or Minerva as either a current or former (though not required to graduate) student or employee; and

2) Over the age of 18.

Interviewees were welcome to participate regardless of their gender or sexual identity, while observation participants were required to self-identify within the trans* umbrella. For the purpose of this study, I did not limit the definition of trans* beyond this; as such, people could identify as, but not limited to:

- transgender, trans* man/masculine, trans* woman/feminine, genderqueer, agender,
- genderfluid, gender nonconforming, gender non-binary, questioning, bois, femmes, pre-transition, post-transition, pre-hormones, pre-surgical, and many more identities.

Potential participants were directed to a Qualtrics demographic questionnaire that would determine their eligibility, upon which I would email the respondent and set up a time for an interview or an initial meeting at a time and location of their choosing.
I pre-interviewed each observation student before they entered the study to discuss expectations and requests, as well as offer them an opportunity to meet me. In these meetings, often held in campus cafés over a coffee and treat, we discussed my connection to the study, time availability, how to interact with students in public (especially around friends), as well as what they thought I should observe. Additionally, because participants were “out” in varying degrees, I asked how I should refer to them (names, pronouns) when in public spaces as well as in private, and allowed them the space to introduce me however they like, which spared them from having to disclose their participation in a study about trans* students if they preferred not to share that information. Throughout the year, and ongoing through analysis and writing, I continued to check in with participants to renegotiate their initial requests as well as share research materials and ideas to ensure my representation and interpretations.

At first, many students, such as Ezra and Hannah, expressed that their “life was boring” and that their trans* identity really wasn’t a factor in their life so they didn’t know if they would be of much help, if at all (see Lee 2015). Others, such as Nell or Luca, were overly extended on campus and could only meet on a semi-regular basis or in passing once every few weeks. And yet, over time, more and more students became excited about the project, sharing with one another “through the grapevine” about their participation; as Josh (he/him) relayed to me once about a group-therapy meeting: “They were all going around the circle talking about when they were scheduled to talk with you. ‘Oh, I had my interview last week!’ and ‘I saw them in the café the other day.’” Ethnography in this sense was less so about being on campus proper, though certainly an important factor, but more about the interactions and sustained relationships built with the students participating both formally through regularly scheduled one-on-one time together as well as interacting informally or even in passing, what I call “sharing space,” at
events or online—constructing this research to be by and with trans* students rather than merely about them.

In all, I regularly met with six students across two schools—Ezra, Josh, Violet, Hannah, Emily, and Nell—as well as created lasting and informal relationships with dozens more. I additionally interviewed 126 students, alumni, and employees of Athena (n=73) and Minerva (n=41). Due to the requirements of my IRB, I have aggregated the data for employee interviews (n=20; total n does not tally to 126 due to overlap in participant categories), and will not indicate any demographic information, job title, office, or institutional affiliation, though nine employees are also alumni and counted in the alumni sample. Table 2 shows the full list of participants for the study. It also provides some key demographic information that is relevant for the remaining chapters of this dissertation, including how they defined their gender identity, pronouns, affiliation, and other social identities they deemed salient throughout our working alongside each other.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place throughout the entire research process, rather than at its conclusion. After each interview, the recorded audio file was transferred to a digital file on my password-protected computer and transcribed word-for-word using the Otter online interface, which would provide a computer-generated preliminary transcript.

After cleaning words Otter missed (such as “cis”) and de-identifying each transcript, final transcriptions, fieldnotes, archival documents, and memos were then analyzed using the password-protected, cloud-based coding software Dedoose. While codes were largely emergent from the data, they were first informed in collaboration with three research assistants which also participated in the study. As a research team, Josh, Nell, Violet, and I initially coded four
interviews and compiled a master list of codes. We then discussed our coding choices through memoing and refined our code list to generate the study codebook, upon which we coded the remainder of the interviews and notes. This collaborative coding process also promoted the opportunity for us as a research team to learn from one another, as our own identities and experiences shaped how we each approached the data. Rather than seeking a unitary consensus or answer to the research questions, our research team welcomed the possibility of multiple truths and readings of the data, approaching the data to embrace tensions, nuances, contradictions, and dissonances (Nicolazzo 2017). These codes were then organized into broader themes through the use of analytic memoing and data were coded using focused and axial codes. As findings were organized, I shared the preliminary findings with research participants to receive feedback and clarification upon any questions from the data, and then incorporated this into a final round of analysis and theory-building.

As such, the findings from this research were constructed through grounded theoretical methods. As Charmaz (2014:1) defines, grounded theory methods consist of “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves.” This iterative and inductive process of going back and forth between the data and theory allows the researcher to move beyond merely descriptive studies to construct explanatory theoretical frameworks of studied phenomenon. This process also allows for the use of what Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe as constant comparative methods, by which I was able to establish analytical distinctions within the data to find similarities and differences across respondent identities and institutions.
**Ethical Considerations**

Because, historically, objective science has excluded and subordinated trans* knowledges and experiences, critical trans* paradigms have called for careful consideration of the ways in which research with and about trans* people involves the participation and cooperation of trans* people in the production of knowledge about their own lives (Hale 2009; Johnson 2015; Lange et al. 2019; Nicolazzo 2017; Renn 2010; Spade 2015; Stryker 2006).

Receiving permission to observe and interview transgender students in a university setting was not easy. It took, in total, over six months to receive three institutional review board approvals to collect these data, and my research protocol underwent multiple rounds of line-by-line revisions to ensure the safety and trust of my participants in spite of the risks of participating in this research. It is possible that many of these revisions were presumably to ensure that the institution was protected more so than the students, as many questions posed by the review boards showed that reviewers did not fully understand grounded theory (such as what “data” will be collected during observations), ethnographic work, or trans* identity (such as if I will be going to observe students on dates or in the restroom). In the end, this extensive process led to the creation of a 10,000-word document detailing how I would respond to any ethical or safety eventuality.

**Confidentiality**

In particular, one of the main ethical concerns within this research is the confidentiality of the respondents. Especially given the 1) small number of women’s colleges and 2) even smaller number of transgender students within these colleges, it is my primary concern to ensure that the identities of the participants are kept safe.
At the institutional level, I will refer to each school with use of pseudonyms and will generalize institutional demographic information so that they cannot be easily identified. At the time of this writing, there exist approximately 40 women’s colleges in the US, of which 25 (63%) have adopted trans* admission policies (and at least 3 more are currently being considered), and thus collecting data at only two of these schools consists of approximately 8% of those institutions.

For employees, the institutional review boards required that I omit information regarding which institution they are affiliated with, job titles, offices, demographic traits, and names to ensure that there is no possibility of identification or to their career should they “run afoul with their employer” (qtd. from communication with IRB). Therefore, following the methods of Susan Marine (2009) who conducted her dissertation with student affairs staff at women’s colleges, I chose to aggregate all employee data, as the inclusion of employees in this research was more to provide contextual and composite institutional information regarding the setup of the policies and practices. Therefore, any quotes used in analysis will be referenced as “one employee at a college stated…”

Students and alumni were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym and any other identifiable information was omitted in any quotes or written descriptions. Additionally, students and alumni were provided the opportunity to read over their quotes and any written analysis to ensure that any information regarding their experiences was adequately confidential. During this time, I also found it important to confirm their pseudonym choice and pronoun use, as some pronouns had shifted over time between data collection and analysis, and some respondents had begun going by a new name and on occasion was the same name they had chosen for their pseudonym, which then had to be changed.
When in the field, I asked the IRB for a waiver of consent for those with whom the ethnographic participants interacted with, as this otherwise could have risked the confidentiality, safety, and consent of the participants. For example, obtaining consent from each and every staff member and person in the dining hall is not only impossible but also breaches the confidentiality of the participant by identifying them as a member of the study.

Researcher Statement of Reflexivity

In addition to confidentiality, a key ethical concern within a critical trans/feminist paradigm is the role of and the power dynamics between the “researcher” and “researched.” It is the responsibility of the researcher to recognize their own part in the research process through reflexivity, as research is never neutral and value-free due to the natural inquiry of human values (Bailey 2018; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2003; Plummer 2011). Reflexivity requires “critically thinking about how one’s status characteristics, values, and history, as well as the numerous choices one has made during the research, affects the results” (Bailey 2018:28). Engaging in what Tillapaugh and Nicolazzo (2014) call “backward thinking,” in the reflection that follows, I address four questions regarding my own positionality and its effects: (1) What were my motivations, reasons, and concerns driving me to this research?; (2) Who am I as a researcher?; (3) How does my position impact or constrict my relationships with participants and my understanding of the findings?; and (4) What do I do to account for that impact?

The road that led me to this project was, for the sake of a bad analytical pun, not straight. It’s true though. Rather than thinking about a series of particular events that consecutively built upon one another, culminating in a grand realization, a specific moment, this dissertation began long ago in fits and starts, even if it wasn’t clear to me then.
This dissertation began when I called myself a feminist at my (then) boyfriend’s church youth group retreat and the young adult leader said in disgust, “Why?” and I only doubled down on my feminist identity. This dissertation began when I read Jessica Valenti’s Full Frontal Feminism (2007) and made me realize that women’s colleges even exist. This dissertation began when, during my AP Chemistry class, the teacher called out to me in front of my peers, “Do you know what happens to girl clownfish when there’s no males?” The answer, he shared, was that they “transition” to male, implying (or predicting?) that I too would transition if I attended Smith. And this dissertation began when the first person I met from Smith, my house president, was a masculine-presenting queer student. By my senior year, I was involved with Smith’s transgender student organizations Transcending Gender and Queers and Allies (later changed to Q&A: Questions and Answers. Question: Do trans* women belong at Smith? Answer: Yes!) after Calliope Wong’s application was denied during my senior year.

Time and time again I was led closer to this project. But more importantly, time and time again I was led closer and closer to realizing who I am. As Tillapaugh and Nicolazzo (2014) contend, my own internalized understandings and experiences of identit(ies) influence the ways in which I make meaning and view my own research and research relationships. Yet, it seems futile to “string” my identifiers together with commas and expect that I have engaged with my positional relationships fully (Tillapaugh and Nicolazzo 2014). Rather, I must question how my own power and privilege, as well as oppressions, construct my relationship to this project.

It was particularly after graduating from Smith that began my explicit engagement with the larger questions of this dissertation. As I entered alumni spaces, wherein I had been promised to be graduating into a community, I was quickly introduced to the hate, vitriol, and contentiousness that the question of transgender inclusion—a fact that seemed almost unanimous
on campus—stirred among fellow graduates. Perhaps it was the negative media attention Smith received over these questions that brought out the particularly worst in people, though I doubt so as these debates still arise to this day online, but my unease with the way these issues were being framed sat with me on a more personal level. These disputes felt like an attack on my own beingness; my stake in these arguments was my own right to belong in this community as a non-binary femme alumni.

And yet, I was unable to articulate this until recently. By recently, I mean that I did not adopt this language for myself until a year or so before defending my proposal and did not ask the same of others until the weeks leading to my fieldwork. In the early stages of preparing for my research, I found it rather difficult to articulate my connection, my dedication, to this research. I never felt at ease with my practiced answer on why I wanted to do this work as a cis person—a question that my dissertation committee had prepared me to be able to address. Describing my involvement at Smith and the organizing at Calliope and explaining my dedication and knowledge in transfeminist epistemology, literature, and methodology did not feel right. Not that these factors were untrue, but rather, it felt as if part of the truth was missing, what was at stake for these students was what I too felt within the community. And yet, I still found myself pondering, “Am I really trans* or am I just saying that for credibility in my work?” I never had a problem with femininity, and in fact I find my femininity empowering, but being called a woman did not sit right with me. As a feminist sociologist, I grappled between the

45 While I do not believe that only trans* people should be able to do trans* work, as this silos trans* people into one type of research, some gatekeepers to my preliminary inquiry regarding this research were resistant to the idea of a cis person (or at least not visibly or openly trans* person) doing this work due to previous tensions and violence on campus towards trans* people as well as within academia more broadly.

46 Nell (they/them) once asked me, “We talk about my gender a lot but we don’t talk about yours. Can you tell me about your gender journey?” To which I replied a long, detailed answer that, as I explained, could best be summarized by “Badass power boss bitch” as I found masculine power in hyper-feminization.
theoretical understandings of gender presentation and identity, doing gender and being held accountable by others based on my own performance. If I embraced femininity, if I was read as a woman, and if I was assigned female at birth, could I not be a woman? It was then a video by Riley Dennis that came across my Facebook that gave me the language to find myself. As Riley described “I don’t feel like non-binary describes my whole experience. I’m like right in the middle and there’s no perfect word to describe someone in that part of the spectrum” (Dennis 2016: 1:33 min). Riley’s statement made me realize that the problem lied not with my own identity, but the limits of language and categorization. While I came to the project dedicated to affirming in others that identity, presentation, categorization, and recognition do not and/or cannot always align, I too had fallen into the trap of thinking that there is one right way to be non-binary.

Despite my identity connection to the project, however, I too must recognize how the intersection of my identities as a cis-presenting, gender-conforming, white, middle-classed and highly educated person afford me immense privilege. In other words, while my identity allows me to be credible to the other trans* people within this project in some regards, this does not suggest that I can claim to understand all trans* people’s experiences, as trans* identities and experiences are constructed, intertwined, and lived through other axes of identity. As critical paradigms instruct, it becomes my responsibility to recognize and use this privilege to help make space and re-center other marginalized populations by pushing back against normalized, stable, and unified understandings. As such, I approach this project with an interest in sex/gender and sexuality, while recognizing that, in order to liberate our experiences from repressive systems of binary gender, we must liberate everyone. This does not suggest that liberation is a singular point of arrival, but rather a process, wherein we must continually think about the ways in which our
practices and scholarship center those most marginalized. In collaboration with these students, at
every stage of this process I continue to think about ways to center their experiences and
feedback not only in what this project says, but what is does—constructing knowledge,
legitimating these experiences, and creating a resource for students to support them as they
continue doing the hard work of improving their communities, building bridges as the gates to
formal inclusion open.
CHAPTER 4: OPEN GATES

In what follows, I present the findings from this study. Applying Dean Spade’s (2015) notion of critical trans* justice as an analytical tool, these findings were developed in collaboration with research participants — from the construction of the codebook and relevant themes, to the framing of the study. Through the voices and viewpoints of 126 participants—students, alumni, and employees of Athena and Minerva—as well as in-depth experiences in community with six trans* students at these colleges, this analysis describes the multiple realities and (im)possibilities that take place in these gender-selective environments that are dedicated both to explicit inclusion and exclusion on the basis of sex/gender. As I discuss, gender-selective colleges, like all institutions of postsecondary learning, are embedded within and contribute to a complex hierarchy of power (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006). In addition to formal hierarchies through bureaucratic structures, power also takes shape within communities through an intricate matrix of domination at the group and individual levels. As such, this analysis focuses on the interaction between these levels and how institutional structures interact with, shape, challenge, and maintain inequality, noting that neither work in isolation from one another. As a result, the experiences represented in this study reflect participants’ embeddedness in a larger institutional system of identity and categorization (Marine 2009).

For these reasons, I organize the findings of the present study in two chapters. The first chapter examines the changing landscape of gender-selective colleges by examining the ostensive functions of gender-selective colleges as organizations. As the presence and admissibility of trans* students raise questions regarding the articulated feminist missions, I examine how students, alumni, and employees—and the institutions more broadly—articulate the purpose and mission of women’s colleges today. In taking up this meaning-making question,
I examine if and how such institutional policies and definitions support the mission and purpose of the college itself. In my second analytical chapter, I shift focus to the performative aspect of these colleges, centering trans* students’ experiences with community and belonging on campus, particularly after the adoption of these formal inclusion policies. While most students articulated overall positive or neutral experiences on campus because of (or in spite of) their gender identity, articulating it as “not a major factor” within campus culture, I discuss the social hierarchy within these spaces and how inequality and exclusion can be reproduced particularly for low-income, and trans* students of color, leading to less-than-positive experiences for the most marginalized of students.

Setting the Stage

Given that one of the key premises of this dissertation is that we need to see trans* students’ experiences as located within a situated space—a gendered space—in terms of physical structures, institutional policies, and social practices (Lee 2016), I first paint the social and structural landscape in which this study took place. Minerva is a rural school in which the campus centers around a balance between the natural and built environment, articulating an institutional emphasis on sustainability and community. Athena’s campus, on the other hand, is located in a bustling town, organizing campus life around traditional and contemporary infrastructure, fostering collaboration with the local community. Through this description, I highlight several aspects of these environments that later allow us to understand their local histories, conditions and construction of their admission policies that create barriers for inclusion, but in slightly different ways at each school.

To describe each of these campuses in this manner, however, does not suggest that they are entirely oppositional nor that these colleges do not share elements described of the other. In
fact, these campuses are more similar than they are different—both institutions enroll a similar population of students (~2,500 with between 25-35% students of color), and are similarly ranked (with Athena slightly higher than Minerva). Both colleges have shared articulated commitments towards women’s empowerment—walking through buildings on both campuses feels like walking through a museum dedicated to women’s history. Buildings and programs are named after rich alumni and multiple items throughout campus such as artwork, pianos, and fireplaces adorn placards with the names of alumni who donated large sums of money to the institution. Signs hang from lamp posts along the streets of campus with images of women’s faces and slogans articulating the institution’s dedication to global and diverse education, and the websites both feature posed photos of students and faculty with language such as “Empowering the whole you” in large fonts front and center. Both campuses also highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion, offer interdisciplinary curriculums with an emphasis in STEM, offer paid internships for students as well as have high study abroad participation, and even have similar campus traditions. Consequently, administrators and students alike often refer to the other college when comparing policies and resources, opportunities, performance indicators, and outcomes, thereby providing the opportunity for analytical comparison between the two regarding students’ experiences.

47 College rankings play a significant role in influencing both students’ decisions to apply and enroll, leading to competition between similar schools and attempts to create distinctive brands to increase their prestige and enrollments. Such rankings consider, weighted at different amounts, academic reputation, graduation and retention rates, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial aid, and alumni. Such methodology is problematic because it reproduces hierarchies wherein schools that have historically been exclusive to the white upper-class have larger endowments, leading to greater rankings and selectivity, leading to more exclusivity, cyclically being exclusive to only the elite. Additionally, they only assess the quantitative outcomes of such institutions, not factoring in the qualitative experiences of students. For more, see Bastedo and Bowman (2010); Gladwell (2011); Hossler (2000); Meredith (2004).
Minerva College

Minerva sits in the center of North Wells, a small rural community consisting of one main street and a single stop light. Tucked away from the nearby hustle of the larger city of Sheffield, North Wells is home to a small assortment of restaurants and a single coffee shop; therefore most social life and activities occur on campus.

Due to the secluded nature of North Wells, Minerva’s campus is vast with large green spaces between large brick buildings—over 800 acres. A large pond nicknamed “the Lily Pad” by students divides campus in two, with most residences and the campus athletics building accessible by a bridge across the duck and swan-filled waters. The pond also serves as an academic living laboratory, where STEM classes are able to study within the natural and built campus ecosystems, further supported by the newly emphasized commitment to community and sustainability outlined within the institution’s Strategic Plan. Also within this commitment is the institution’s architectural landscape, most noted by the newest addition to campus: the large sustainable dining hall and “community center” that overlooks the pond located in the heart of campus.

In stark contrast to Athena’s student service areas with modern architecture that evokes both openness yet a feeling of sterility and coldness as I discuss below, Minerva’s community center resembles a warm hearth—presumably to encourage and create community as the name implies—with dark green walls and natural elements such as wooden beams framing the ceiling. With three floors, the community center houses the offices of deans and staff of student life, couch-lined walls for students to gather and relax, as well as private study rooms available for reservation. In the middle of the building is a great hall with round tables and a stage available for concerts and events, as well as an art gallery, game tables, a pub, and unity space open for
campus organizations and personal meditation. The dining commons that adjoin the center are the only source of on-campus dining, requiring students to all make their way into the heart of campus multiple times of day to share mealtimes together, sitting either at large communal tables seating 8-12 or small booths for 2-4. Offering “food court” style dining, the hall includes numerous all-you-can-eat dining such as a pizza oven, deli area and salad bar, omelet station, stir-fry, and restricted dining options such as halal and kosher.

In front of the community center steps is a large lawn that hosts large community luncheons and sunbathing students. Around the lawn’s borders locates a number of the older central campus residences, most of which are home to the on-campus living learning communities such as for Latinx students, students of African American/Black descent, and LGBTQ+ students. These residences are large brick buildings with long halls of single and double rooms (with the occasional triple or quadruple room), shared bathrooms, and small kitchenettes. Each hall includes a kitchen/ette, a small TV room, and a study/living room, and during study breaks students are encouraged to socialize in these communal spaces, lured by free treats made available by the dining staff.

To the left of the community center sits a small flower garden with benches bordered by a wrought-iron gate that students can sit and pensively take in the grandeur of the campus. Clustered next to the garden are the majority of academic buildings and library, with small paths cutting across another lawn. The academic buildings model as the hub of interdisciplinary learning, connecting humanities and social sciences to the STEM buildings by bridges and tunnels. Most classrooms, with the exception of a few lecture halls, include large seminar-style tables encouraging communication and collaborative learning.
An Open Policy

Minerva’s policy openly admits students of all sex/gender identities except cisgender men. As the policy explains, as a liberal arts college, Minerva is dedicated to critical inquiry of social practices, and as such, the college’s practices and policies should also reflect such a commitment to social justice, diversity, and inclusion within the student body. And yet, students and employees alike had very little input in the policy-making process. Rather, the policy was developed behind closed doors by key members of the college administration, led by the board of trustees and college president, and announced to the student body at the beginning of the academic year.48 As one employee explained to me, “We talked to some representatives from student groups, from faculty groups, but we did not have community conversations about this issue… This [was] a matter of human rights and it wasn't up for debate. So that's how it came about: that the board made this decision, again, articulating our values but not necessarily changing practice.” Asher B. (she or they), a Minerva alumnus, confirmed this by detailing, “Nobody told us this was happening. It was just announced my sophomore year.”

Similarly, Anya (she/her), a Minerva alumna and founder of the student organization advocating for an admission policy on campus, retells:

We started out with a lot of kind of fact finding...we corresponded with people from those other colleges … And I guess it's during that time, I know some people had gotten some wind that there were administrators who were talking about what it would mean, or having some conversations about admission policies at least. And during that time, it still felt very tentative, and like we needed a lot more time and planning to know what, what

48 Most notes detailing the development of both Minerva and Athena’s policies are under archival 50-year restriction. All information here is provided by interviews and information available through online archival research. To keep anonymity of the institutions, I do not disclose the dates, quote from, or provide specifics regarding the policies themselves, but rather speak more generally to their presence on campus.
to even be working towards and what to propose. So I know that a lot of people were deeply surprised when [the college announced] that there would be a change in admission policies.

While Minerva previously had an informal practice of “admitting women, graduating students” (qtd. from employee), the shift to an explicit policy came as a shock—albeit relatively positive—to the campus community. As Anya continued,

I was really surprised to hear that many incoming students who I talked to, they named that as one of the reasons why they wanted to go to Minerva was because they'd heard about this policy. And some of these students were now more easily able to be admitted because of the policy, but many of them were not. But they still thought that that made Minerva seem like a place they wanted to go, because [Minerva] so publicly made this policy change...

Minerva’s policy was met with laudatory applause for being groundbreaking in its endeavors. News outlets and students alike praised Minerva for taking such a bold stance towards declaring that the institution would welcome and support transgender students, and especially transgender men and non-binary students, which were otherwise left out of the admission policy discussions at other gender-selective colleges.

And yet, while Minerva was not the first women’s college to adopt a transgender admission policy, the rapid formation of the policy does lead one to wonder why it was imperative that the policy be created so secretively. As one employee explained, “It seemed to be a rush process, begun at the end of the college year… I remember saying we want to be a little more deliberative – not to say that Minerva wasn’t, but it just seemed to me to deliberate this over a summer when you don’t have normal board meetings. Wasn’t the way I wanted to do it.”
While the preamble to Minerva’s policy claims that the policy process involved student leaders and alumnae association, as the employee argues, by forming the policy over the summer, this limited the amount of involvement—and potential backlash—that the policy formation could have really included. The decision to form the policy over the summer could have been that the policy was understood to simply be a non-issue and not up for debate. But the fact that other offices and community members were left out of the dark—those that would directly be impacted by such a change—until the policy was announced could lead us to other conclusions. A. Davis (2019), for example, theorizes that institutions seek to craft positive public images of themselves as attentive to gender and sexual minority students. As a form of institutional currency, making outwardly progressive stances towards transgender students engenders a particular reputation for the institution: “[An institution can] gain notoriety for its progressive gender and sexual politics, channel that reputation into an advantage over its peer institutions, and, above all, convincingly claim membership among a highly selective, highly ranking subset of institutions of higher education” (p. 323). Put simply, it is possible that Minerva’s policy formation was more so geared towards being first and the best, rather than meeting the needs of their gender-diverse student bodies. As one employee compared Minerva and other gender-selective college admission policies process,

So Minerva is really known as the most inclusive college, right?...I think there was like this bifurcated consciousness that sort of came into play where when that announcement went out and there was such laudatory feedback from the students. But there was such a quagmire and that the faculty and staff there had not been the capacity building all along. And there were no workshops happening….The [area] is very queer, right? Affirming? So people think they’re further than they are.
As the employee cites, Minerva continues to advertise the fact that it was one of the first gender-diverse women’s colleges with “the most inclusive” admission policy without changing many of the structural practices and support systems within the college. As a result, this creates an inflated sense of importance and inclusivity, which, as I discuss below, potentially leading to negative consequences for students.

*Athena College*

Athena, a small compact campus, sits atop a rolling hill overlooking the small town of Telford, bordered by a small lake and wooded area, complete with walking paths, a waterfall, and swimming hole that students find enjoyable throughout the warmer months of the year. The campus, marked with a wrought-iron gated entryway, could be described as an “architectural garden” with buildings constructed in a variety of styles ranging from Colonial to Greek Revival and Victorian Gothic to neo-Georgian, with a dose of “modern” and eco-sustainable styles added more recently. Organized around a central cluster of administrative, academic, and residential buildings, the campus’s layout is divided into four central areas: north, east, west and central campus. The heart of campus locates the community center, a large auditorium used for all-campus events, and a large lawn interspersed with trees for students to relax and study. To the west sits a collection of brick buildings that house the Social Science and Humanities departments while the central campus residences are, somewhat geographically confusingly, to the east. The emptiness of the lawn frames Davis Library, a grand building encompassing a mixture of both the traditional ivy-covered brownstone with accents in white stone, classical columns and copper finials, mixed with contemporary design elements such as energy-efficient solar panels and floor-to-ceiling glass walls—including two newly designed wings that include
an amphitheater and cafe, as well as the new location for student affairs offices and the college archives.

A short 7-minute walk from central campus brings one to the north side residences. This side of campus is reputed to be the “party” halls and houses the majority of Athena students in a clustering of eight large, traditional brick hall buildings. The opposite direction locates another clustering of residences—the smallest as well as the oldest on campus built within the first five years the college opened—which is known to house athletes and theatre/music majors due to the proximity to the gym and recital hall. The east side, located across a busy two-way street, sits some of the newest residences as the campus, including student apartments for seniors, co-op housing, and residences for non-traditional aged students.

A peek inside the residence halls further demonstrates an ode to the founding of the college while looking towards the future. Each residential hall, organized in a homestead fashion with student-run leadership, houses anywhere between 5-120 students, includes a fireplace, kitchen/ette or dining hall, TV in a living room, and study room. Like at Minerva, the residential staff put on weekly programming and study breaks over snacks such as “stress free coloring” or inviting campus staff to speak to the residents. Rooms still possess original wooden windows that leak when it rains and old radiators that are hot to the touch even during the warmer months. While students typically remain living in their hall for the majority of their enrollment at Athena, each year they participate in a “room scramble” lottery system, where upper-class students vie for the “better” rooms including large singles, extra closet space, or coveted bay windows overlooking scenic vantage points on campus. Each room comes standard with an extra-long twin bed, wooden desk and chair, bookshelf, and side table per student, with approximately half the available rooms being singles predominantly housing seniors, juniors, and half the
sophomore class (though some first years also are also housed in single rooms based on accommodations and availability), offering students the opportunity to personalize their rooms as they see fit. As I would walk down hallways to attend house gatherings or meet in the living room to pick up a student for dinner, I would pass decorated doorways complete with pictures and signage from the first week of classes that designated name, pronouns, and class rank. Each hall shares a large bathroom, which often includes designated signs reading “Athenians Only” on one side and “Visitors Welcome” on the other to indicate who was permitted in the space. In general, each building has different rules about passage through the halls—the campus has a “universal swipe” system wherein each student ID permits them access into any hall, but visitors are generally only allowed on the first floor unless accompanied by a resident. About a quarter of the residences also have attached dining halls, where the rest of campus can eat at large family-style tables on antique china, and on Thursdays and special occasions students dine by candlelight.

The academic buildings, too, follow a similar suit of tradition-meets-contemporary. Within the oldest academic building, classrooms include iconic floor-to-ceiling rolling chalkboards and row upon row of tiny wooden desks that uncomfortably fit a standard size notebook. The science buildings—five in total—have all recently undergone renovation and include state-of-the-art Smart boards and interactive workspaces, makerspaces, and labs. Most faculty offices line the upper floors of academic buildings, while administrators occupy “Athena Hall” at the southernmost corner on campus overlooking the town. The newest buildings on campus focus on student well-being including the campus center, student apartments, and a new health and counseling center. These buildings stand in opposition to the red brick of most of
campus, featuring floor-to-ceiling windows, solar panel roofs, and white walls, creating an open and clean sense to the environment.

Making one’s way down from campus into town, Telford plays a significant role in the social life of Athena students. A classic New England town known for its creative, liberal, and queer-friendly environment, Telford’s city center consists of two main roads replete with coffee shops, breweries and bars, eateries, artist galleries, salons and tattoo parlors, and concert venues. Though most students stay within the city limits except for on weekends, students are also able to use the county’s bus system—free with a student ID—to go into neighboring towns and access more mainstream stores such as Walmart and Target, as well as the local mall and neighboring universities.

\textit{A Deliberate Process}

In contrast to Minerva’s policy, Athena’s policy came out of a year-long process, whereby an appointed study group of administrators, staff, and faculty worked to address two questions:

1. Should Athena consider trans* women, gender nonconforming students and/or trans* men for admission?
2. Is self-identification sufficient for admission, or should any additional documentation be presented in order to be considered for admission to Athena?

Throughout the year, the committee met with faculty from the gender studies program, the college attorney, and the board of trustees; reviewed nearly 2,000 student and alumni responses to an institutional survey; hosted open meetings with faculty and staff; and hosted virtual roundtables with alumni and students to develop an interim report that then was provided to the faculty. Unanimously, the committee agreed that as an institution founded on the commitment to
expand educational opportunities for women, trans* women should be admitted to Athena.

Additionally, the committee unanimously agreed that non-binary individuals who were assigned male at birth should not be eligible for admission. The working group, however, was unable to provide a clear answer for the direction that the institution should move regarding trans* men: approximately half of the committee recommended that candidates for admission should live and/or identify as a woman, while the other half additionally recommended that candidates who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) should be considered for admission regardless of their current gender identity. The committee also provided an unsolicited third recommendation, calling for a working group on campus to address climate issues for transgender students, though this group was not formed until after my field research concluded, nearly six years after the policy was initially adopted.

Regardless of the working group’s recommendations, the final decision regarding the policy came from the board of trustees. As one stakeholder explained in their interview,

[It] was a little charged at the end, nobody knew where it would come out. We just didn’t know. But in the end – I don’t know if anyone mentioned – but we had a unanimous vote. I thought that was sort of an amazing thing because just before that I really opened up a discussion on the board without any of the administration there. It was only the trustees… So it was a little gutsy in a way to say no administration here... I mean, that’s what we’re there for, to think about the impact of anything on the overall college and as an institution. Obviously, this issue got to the heart of Athena being a woman’s college. All women’s colleges had to deal with this, none of the other co-ed colleges had to, they could skate through… I think in a sense, we had to define what is a woman. Now, as I learned, there’s the self-recognition or self-definition – there’s a term for it.
As they explained, the policy was understood to be one that gets at the root of the mission of the college, thereby the college charter required that the decision be made by the board. The board, consisting of primarily Athena alumni, partners of alumni, and nominated leaders of peer institutions, remained attentive to the policies other colleges were adopting at the time, and ultimately decided that in order to remain a women’s college, Athena, unlike Minerva, would require all students to identify as women at the time of admission.

As the new policy was announced, in contrast to the applause Minerva received, Athena received backlash from trans* students and alumni, stating that they wished Athena’s policy would look like Minerva’s. Put simply, students felt that Athena’s policy did not go far enough.

As one alumni, Cam (ze/zim), recalled,

My recollection is that they eventually came around to a policy that was inclusive of trans* women, but they basically fought about that for, what? Three to five years? And I think it's hard to come back from that and be like, “We are inclusive now.” You’re more inclusive because people fought you tooth and nail to get to that point and we're glad that you've got there now, but I can't imagine that it feels like a super welcoming place for a lot of young trans* women… It's one of those lines that seems really reasonable on the surface and then you start really thinking about, you go, wait, hang on. This is actually a terrible line. This line does not actually work.

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49 Section 1 of the Sherman Antitrust Act, adopted in 1890 in attempts to encourage economic competition by prohibiting joint price fixing, stipulates that colleges cannot share information regarding policy formation with other colleges until after the policy is finalized. This extends to tuition, fees, housing or other costs of attendance, the amount or type of financial aid to be offered to students, the recruitment and admission of students, the quality of student amenities, and the hiring, recruitment, and compensation of faculty (Gulland and Steinbach 1993; Strimel 2018).
As Cam described, yes, technically the policy was inclusive—a topic of pride that the college could point to saying “we’re inclusive now”—but this inclusion was still predicated on the exclusion of trans* men and non-binary students. Similarly, Blue (they/them), a student at Athena, advocated for an affirmative policy focused on gender minorities, “I've heard language around like gender minorities, which I think is interesting. I think it's hard. I know that like Minerva's policy is just like no cis men, um, which I think is great. But I understand wanting like a[n] affirmative policy versus like who can't come here.” Recently, during the summer of 2019, Athena changed the language of the admission policy to be more affirming of trans* students present on campus. For example:

Are trans* women eligible to apply and attend Athena?

Previous: Applicants who were assigned male at birth but identify as women are eligible for admission.

Current: We welcome applicants who identify as women, including those who were assigned male at birth. No specific documentation is required to verify an applicant’s gender. Please note that in other contexts, different definitions of gender beyond Athena’s control may apply.

Are trans* men eligible to apply and attend Athena?

Previous: Athena does not accept applications from men. Those assigned female at birth but who now identify as male are not eligible for admission.

Current: Athena does not accept applications from men, including those assigned female at birth. Our community does include and value male students who transitioned after their admission to Athena.
Recalling that, as Boskey and Ganor (2019) argue, the ways in which policies are presented can, in effect, determine their level of efficacy, the change in policy rhetoric—even if not a change in substance—will impact how students feel welcomed into the college community. From one-on-one cases to formalized policies, the adoption of trans* policies at gender-selective colleges is an important first step necessary towards trans* inclusion. From here, however, is where we really begin our examination. How does trans* acceptance fit within the articulated (albeit contentious) identity and mission of these institutions?

_A (Feminist) Commitment_

Just like most of the students in the room, I spent my very first day “on campus” at Minerva attending first-year orientation. I sat in the large, oval auditorium, with a main hall lined with row-upon-row of folding chairs and a balcony overlooking a large stage that featured a roll-down screen and large wooden podium bearing the college crest, reminding me of a theatre or a colonial-style courthouse. Gradually, the buzz in the gallery grew to a loud roar, with new students and families filing in from the welcome fair on the lawn outside the building, where incoming first-years received their residential hall and bedroom keys, recycling bin, and could sign up for various local banking accounts or learn about the bus system. Catching only snippets of conversations occurring around me, students talked to family members and new roommates about nerves, activities, and shopping lists to decorate their rooms. As the event—the presidential address to the incoming families—began, the room quieted to focus on the Associate Dean of Admission, a dark-haired white-passing woman (she/her), who spoke directly into the microphone, "Let me begin by telling how you fit in this dynamic community,” she started. “One

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50 No speakers during this event introduced their pronouns during their speeches, but in later communication I learned the dean and the college president (the next speaker) identified as cisgender women and used she/her pronouns.
of the questions that I receive most often from parents and prospective students is what is a ‘typical student at Minerva’ is like, to which I reply that the community is one of increasing diversity, both ‘visible and invisible’ beyond that of just academics. If anything, Minerva students all share a sense of curiosity, character, and confidence—that is the type of student that attends the institution.” She continued explaining that out of 3,800 applications, Minerva accepted 668 students to join the community. Out of this group are 22 transfers, 13 non-traditional aged students, and 35 whose grandmothers, mothers, or sisters attended the college. I continued in my field notes documenting the statistics the Dean read list-like, almost as if they were bullet pointed in her notes:

- Students come from 38 states and 37 countries, 29% are international students and spoke 25 languages (which is good, she editorializes, as Minerva has faculty that speak over 50 languages)

- The incoming class averages a 3.84 GPA and were involved in over 400 clubs and over 800 examples of volunteering or activism in high school. Nearly 100 students earned honors at graduation. Again, she adds that this shows that these students are “true scholars” and are dedicated leaders for the future.

- At Minerva, ⅓ of the new class were offered merit awards and 14 were offered full ride scholarships due to their academic talents.

- 88 students were recruited for the Minerva athletics teams, while over ½ of students expressed interest in the arts.

She began to conclude saying that this is the advantage of an education at Minerva—there are countless paths and opportunities to explore passion, interests, and skills or perhaps find new ones.
Following a round of applause, the college president (she/her), a white woman with bold colored glasses, a platinum blonde asymmetrical bob, and a long kimono-styled wrap, approached the stage, leaning in a relaxed manner with one arm on the podium, and began detailing “our history” of the college. As the president described, in many ways, Minerva today is built upon the legacy of its founding, sharing similar values in the domestic system including physical education, community, and the sense of the college being a *home*. She continued, “The community has a shared commitment to equity and inclusion...Minerva is a commitment to community and ‘you will transform it as much as it transforms you—that is my promise and expectation for all of you.’” Concluding with a quote from the founding documents of the college, she stated that Minerva is an "intellectual and moral machine" and welcomed the class of 2022 to their new home as applause from the audience erupted to a standing ovation.

After the Presidential Welcome at Minerva, I made my way for the rest of the day to the afternoon events held at Athena’s orientation also starting that day. In a similarly styled building, I sat in the back row of a grandiose hall, this time with carpeted floors lining the aisleways between the built-in theatre-style wooden seats. The balcony overlooking the stage was empty, with students and family members filling the main floor of the auditorium. Large industrial fans ran to attempt to beat the afternoon August heat, as people fanned themselves with paper copies of the college song that was sung for the first time that academic year. As the event was called to order, after the college chaplain set our intentions of the event through a brief meditative

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51 One of the perils of multi-sited fieldwork was the necessary travel back and forth between field sites, thereby missing events at one college to be at another. To counter this, I tried to develop relationships with students who would attend the events in my absence and to have them relay their impression and experience of the event. For example, Minerva hosted two “trans* at women’s colleges” events but it was requested by the event host that I not attend to keep the space for students. Violet attended in my absence and took notes as well as described the event to me the next time we met. I also attempted to schedule events only on one campus every few days to day to avoid rush travelling long distances between each school.
welcome, the president of Athena approached the podium to speak. In stark contrast to the president at Minerva, the Athena president, who could be described as “conservatively sensible” with a long, grown out blonde-to-grey bob with side-swept bangs and a fitted canary yellow pantsuit, rested her hands on the edge of the podium only to read from her prepared notes. She began by comparing her own college experiences to that of the first-years in the audience, recalling the “risk” associated with being a first-generation college student. After discussing major opportunities on campus that such a risk can reward, including the newly renovated library, prestigious STEM program, and paid internship opportunities, she turned our focus to the value of an Athena education. As she stated, “That is the power of Athena—the focus on women's empowerment. You’ll graduate into a network of over 48,000 alumnae who are excited to welcome you into the community.”

Detailing the events in my field notes later that evening, I questioned the similar theme that both college presidents presented in their addresses, describing Athena and Minerva as communities. From a sociological standpoint, I understood communities through Anderson’s (1983) concept of imagined communities and Gamson’s (1997) boundary negotiation, suggesting that communities are socially constructed through in-group and out-group processes. Those who perceive or imagine themselves as members of the community, even if they do not know each member individually, are able to form communities through shared experiences and histories, discourses, identities, opinions or standpoints, and general agreement of who belongs. Put simply, a community is a community through a sense of togetherness (hooks 2003), whereby others are rendered outside of the community. As the Minerva president presented in a circular fashion, the Minerva community is defined by and is committed to community. But what is the community to which Minerva is committed, if the definition of the community is commitment?
Throughout orientation week and my academic year in the field, I paid close attention to this notion of community only to realize that, in many ways, the answer was provided on that very first day. Both colleges were presented through feminist identities and missions, organizations dedicated to empowering students and embracing the diverse experiences and identities that, together, made these colleges a community. And, yet, at the same time this feminist identity was entangled with messages about sex/gender and inequality, calling to question what feminism is, what kind of feminism these colleges are citing and/or practicing, recognizing that students and faculty do not have to identify as feminist to belong to these communities, and how trans* students fit within this institutional identity. Are these colleges for women, or for addressing gender inequality more broadly?

As previous scholars have noted that women’s colleges have relied on articulated feminist missions in order to survive as viable postsecondary options beginning in the 1970s, in this section I discuss whether and how these colleges open the gates to transgender students as part of their feminist mission. Focusing on the ostensive, or formal, aspect of organizational routines, I examine the ways in which these colleges communicate their institutional commitments through the construction of the institutional image, purpose, and mission. As I show in the sections that follow, some of these commitments function through overt processes articulated as “feminist”—drawing upon ideas of freedom, empowerment, diversity, and community—and therefore could be inclusive of and beneficial to trans* students. But at the same time, these commitments are articulated through an entanglement of contradictions, often limiting this institutional articulation of feminism to womanhood and femininity. Put simply, institutional feminism does not necessarily equate to eradicating gender inequality.
Commitment to Safety

It was a cold and rainy Monday morning, the school year at Minerva had just begun. The first official Monday of the semester, the gloom of the day made the campus desolate, with students hiding under umbrellas or walking quickly outside as to not linger in the rain. To acclimate myself with the campus, I had signed up to participate in a campus tour and information session offered through the admission office. As I arrived at the white-trimmed, remodeled admission building located next to the town square, I was checked-in by white adult woman who suggested that I look at the available admission documents displayed on shelves around the room or to warm up with a free cup of coffee, tea, hot chocolate and snacks as I wait. As I glanced along the wall—lined with books about Minerva, literature by Minerva faculty, and admission materials about STEM, diversity, sports, careers, “Why Choose a Women’s College,” and sustainability—two tour guides came to the front desk and announced that it was time for the tour. We were split into two groups by last name, and I was placed in a group of four prospective students and their parents. Students were welcomed to introduce themselves to the group, upon which I “outed” myself as a visiting staff member though I looked young enough to be a student, hence why I was alone. As we exited the building, the tour guide, an androgynous appearing senior majoring in environmental studies with a neutral-to-masculine name, crew cut hairstyle, and ripped jeans and boots, walked backwards introducing themselves and a bit about what the tour would consist of. As we approached the main road to campus, the tour guide began discussing the history of the college, explaining that Minerva’s founder was dedicated to a

52 The tour guide did not announce their pronouns to our tour group. As another tour guide, Will C. (he/him) explained, “I just had a tour where somebody was like, ‘What are your pronouns?’ And I was like, ‘There’s too many people in the tour to answer that question.’ You don’t know where parents are coming from. You don’t know what they’re going to say to you.” I got to know my tour guide over the year through mutual friends and attending similar events on campus—while their institutional profile on the admission website used she/her pronouns for the tour guide, amongst friends and on Facebook they used they/them pronouns.
STEM education for women, and that Minerva’s strength in environmental science is what brought them to the school. They continued, “The fact that [Minerva’s founder] wanted to create a school for people who have been excluded, people who have experienced gender discrimination or um, women and other gender bodies who experienced this exclusion is groundbreaking. Even today, Minerva is a women's college, but it's an inclusive women's college, meaning we have non-binary, genderqueer, gender fluid and trans* men on campus.”

Without skipping a beat, the tour guide continued on talking about the building that we were entering, talking about different student services available to students.

For the next hour, the tour guide walked us through the library, science building, and community center, pointing to other buildings from afar as we passed them including the sports center, student health services, other residential buildings, community and administrative buildings, and campus police. At one point, we stood clustered to the side of the road that overlooks the Lily Pad, and the tour guide noted that while the campus is over 800 acres (which is why we couldn’t tour the entirety of campus), they felt safe everywhere on campus, even at night. They pointed to a blue box that lined the sidewalk, mentioning how they were available throughout campus should a problem arise and people needed to get in contact with emergency services, but to their knowledge no one has ever needed them.

Later, we went inside one of the residences located in the center of campus, a smaller building that looked more like a Victorian-era house than the large boxy buildings across the bridge, complete with a white-columned entryway and tall brick walls that had ivy draping along the south side of the building. As the tour guide held open the door for us to enter, they explained that each student is given an ID-card and a physical key during orientation that is essentially their “passport” to campus, including access to each of the buildings that are otherwise locked from
the outside and their individual rooms. Each hall had rules that were communally agreed upon at the beginning of the year regarding guests, most often agreeing upon the idea that guests were to be accompanied by residents around the hall and should a cisgender man be on the floor, they had to use gender-neutral restrooms designated for guests.\textsuperscript{53} Other residential buildings included computer labs, living learning communities, and lounge spaces that could be reserved by students and campus organizations that were closed off from the rest of the residence without a key card, but were open to the outside from an exterior door.

When thinking about \textit{safety} on campus, the term can be conceptualized in multiple ways. First, of course, colleges would and should ideally keep students safe on campus, providing resources and support for their wellbeing. I use the tour that I attended at Minerva, however, as an illustration to exemplify not necessarily the resources available on campus, but how these resources contribute to a particular \textit{idea} of safety. Drawing upon feminist theories of freedom and agency, wherein, as Hirschmann (1996:48) argues, “feminism...describe[s] critically the ways in which desire, preferences, agency, and choice are as socially constructed as are the external conditions that enable or restrain them,” I contend that these colleges articulate the meaning of safety as \textit{freedom} and \textit{empowerment}, such that students are \textit{safe} and \textit{free} to be empowered and \textit{empowered} and \textit{free} to be safe. This is done in juxtaposition to a context in which claims of unsafety are made, such that safety \textit{to} depends on a safety \textit{from}. In other words, the value that is placed on safety as freedom/empowerment is understood through the historical relations and actions that have imported meaning to our bodies as a community as well as those positioned outside of the community.

\textsuperscript{53} Confirming this, Violet (all pronouns except she) explained to me, “There’s basement bathrooms that are for all genders as well as some floors having bathrooms open to everyone including guests [and some for Minerva students only] but the basement ones are more open so it’s rare to see a guy in our bathroom though it’s technically allowed.”
Overtly, these institutions promoted the message that gender-selective colleges empower students through physical and social safety, wherein students were safe to explore new experiences and hone skills that were otherwise restricted or considered taboo in other social environments. For both Athena and Minerva, articulating and marketing such commitments served as an important strategy to distinguish these colleges from the presumably countless other colleges that prospective students would consider during their application year. One of the admission pamphlets offered by Minerva, for example, lists the top nine reasons to attend a gender-diverse women’s college—and Minerva in particular. In an accordion fashion, each fold reveals a new justification alongside stock photos of students on campus, with the number one reason stating that “social justice is in [the college’s] DNA.” It then continues with additional reasons including that students stand among and follow the footsteps of great women leaders “who take you seriously without you having to ask,” with pages decorated with hashtags like #WomensMarch, #NastyWoman, #GirlsLikeUs, #MeToo, and #DressLikeAWoman. As a result of such marketing, recent reports have noted that there has been an increase in applications to gender-selective women’s colleges across the United States over the past five years. Schools such as Agnes Scott, Smith, Barnard, and Mount Holyoke are enrolling their largest first-year classes in history, with increases in applications as much as 64% (Jaschik 2018). As some reports hypothesize, this might be a result of the feminist missions of these colleges, promising to provide a safer environment for women in a current conservative socio-political environment under the Trump Administration and in an era of #MeToo.

This articulation of these colleges as safe feminist communities, however, also suggests that there is also something, or someone, that is antithetical to the campus community, from which students need protecting from. As a student quoted in another Minerva pamphlet states,
“Minerva has taught me to resist against whatever pushes me down—including those with a narrow view of what women can and can’t do” (emphasis in the original). On one hand, the presence of particular policies, practices, and resources, both in terms of who is permitted on campus as well as how life on campus is lived, are created to support students. For example, in the unfortunate event of sexual harassment or assault, there are policies and an order of operations in place to report to police, investigate, punish violators, and provide resources to support survivors. Additionally, there are preventative resources always available on campus just in case, such as call boxes and emergency lights around campus, locks on residential buildings, self-defense courses, and the presence of campus police creating a supposedly safe atmosphere and institutional protection to prevent such violence. On the other hand, these institutions, as the pamphlet suggests, are also meant to empower students to have the strength and agency to protect themselves, being able to resist such violence or barriers in the first place. As the quote states, the college provides students the tools and skills for students to stick up for themselves. While these colleges never overtly stated from whom the students would be safe from, saying “You’re safe from X group” or “We protect you from Y people,” groups were often implicitly and relationally articulated as antagonistic to the defined college identity as feminist colleges for women, including those, as the pamphlet states, who have a narrow view of what women can do.

As one employee exemplified in describing the purpose of women’s colleges, “I think the purpose is giving women a chance to breathe... a chance to embrace competition, embrace intelligence, embrace the fact that I could be wrong in front of other people.” As they describe, women’s colleges provide students both positive and negative forms of freedom, wherein students are able to embrace competition, intelligence, and just “breathe.” But, this first must be accomplished by providing freedom from some undefined other; implying that women do not get
this opportunity in other environments. As another employee described the purpose of women’s colleges:

[Women’s Colleges] still play an extraordinarily important role in shaping the next generation of women leaders and empowering women, especially global women to not only feel that they deserve a place in the academy, but to play a leadership role at every, every level of collegiate life. Being in a community of women is, it's an important opportunity really to develop a mindset where we are encouraged to be innovators in our own lives, to thrive individually and collectively and to make sure that women's contributions to society are not always confined to the lower shelves. And so it is, it is empowerment. And it doesn't mean that you can't be empowered or have those same lessons about agency in a coeducational institution, but there is something, um, as we know from the statistics that that shows that this environment works really well.

As the employee explained to me, while yes, certainly co-educational institutions likely value and center similar ideals, there is something particular about the gender-selective college environment that fosters these values for their students and that leads to notable outcomes for their students. While these employees do not name this other, it is implied that, because women’s colleges aim to provide this opportunity for women—what Langdon (2001), Marine (2009), Tidball et al. (1999) and others have described as a feminist value of “taking women seriously”—then the key factor here in creating such an environment is the omission of and freedom from men.

So then, why are women’s colleges protecting students from men on campus? Recognizing the documented evidence that women experience inequalities and discrimination in education, the workplace, politics, athletics, sexual autonomy, and all other areas of life (see, for
example, American Association of University Women 2020; Kinzie et al. 2007), these gender-selective colleges market their campuses—and are sought out by students—as safe spaces from Patriarchal environments of competition, toxic masculinity, being ignored or disregarded, “mansplaining” and masculine dominance. Presumably because (cisgender) men are not admitted to the institution, this creates an environment where women students are able to coalesce and create an empowering sense of womanhood that is safe from misogyny and casual disregard, erasure, minimalization, and violence, as well as safe to engage in classes, social activities, and express themselves on campus. For example, one of the many, but often cited, reasons many of the respondents described deciding to come to a women’s colleges was safety from sexual assault and harassment. Alex P. (they or she) explained,

> Women have been raped since the beginning of time and women have been valued based on their sexuality from the beginning of time. And so I think, there's like a safe space here. There's not as much male gaze. It feels safer, not to say now that women on historically women’s campuses don't get raped or experienced sexual assault and not that they're not experiencing that by other women. Like that's totally real. But I think in some ways there's a protection of being here, as well as getting your education. Um, but I also think it's like, like a fiercely like liberal place to be and like women can exist in the way that they want. So women don't feel the need to share their bodies in a way that society expects them to. Not expected to wear bras, you know, in a way that society expects them to do. And they can like speak up and speak loudly in classrooms and say what they believe in. They have to hide their opinions from men who are, you know, unfortunately threatening and you know, can be scary in some ways. And so I think it's a bit of a safe
haven for a lot of women. There is a place for a lot of things [to] be challenged in those spaces.

As previous research has found, one in six women experience sexual assault (though this is likely even more common due to low rates of reporting), and that those in traditional college-aged years are at the highest risk of sexual assault (54%) (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network n.d.). For many students—women, men, and non-binary alike—being on a campus that was perceived to be safe(r) from such assault as well as to feel empowered and free was an important factor in their campus search. As it was explained during the first-year orientation sessions on campus safety, these campuses are not entirely free from, nor can they promise to be free from, crime, but they are generally safe spaces for students to be in both physically and socially, especially in comparison to co-educational colleges. It is both because of the physical safety that students were able to be socially empowered, as well as the campus environment of women’s empowerment that created physically safe spaces. The campus police had a booth at the Minerva student check-in, where students could “kick it” with officers, though, as I discuss in the next chapter, the presence of police on campus is contentious and is actually unsafe in itself for trans*, low-income, and students of color. At the booth, incoming students and their families were able to learn about a self-defense course during orientation, and were given freebies like flashlights and handouts of safety tips including: keep rooms locked, register and lock bicycles, keep one’s personal belongings with them at all times, avoid walking alone, walk along well-lit paths at night, keep one’s keys and phone easily accessible, and to “walk with an air of confidence.” Additional precautions on campus included nighttime escorts, shuttle busses, emergency alarm boxes throughout campus, and individual houses set up male visitor escort and
“announcement” systems alerting residents of their presence either on residential floors or in the communal restrooms.

Acknowledging that, yes, these resources are generally important in the event of an emergency and to empower students to prevent individual harm, the reductionary focus of men as the unstated other who are sexual perpetuators draws upon and reinforces a heterosexual binary wherein women are perpetual victims in need of protection and men as sexual aggressors with no self-control (Westbrook 2008). Called “penis panics,” the fear on these campuses regarding men reduces gender to biology, wherein manhood is determined via the presence or lack of a penis, which is then considered a threat to women’s (those supposedly without a penis) physical and biological safety. As Westbrook and Schilt (2014:35) argue, “We posit that bodies (mainly the presence or absence of the penis) matter for determining gender in women’s spaces because of cultural ideologies of women as inherently vulnerable and in need of protection (Hollander 2001) that reproduce gender inequality under the guise of protecting women.” It, too, is this logic that then creates panics surrounding trans* women’s inclusion within these spaces. Recalling the trans* exclusionary argument of Janice Raymond (1979:104) and other TERFs, wherein “All transsexuals rape women’s bodies... Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception,” such fallible and essentialist logic constructs an ideology wherein trans* women are not women, but rather men “pretending” to be women in order to access and violate women’s spaces. Like other women’s and feminist spaces before where such panics are based on the fear of allowing “wrong bodies” in spaces deemed to be “for women only” (see Demos and Segal 2017), these panics arise when the “women’s” in women’s college is thought to be defined by a presumed shared biological experience as opposed to social gender experiences. Logan (they/them) for example, stated,
The things that people have said about trans* women on campus is like truly disgusting and horrifying to me. An argument that I've seen most often is people say, “I am a survivor of sexual assault or rape by someone who has a penis. And now you're going to make me live in a house with someone who has a penis and I'm going to be afraid that I'm going to be assaulted by this person like every day.” And that just like, I like can't even get into how much that bothers me. Well, like I heard that so many times and, on one hand, I want to say that those feelings are valid, but on the other hand, like we cannot go around saying that every person, that every trans* woman who wants to attend Athena is there because they are intending to assault students on campus. Like where did that come from?

As Logan points out, although it is likely that there is a large proportion of students who have experienced sexual trauma given the student population, the prioritizing of cis women’s fear over trans* women’s safety is problematic. Recognizing that trans* women, like cis women, experience inequalities and discrimination in all aspects of life as women and as trans*—including half of trans* women experiencing sexual assault (James et al. 2016)—this raises the question of who has a right to safety on these campuses? This is not to suggest that trans* women’s safety should or does displace cis women. Rather, by not considering trans* women’s experiences with violence—which can be perpetuated by other women—an intersectional part of the larger concern of women’s safety, as Logan suggests, this leads us to realize that the right to a “safe environment” on campus is for cis women only.
To suggest that these colleges could actually promise—or even desire to promise—that men/penises never exist on campus or that the college could guarantee safety, however, would be farcical. Men are present and integral members of the community as faculty and staff, students from peer institutions, students of the home institution, as well as family and friends. Because the physical borders of the campus are fluid, permitting members of the general public to enter (some) community spaces, the notion of who belongs to the campus community is not easily clear cut as “us” and “them.” Members of the public can, for example, be in the library or community center, workout at the gym or attend events, but not enter residential buildings. Faculty have similar access as the public, but can enter classroom spaces. Meanwhile, students have access to most buildings but not administrative offices without an appointment. Therefore, rather than defining community in terms of physical access, this work must be done more at the discursive level, creating group boundaries regarding who ideologically belongs within the community. As Gamson (1997:179-180) argues, “Maintenance of group boundaries involves movements in bitter disputes not only with those everyone agrees is not a member (that is, with antagonists) but also in often uglier conflicts with those who might reasonably be considered members or protagonists. The us is solidified not just against an external them but also against thems inside, as particular subgroups battle to gain or retain legitimate us standing.” In other words, by articulating who belongs to the community or not, noting that this may include those within the college population, these colleges draw boundaries regarding who belongs within the institutional purview of the college mission as a feminist space as instantiated by protection and freedom from men. To protect not just the students, but also the student body, constituting an

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54 According to Cleary Act reports (U.S. Department of Education n.d.), Minerva recorded seven reports of on-campus rape in 2018, and Athena reported three cases. While Clery data provide a glimpse into the sexual crimes that occur on college campuses, they do not present the whole picture. The Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (n.d.) estimates that just under a quarter of sexual assaults are reported to authorities.
institutional identity and subjection, those who do not fit within this boundary are seen as a threat.

But, can these colleges enact their feminist mission—taking women seriously—without the exclusion of men? As Fogg Davis (2017) points to previously women’s colleges such as Vassar, it may be that this feminist mission could be better articulated as a safety from toxic masculinity, as opposed to (cis) men per se. Such a shift in framing then allows these colleges to address gendered behaviors as well as identity, thereby both making room for more gendered possibilities on campus while also controlling a narrative regarding these colleges as safe and empowering environments. As one employee explained when asked about the feminist mission of gender-selective colleges:

I actually think it's becoming, there's almost a rebound for need [for women’s colleges].\(^{55}\) Like I think it's helpful. To really think about how the history of where women have come from, I think being able to explore an identity and just the fact that [the college is] based around an identity and to be really think about how does identity impact who you are as an individual and how you navigate the world and the lens you that you see things through. Women are not equal. Folks from traditionally marginalized genders are not equal. How do you learn about that? How do you begin to strategize how to think differently? I mean, I think about the sciences, like just the fact that the majority of people in a classroom are from a marginalized gender. That's huge. Because the only way we're going to shift the tenure of what's happening in society is if we have people thinking about gender as an essential identity. And it can be a traditionally oppressed

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\(^{55}\) See Jaschik (2018) for theories regarding recent increase in admission at women’s colleges post-2016 election.
identity… We need to show that we need to shift that narrative and I think this is like ripe
ground to be able to do that.

As they describe the multitude of evidence-based opportunities and positive outcomes students
experience in gender-selective colleges, the employee draws upon the notion that these colleges
“take women seriously” and extends this to “taking gender inequality seriously,” wherein these
colleges are feminist learning environments of empowerment as opposed to masculine
competition. This focus on gender inequality then creates the room for more gendered
possibilities of campus, including masculine women, trans* masculine students, and trans* men,
recognizing that gender inequality is more complicated and intersected than a simple male-as-
oppressor/ female-as-oppressed binary. Grappling with the institutional notion of feminism as
one for centering women and one for exploring sex/gender more broadly—whether that be
expanding notions of womanhood or other sexes/genders altogether—gender-selective colleges
are articulated, as one employee described, “one of the absolute best places” to do so. As the
employee continued, explaining how the mission of the college should be reflected in what we
should call these colleges, “I think gender affirming is better. Because you know, being a gender
affirming women's college basically says, ‘We're a women's college down with gender
affirmation. So we're not going to question your chosen identity. And we can affirm you in that
identity and in your gender, whoever you are.’ Right? Because if you're eligible to apply, you're
with us and you're part of us… And, you know, I don't need to be in the business of affirming cis
men.” As the language in the admission pamphlets suggest, such as using the popular feminist
hashtags #WomensMarch #NastyWoman #GirlsLikeUs and #DressLikeAWoman, this signals to
others a commitment—at least formally—to creating a feminist learning environment,
empowering students because of their gender.
Another employee exemplified this to me when I asked them what they thought the purpose of gender-selective women’s colleges is in contemporary society:

I think [there are] two main things. I think the chance for people who are not cis men to kind of have learning experiences that are not dominating by cis men. And there's so much socialization of course, as you know, around how people participate in a class discussion, who gets to be leaders in campus organizations and communities. Just the fact that every one of those leadership positions and every one of those, “here's the person who makes a lot of great comments” in class. It's always going to be a woman or a trans* person. I mean, that's, those are the only options. So when you take cis men out of those positions by necessity, other people who may not have felt kind of empowered, are entitled to step into those roles, finally have a chance to and often like find their footing in really amazing ways. So that's one angle on it.

And honestly the other angle is these colleges, uh, draw queer people like moths to the flame… It's an incredibly rare and valuable space that they create to support queer people, even if it's not what they're doing on purpose… We're all complaining about [the college] and how hard things are, but it's also the best environment to be non-binary of anywhere I've been, you know? To get 3,000 students and hundreds of faculty and staff to like a space that big that is as supportive as [this college] is, it's really hard to find. So, even though there are many problems, um, I think it's still one of the absolute best places to kind of find a new gender or find acceptance for one that you already have.

As they state, citing empirical research on the benefits of women’s colleges, gender-selective environments have historically challenged barriers and inequalities that women have faced, particularly within higher education, countering essentialist notions of binary sex and female’s
intellectual inferiority/inabilities. Recognizing that women are still not equal in contemporary society, they contend that gender-selective colleges continue to serve an important purpose in learning and teaching about gender inequality and how to address it. While few stated what the end goal of these colleges would then be—likely to no longer need to exist in a society that realizes full gender inclusion and equality—they focused on the first step of many towards this goal: opening the gates of possibility to include transgender students who may or may not identify as women. As such, this articulation of safety becomes expanded from a sole focus on women-versus-men to a broader conception of feminism as an empowerment and freedom to gender affirmation and support.

Commitment to Diversity

Returning to the large auditorium at Minerva, the second day of orientation centered around “building relationships and community,” complete with sessions with residential life, a “crash course” on campus traditions, and orientation small group activities like yoga and crafting. I sat in the back of the large auditorium, watching students talk with one another. The room was noticeably louder than the day before as students had said goodbye to their families and spent their first night in their new beds. It amazed me how quickly these students were in community with one another, friendly and energetic about their activities and other events on their upcoming schedules. A curly headed man (he/him)\textsuperscript{56} approached the podium of the stage and began softly with a question, having to repeat himself three times to get the attention of the room: “Who knows a transgender person?” Approximately 80% of the room raised their hand. The workshop, he explained, while called Trans/gender 101, was about sex/gender more broadly

\textsuperscript{56}After the introductory question, the presenter introduced himself as a women’s college graduate and his pronouns as he/him.
on campus. Through the workshop, the facilitator covered topics regarding gender stereotypes, the gender binary using the gender unicorn model (see Pan and Moore n.d.), pronouns, and administrative and physical violence transgender communities face.

Near the end of the allotted workshop time, the PowerPoint transitioned to a slide reading “Transgender at Women’s Colleges.” The facilitator paused and breathed deep into the microphone. The room seemed to lean into his inhale, waiting in silence on bated breath for what was to come next. The air was tense and yet excited for the discussion.

Up until now, two days into orientation, there had been no mention of transgender students in the college. Surely, for the past 24 hours the orientation leaders and college administrators mentioned sex/gender at length in terms of womanhood, discussing how women could be leaders and empowered in this college, that Minerva was built by and for women of conviction. But this was the first explicit mention of the possibility that not all people in the audience—or college community more broadly—were in fact women.

The facilitator broke the silence with a question. “Hypothetically,” he posed, “do you say this is a space for women? Trans* women in particular? Trans* women and women?” Without a pause, he continued, “What’s the problem with that last one? It normalizes cis women as the standard by differentiating trans* women as something else.” A few members of the crowd nodded and snapped in agreement, and he once again asked,

Do trans* people, particularly trans* women, belong at women’s colleges? Do trans* men? What about people who come as women and transition during their time here? What about non-binary people? What we call a women's college today doesn't matter so much as what we do and why we do it.
Displaying a quote from Minerva’s admission policy, he emphasized that the school does not consider gender identity to be static and as such, the meaning of womanhood in the institution could not be static either. The audience erupted with pride—students to my left shouted and others in front of me shouted and whistled. He then moved on to talk about who our trans* classmates were, which he explained could include anyone in the trans* umbrella that may or may look trans*, may be trans* faculty, or people with trans* parents. “So, in order to support these students,” he concluded, we must “be inclusive. Don't use the term ‘women’ to refer to everyone at the school… Everyone in college is in transition, and this is our time to learn how to help out others and learn about these topics.”

This event was the first of a number of conversations that year that attempted to reconcile the feminist mission of the college as colleges for women and transgender inclusion. As students, alumni, faculty, staff and administrators partook in Trans* 101 trainings, support groups, and student organizing meetings, the question of how trans* students belonged within the women’s college identity was entangled with language and concepts of “diversity” (meaning difference) and “community” (meaning shared sense of togetherness). Ostensibly, the transgender admission policies serve as formal, public statements of commitment to transgender students—a declaration of principles of sorts, articulating that these colleges are home to a diverse and dynamic community of people, and transgender inclusion is just another arm of social justice education. As the college president at Minerva stated (quoted in the opening of this larger section), the Minerva community is committed to equity and inclusion, a commitment to community. And yet, more often than not, as I discuss further in the next chapter, institutional recognition of transgender students on campus was often relegated only to unidimensional
discussions of gender diversity on campus, largely separate from other intersectional axes of identity, leaving the larger institution to be understood as colleges primarily for women.

Both colleges used similar mottos for the year such as “We are Athena” and “One college, one community, one Minerva.” Working as what Butler (1990, 2004) refers to as performative speech acts, these mottos bring the institutional body into existence as a subject, both simultaneously describing and constructing the campus population as a singular community while recognizing that this community benefits from different experiences, opinions, and identities. For example, during Athena’s introduction to their “diversity and community” day during orientation, the speaker introduced a whole range of student identities that were represented in the room. As I wrote in my notes:

In an almost preaching manner, the Director of Student Wellness approaches the microphone, first starting off loudly with "What's up y'all?!" After introducing her name, hometown, position on campus, and her she/her pronouns, she goes on to introduce "us": "Hey Asian, Brown and Black queens"—a loud cheer from the back right erupts with claps, whoops and snaps. “Hello to all my queers. Bonjour, Bienvenu to all those who speak many tongues or tongues not originally English, a very difficult language to learn. Welcome to those moms and those who had to save for a few years to get here”—applause breaks out in the audience. “Stay strong to those who were told that they were born on the wrong side of the tracks”— more shouting. “Welcome to those who are the first in their family to attend college. To my beautiful trans* folk, gender bending or people who just don't care to perform. And hello to all the rich girls who are tired of people assuming what stuff and experiences they have. Hello to the beautiful humans with visible and invisible abilities and disabilities, to those who never felt comfortable in
their own skin, to those who don't fit in, and—I promise this is the last welcome—to those who are scared lonely or homesick. We are all unicorns with our unique horns and we all have fears and bumps in the road. But we are all part of the Athena tribe. As part of the tribe, you all have a role, a purpose here.”

Between each category, the audience would erupt into cheers and applause, staking claim and pride for who they are and where they come from. As the speaker continued, “Regardless of who you are, you belong here. Never let anyone tell you that you are here just because you check a box. You are so much more than that. You rock! You are uniquely you.” Alongside multiple forms of identity and experience including race, class, sexuality, nationality, gender diversity, and transness, the speaker acknowledged the multitude of ways the community may embody or experience difference—and that everyone is different—while stating that it is these differences, rather than similarities, that are considered an important strength of the institutional community.

As the Athena admission pamphlet on Community and Diversity states on the first page, “Many colleges talk about the importance of DIVERSITY to a campus community, but Athena has gone beyond words, opening as many doors as possible to welcome a broad and diverse population of outstanding students” (capitalization in the original).

As a part of the campuses’ Strategic Plans, both colleges had a number of resources and events that sought to recruit, support, and celebrate the multitude of ways in which diverse students could experience, participate, and succeed on campus and after graduation. For example, both campuses hosted a number of unity spaces for students of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and non-traditional aged students to be in community; living learning affinity communities; and numerous student organizations that students could participate in either socially and/or politically. This also took form in terms of more structural advancements
across campus, including hiring diversity and inclusion staff members, training opportunities for staff and faculty regarding diversity and inclusion, and funding diversity projects on campus in terms of physical resources, research, and campus events. As one employee explained to me, “What we really need to make a systemic change is to have kind of ambassadors across the campus. Right? So you can't do it by just expanding a centralized staff. It really needed to be everybody's responsibility. And so everybody has to commit some percentage of this being part of a job description without it being extra labor.” Explaining that diversity and inclusion work had to be the responsibility and mission of everyone on campus, both colleges hosted multiple events on campus, bringing diverse speakers and performances for the community to learn from, and both had a dedicated “Day of Diversity” on campus, where all classes were cancelled and college offices were closed so as to engage every member of the campus in topics including race and culture, economic status, religious beliefs, disability, political opinions, and sexual orientation.

Attending these events throughout the year and sorting through institutional materials to learn about how trans* students in particular were included within discussions of the diverse institutional community, what stood out to me were the ways in which diversity arose in conversation in terms of intersections within womanhood in particular. As Ahmed (2012) might argue, commitments to diversity serve the purpose of bringing particular bodies, and not others, into view, orienting students towards ways of acting and being on campus. In environments that depend upon some notion of womanhood to exist, messages of diversity centered more around intersections within womanhood than across gendered categories, though the creation of these admission policies began to open the gates to such dialogues. Revisiting the discussion in the previous section, for example, “empowerment” was not only brought up through messages of
safety to/from toxic masculinity, but also in terms of the ways in which these colleges provide ample opportunities and resources for their students to succeed. There was, however, no one way to succeed. Rather, students were encouraged to forge their own paths, finding multiple ways to use their backgrounds, interests, and skills to contribute to the larger college environment, local community, and world as a whole. For example, Athena’s admission materials profiled the multiple identities, experiences, and outcomes students could experience on campus, including an Asian American flutist who is her residential hall president and aspires to earn a PhD, an international student from Paraguay double majoring in mathematics and early childhood education, a first-generation Latina who discovered a love for global travel through study abroad opportunities, and a Mellon Mays undergraduate fellow and tour guide whose blurb talks about the Athena’s weekend for prospective students of color and the fact that “Athena has much more diversity than I expected.” Interspersed between these features includes information about major offerings and descriptions of “your learning experience” such as athletics, housing and facilities, study abroad, racial diversity, sustainability, financial aid, and the local area of Telford. On the last page, the book reads in large font, “Imagine yourself at Athena. Individual… Global… Exceptional.” As the pamphlet demonstrates, there is not necessarily one way to embody or to be Athena. All of these students have individual paths, different intersecting identities, and varying experiences but they are all a part of—and belonged to—Athena. They are Athena. Therefore unity within the Athena community is brought about less so through notions of similarity per se, than through diversity.57

57 As Ahmed (2012) and others argue (see, for instance, Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015; Stewart 2017; Thomas 2018, 2020), diversity as a term seems ubiquitous, and yet at the same time serves very little purpose beyond an institutional buzzword. Because diversity has different meanings, efforts to institutionalize diversity become difficult or deserted altogether in favor of best practices (Thomas 2018). Diversity can be used as an adjective, describing something or someone as diverse, or it can be a verb, stating an action of diversity. Diversity is also used normatively, expressing values and commitments of an organization. Historically, diversity and inclusion
While seemingly contradictory, as these institutions claim to value diversity and
difference amongst students, they also claim to create unity through some intangible yet
distinguishable sense of “shared identity” within the college—the we in “We are Athena.” As
one orientation leader described, belonging to the college community was fostered via “shared
community and traditions” throughout the year, such as attending particular events on campus or
having school pride and/or wearing school memorabilia. For Minerva, that began the very first
night as students gathered to watch a film on the lawn, or at Athena when students received an
ivy plant from the campus greenhouse to (in theory) grow throughout their four years on campus,
all the way through graduation where students at both colleges would join the “network of
48,000 alumnae who are excited to welcome them into the community and how much they care
about them and the institution,” as the Athena president described in her address, celebrated via
an alumni parade and ceremony for graduating seniors. In this way, despite the fact that each
student came from a different background, had different experiences, identities, skills, and
interests, or even if they lived in different halls, had different majors, and graduated in different
years, students could feel a sense of connection to the college community.\footnote{In my own experience as a Smith alumni, one of the first things that is asked in interaction with current students or other alumni is what house they lived in on campus. This bond also, as Avery H. (she/her or neutral pronouns) suggests, extends beyond just one college, to include all gender-selective colleges.}

As I spoke about this sense of community with respondents, asking if there is a women’s
college community and what defines it, students explained that the notion of campus community
was a very gendered concept. For some, as Avery H. (she/her or neutral pronouns) stated, the
notion of community on campus is predicated on mere attendance:

\begin{itemize}
\item has replaced terms such as “equal opportunities” and “multiculturalism,” and there is even an emergent shift away from diversity towards equity and justice.
\end{itemize}
I think [the women’s college community is] like anyone that, even people that didn't
graduate, anyone that attended a women's college and still feel somewhat connected to it
and people that are currently attending obviously. If I talk to someone who went to
[another women’s college] and I'm like, "Oh, I went to Athena," I get an immediate
connection. That will bond our experiences.

Avery illustrates that this immeasurable bond is created just by attending the college. As another
orientation leader told the first-year students at Athena: "You belong here. You have your
acceptance letter, they chose you, you chose here. You belong." Describing this bond as a two-
way interaction, wherein the college chooses its community members and the students choose to
belong to the community, there is something that draws students to choose a gender-selective
women’s college in contemporary society, leading to that unique bond that Avery describes.

Timothy (he/him) further elaborated, this could perhaps be the fact that students share a unique
educational experience that goes against the higher norm of co-education:

There is a sense of like togetherness that kind of persists. Even if people have nothing
else in common. Like I feel like I, whenever I encounter someone who went to another
women's college, we have this kind of like, “Oh yeah, you know what that experience of
not having to be around men all the time is like.” And I think that does, I mean not
everyone, but I think it does kind of change a lot of people's perspective of having that
four-year break. There is this kind of like sense of shared community that seems really
invested in like perpetuating itself.

As Timothy relates, students may have nothing in common with one another—different
institution, residential hall, major, friends, activities, even identities—but what unifies these
diverse experiences is the fact that students attended the same type of college—a gender-
selective college. By sharing in the experience of being in a dedicated environment centered around womanhood, even if students themselves were not women or feminists, this creates a unified community that has been exposed to the feminist mission and education of the college.

And yet, in asking participants who belongs to the women’s college community, as I discuss further in the following chapter, many trans* students felt that their gender identity was not a welcomed form of diversity on campus because it was seen as antithetical to the mission and displacing womanhood as the unifying organizational logic of the college. Especially amongst alumnae, who felt deeply attached to the traditional notion of their alma mater as a college for (cis) women or females, resistance to including gender diversity within the community boundaries came from a small faction on campus (Nanney 2017). As Marty (she/her) explained:

I have very strong feelings about Minerva and other women's colleges trans* policies. I am strongly opposed to it. I see a very strong need for female centric, female centric colleges and female centric space. ... And I believe that the legal rights that are happening related to gender identity now are removing or, or hurting females and rolling back the um, what, rolling back gains that women have made in the last century. ... It is oppressive to say to females that it is not okay for you to say "this is who we mean by female" and that you can't have female-only space. I loved my time at Minerva. My time at Minerva was crucial to who I am as a person and as a woman and as a lesbian and I no longer consider Minerva a women's college. I think [the trans* admission policy] removes Minerva's focus on women and females and women's historical oppression.

As Marty described, there is a particular purpose for women’s colleges—to focus on women, females, and their historical oppression. This is true. As Marty and I discussed later on, she does
not believe in the existence of gender identity; Marty ascribes to the definition "‘woman = adult human female.’” Therefore trans* women are not seen as women nor are the same as females. As she argues, to tell females that it is not okay to define what is meant by female (by sex) and to not be able to have a space centered around that definition is oppressive. To her, the trans* admissions policy makes Minerva and other women’s colleges coeducational, and thus counter to the mission of their founding, displacing and harmful to the “rightful” woman/female who should be centered in these spaces. Again, I do not mean to argue that Marty is incorrect here—in fact, I agree that there is a particular mission to these colleges and that she means well in attempting to protect and value her alma mater. From a trans/feminist theoretical standpoint, we diverge in our understanding of what that mission is.

I also observed such rhetoric from resistant alumni policing who belongs to the college community at the conclusion of the academic year during the alumni reunion, this time regarding trans* masculine and men’s inclusion. Held in a large, stadium-style theater amongst a crowd of alumni returning for the weekend’s events, the event featured various campus administrators offering quick glimpses of campus events, resources, statistics regarding outcomes, rankings and campus racial/class diversity, forthcoming plans for campus development, and stock photos of campus to provide a “state of the campus.” In a way, we can think of these events as another form of institutionalized marketing but on the reverse end—not to establish a sense of community to encourage students to apply and enroll, but to establish a sense of pride and connection for alumni to continue donating to the college. At the end of the Minerva presentation, one alumna raised her hand and stated—more so than asked—the college president: “I loved my time at Minerva and I am proud to give money and all the great, progressive work going on campus to help women. But I think that women who ‘change’ shouldn’t be here.” At
this moment, I felt the tension in the room, with some fellow alumni—many graduating from the class years of 1969 (50 years), 1979 (40 years), and 1994 (25 years)—nodding in agreement while others mumbling in confusion and yet others upset by the question. It was a make-or-break instance where the college needed to clearly state its commitment to trans* students in response while also being a part of a productive conversation. One of the administrators offered to approach the mic and stated that while she supports dissent, she also wants to interrogate the substance of the statement: “Women’s colleges were founded because women were excluded from education and opportunities in the workforce. How they operate today is not necessarily the same as they were founded.” She continued talking about how the purpose of women’s colleges today is one regarding gender affirmation, addressing gender inequality, and intersectionality: “What we know about gender maps onto oppression, with #MeToo and Title IX. Students across the gender spectrum are a part of the very fabric of our institution. We want them here.” As I discussed this event with the employee later on, she explained to me, “You need to learn how to feel connected with one another… And yes, there are ways that some of us [can be] harmful because of [our privilege]. And that's what we need to work on. Right? And not work against each other. So I feel like... intersectionality has to be an intentional, orchestrated strategy to will itself against a system that is very, very entrenched in everything that we do.”

The employee’s response to the resistant alumna provided the space for a productive conversation around these sticky areas regarding the institutional mission as a feminist institution, identity as a college for women, and diversity within the community. By stating that diversity is at the very heart of the institutional purpose, including diversity within womanhood as well as across gender identity, she demonstrated that diversity work on campus must be intentional, intersectional, and a continued practice amongst all members of the community—
students, faculty and staff, and alumni. Drawing upon the institutionalized notion of gender empowerment that many alumnae are accustomed to and are in support of, she opened the gate for trans* inclusion. Because these colleges seek to challenge gender norms—what a woman is, what they can do, and what success looks like—and acknowledging that one student’s experience with sex/gender is inherently going to be different—in this space, the college embraces this difference, acknowledging that gender diversity, too, fits within this feminist mission, as what it means to be a woman—and what it means to be a women’s college—is not static.

Commitment to Feminism

So, then, are gender-selective women’s colleges feminist? Examining the missions of these colleges, articulated via admission materials, orientation events, and employee perspectives, I have argued that while these colleges have never outwardly called themselves feminist organizations, the ways in which these colleges have constructed an institutional identity is rooted within and draws upon feminist ideals of safety, empowerment, and diversity. And yet, by articulating these institutions as safe spaces for students to become empowered, Athena and Minerva grapple with the notion of whether this empowerment centers females, women, or people of diverse and historically marginalized genders. In other words, who belongs to the feminist community and who is safe to be empowered in their sex/gender?

Returning to the admission policies of the colleges once more, the text of each policy emphasizes the college’s commitment to women. As a result, Athena’s policy continues, this mission has shaped the policy to focus on the application and admission of trans* women, as they fit within the broader mission of centering womanhood. In other words, similar to other minoritized women who have historically been excluded from gender-selective women’s
colleges, including Black, low-income, and queer women who have been denied their femininity, the adoption of these policies opened the gates for trans* women’s inclusion within these organizations, acknowledging, at the base level, the intersectional experiences and inequalities of trans* women as both women and as transgender. Thus, it is in this view that these colleges could be seen as transfeminist, institutionalizing a mission to understand and challenge how gender is normalized, regulated, and produces discourses of livability by centering trans* communities as the focus of inquiry. As one employee stated,

There's plenty of work we have to do for women, right? And those who are not women, are not gender conforming, or trans* need that advocacy and that work with equity just as much as women do. And we have a role to play that is absolutely in line with our historic mission.

As the employee describes, drawing on empirical evidence stating the positive outcomes of women’s colleges, the articulation of empowerment and community is the ostensive function of the women’s college mission. Acknowledging that these colleges, since their founding, have sought to challenge prevailing gender norms and inequality, this extends to other students who experience gender inequality, as they too can benefit from this gender-centered environment. As they state, this is absolutely in line with our historic mission—a feminist mission of addressing gender inequality in the broadest of terms.

Thus, one of the central discussions amongst students during my year in the field is what these colleges should be called in order to reflect this (trans)feminist mission. The terminology used to describe a gender-selective women’s college and why we call it so, as students explained, has an important impact on trans* students’ sense of visibility and belonging on campus. Students, alumni and staff alike took up this dilemma, asking how the college can recognize its
gender diversity while also acknowledging the historical mission of the college as a college for women. As Blake (he/him), an Athena alumni, questioned:

I'm expecting that it would be hard to market themselves away from the women's college. The actual name of like gender diverse and like non-cis male college is such a long and cumbersome name. They're traditionally a women's college because it just starts introducing this idea of like, what does it mean to be diverse?... I think that while the label marketability would be women's college, I think it must be an acknowledgement of what that definition is. Like what is the true definition of this label of women's college? Well, it begins like people who are away from this binary and anyone who is not a cis man. It's almost like an asterisk next to women's college. This is a longer footnotes definition of what this means. So while you can market yourself as a women's college, I think that there should be women, but also we have a lot of like a gender diverse variety of people here... But I think just like putting — the label doesn't really apply anymore. But in an effort to be more like seeing, I suppose, isn't it… So we can all acknowledge that this is not women's college anymore… I think It's just like having that disclaimer like, oh yeah, this is what we mean by women's college, this is what we do. This is what we mean by diversity, things like that.

Describing an asterisk with women’s* college, like my use of the asterisk with trans*, Blake argued that the identity of being a women’s college calls upon some notion of womanhood, but that definition can be more fluid and inclusive. Proposed terminology floated around both campuses and amongst respondents, including single-sex, women’s college, historically women’s college, gender inclusive women’s college, and to a lesser extent gender minority,
For many, the terms single-sex and women’s college failed to encapsulate the complexity and diversity of sex/gender on campus, recognizing that not all people on campus (even despite the policy) are neither assigned female at birth or identify as women. Most students were drawn to the notion of a historically women’s college, akin to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), to denote the historic or traditional purpose of these colleges while recognizing that they no longer are exclusive to that population. And yet, that too was subject to criticism either because trans* students have always been on campus whether or not they were recognized institutionally or, as one employee described,

It's not easy to say historically a women's college. Right? It doesn't it doesn't trip off the tongue. I mean, we might be historic women's college, but that's not the same thing…. I don’t love that because we're still a women's college. And there's something about the women's college charter that precisely protects and this work of gender affirmation. So I actually, I am not keen on historically. I'm fine with historically sort of relegating traditional notions of gender to the history books. But I think that talking about historically women's college sort of makes it seem as if we're no longer a women's college and we believe that there's still a role for us to play for women as well as non-binary students or queer students or trans* students. And I think that I'm talking about gender serving, talking about gender diverse, gender inclusive.

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59 As I outlined in chapter one, I ultimately chose to use gender-selective women’s college throughout this writing as an intervention in this discourse to think through how these colleges may formally be inclusive but are still predicated on exclusion to exist.

60 There seems to be a general consensus on “historically” women’s college across these institutions, not just at these two institutions of study. See, for example, the Instagram account @historicallywomens.com where much of the discussion surrounding this terminology emerges.
The employee differentiates the mission of the college from the historic identity of the college, positing the idea that these two may in fact not be one and the same. On the one hand, they articulate that these colleges have historically, meaning over time, challenged traditional sex/gender norms, in part by their selective admission policies. And yet, this history is not one of the past. As Carter (he or they) described,

Athena is a historically women's college and that is a history of like, that's the feminist history that is also entrenched in like racism and lots of complicated things. But that's a history that has allowed us to get to this place and I think Athena is so afraid that changing its admission policy will change its history and will change what its history has meant. But I think acknowledging Athena as a historically women's college is just a way of saying like, there's a history here that is also entrenched in undoing gender as a limiter in people's education right now. In a perfect world, I would love Athena to be a feminist college, but I don't think we've gotten there yet. But I think that the history, we don't have to erase the history to also welcome new people as a community and not even new people. People who honestly have been here for a really long time. Like, welcoming trans* women into the community was a big fucking deal. It's really fucking important and necessary. And also like if Athena thought that there weren't trans* people here before, literally there's documentation of trans* masculine people at Athena back to the 1920s. Like get over yourself Athena. You've had dudes here for a long time.

The role of these colleges is still to challenge gender norms, and centering women in that is particularly important, and yet this too can extend to trans* masculine and non-binary students. These students have always, historically, been on these campuses, affirming and working towards this mission. This mission works to benefit all students on campus. Thus, a truly
feminist college, as Carter imagines, acknowledges their exclusionary history and is continually reflective on those realities (past and current) to work towards inclusive and intersectional practices on campus.

And yet, as the students and alumni suggested, there is a mismatch in what the colleges formally commit to as feminist colleges and the way these commitments are (or are not) lived *in practice*. I asked each of my respondents to define *feminism* along a series of other terms such as diversity, inclusion, and community. I then followed up asking that, given their own definitions of these terms, are gender-selective women’s colleges—and their school in particular—feminist? I received a range of answers from the affirmative such as Samira (she/her):

Yes, I think Minerva is leaning towards that. And it was [sic] always been kind of like campus where equality is, is taught and it is demonstrated… that you are just as capable as the next person to the world…. Just because you are or you identify or you look female does not necessarily mean that you cannot, you know, be in that field that’s male dominated.

Maddie (they/them):

Yeah, I guess so. But it's like a weird, like, I feel like there's two sort of ways. Like, one of the ways is like, the sort of like 1970s, like Gloria Steinem Athena kind of way. Where it's like very like women, like women versus men kind of feminism like that. That sort of thing. Whereas the other way to look at it, like, I think it's feminist and like a more inclusive sense of the term where like, it's good for people and promotes like, equity and stuff like that. Like, instead of like a very, like binary women versus men takeaway.

and Hattie (they/them):
I would say that, for the most part, Athena is a pretty feminist community because of the fact that it's a women's college. I think people who already identify as feminists and agree with feminist values are more likely to come here or just send their kids here.

As well as answers that were more ambivalent to outright negative, such as Andy (they/them):

No. I think it's, I think Athena is like the feminist kind of a place where it's like women and men are having equal access and equal spaces and things like that.

Spencer (he or they):

R: Man, it definitely has that reputation and definitely historically it has been in many ways. I know it's a white feminist college… It's all about just making sure there are equal numbers of men and women... And definitely some of them are like, okay, this person is the first female head of this corporate place that pays everyone minimum wage and they always find it okay.

I: So do you see it as a trans* inclusive feminism?

R: Absolutely not trans* inclusive feminism.

and James (they/them):

Feminism is a great thing, Like an important thing. I don't want to take away from that word or like what the word actually means. But lately... Every time I hear the word feminism I think of white women and pussy hats. It's like the worst thing ever. I mean, I think that there are varying degrees of feminism and all have their own types of violences. So I think anyone can be like feminist to varying degrees. Feminism is supposed to uplift all folks but a lot of the time it does that at the expense of people of color, like communities who are under-resourced… But Minerva loves to say that they're feminists. I think if you're a white person or like a white woman and you go here, like
you're going to think it’s really feminist. I don't think it's feminist and that it uplifts everyone. But I think that in terms of the way that it's, the word feminism is being used now, we would be considered very feminist. Do you know what I mean?

As the wide range of responses suggest, there is no consensus whether or not these colleges actually are feminist, or even what feminism means. Some respondents, such as Samira, argue that because these colleges are committed to challenging essentialist and sexist notions rooted the marginalization of women, females, and feminine people, this makes them feminist. Others, such as Hattie focus on the individuals within the institution, discussing that it is those who make up the institutional community that determine if the college is feminist. On the reverse, others such as Spencer and Andy both discuss how the focus on equality can be feminist, but is limited to only white feminism, meaning that the feminist articulations on campus focus on and center white (cis) women, and they would wish this to be a more intersecting, more trans*-inclusive feminism. As Hattie questioned later on in their interview,

There are also parts of Athena [at] the institutional level that are still very like — the fact that it's a women's college, it's very gendered… In a way, once you’re gendering everything and making everything swing so far towards your opinion in what being a woman is and your opinion of like a women's colleges is, that excessive gendering just becomes kind of sexist at a certain point. It’s like shooting for and idealizing one view of the Athena student or Athena graduate and that person is a cis woman in the collective opinions and mind of Athena as an institution.

Thus, these colleges may ostensively be feminist organizations, committed to empowerment, leadership, diversity, and safety, but the notion of feminism is defined by sex/gender, thus limiting its reach at best. As Hattie describes, just because these colleges are centered on
womanhood does not inherently mean that they are dedicated to eradicating all gender inequality; the “excessive gendering” and hyperfocus on womanhood can in fact reify the feminist mission and exacerbate inequality through an intersectional lens, idealizing and institutionalizing one view of womanhood as cis womanhood.

*Open Gates, Into What?*

As I’ve argued in this chapter, focusing on the ostensive functions of the trans* inclusive gender-selective women’s college, institutional commitments to feminism are ingrained with tensions surrounding the meaning of “woman” within women's college. From their idiosyncratic beginnings to their unified missions as gender-selective colleges, Athena and Minerva have remained steadfast in their commitment to providing an environment for women to be safe from toxic masculinity and be safe and empowered to challenge women’s inequality. As these colleges adapted their admission policies, opening the gates to trans* inclusion, the institutional mission formally extended to addressing gender inequality more broadly. In many ways, this is the ideal—what I wish and hope for these colleges—extending their purpose and opening the gates to include trans* students *as guided by* their feminist mission. And yet, as I have begun to discuss, and turn to in the next chapter, in many ways, this trans* inclusive feminism is not fully realized on campus in practice, limited by the notions of womanhood and sex/gender that the existence of these colleges hinge upon. In the words of Ahmed (2012), when trans* as diversity emerges, cisgender womanhood recedes into the background, passed over as routine or ordinary features of the institution.

I now shift focus to the performative aspect of these colleges, how these colleges go from trans* admitting to trans* serving (Garcia 2019), in light of this formal commitment and mission, in practice. Centering trans* students’ experiences with community and belonging on campus,
particularly after the adoption of these formal inclusion policies, I argue that most students articulated overall positive or neutral experiences on campus because of (or in spite of) their gender identity, articulating it as “not a major factor” within campus culture. And yet, I also highlight the limits of this inclusion, wherein trans* women are non-existent on campus and how inequality and exclusion is reproduced particularly for trans* men, low-income, and trans* students of color, leading to less-than-positive experiences for the most marginalized of students.
CHAPTER 5: BROKEN PROMISES

“Students come here because of the policy. The policy opened the gates—we made a promise that we want them, that we will support them, that they belong. But there have been a lot of broken promises here. There's real trauma. People have been hurt by the system.” (Qtd. from conversation with employee)

As I set upon doing this work, I knew that I wanted to do more than examine just what these policies say. If I were to conduct a policy analysis or evaluation, I would have, in effect, measured the efficacy of whether or not trans* students can and are applying to women’s colleges. I would have had to take the descriptions of the feminist mission of the college at face value—that these colleges are, indeed, committed to empowering a diverse community. While yes, this is an important question—one that I do address—what was more interesting, more important, was not what these policies say but what they do. As the employee quoted above described, and as student after student detailed to me during my year on campus, despite a formal commitment to trans* inclusion, trans* students’ experiences on campus did not live up to the promises made to them. As Luca (he or they) related,

Minerva likes to preach diversity. It likes to flaunt its policy in people's faces. Like, “Yes, we have the most inclusive trans* admission policy. We admit everybody,” Once you get in here, it's like every man for himself. Unless you go seek it, unless you build it yourself, you have no backbone given to you as a trans* student… Once you are in, you have to fight to stay here.

Going beyond the formal commitments to trans* inclusion, in this chapter I examine the ways in which inclusion is (or is not) performed in practice. Recalling Ahmed’s (2012) claim that making a commitment is to pledge to do something, how do women’s colleges go from trans*
admitting to trans* serving? What is done to include trans* students? Is inclusion just admittance, or is it something more?

In the following sections entitled the good, the bad, and the ugly, I discuss both the positive as well as the negative—and sometimes violent—experiences that my respondents articulated, particularly after the adoption of these policies. Surely, the admission policies opened the gates for (some) trans* students to apply to, enroll in, and graduate from gender-selective women’s colleges. Additionally, other performative aspects on campus such as the creation of resources and alteration of campus norms seek to contribute to the ostensive function of the policies. But, by focusing on the ways in which the discourses within these policies are lived on campus, as the quote above suggests, in many ways, we also come to recognize that these admission policies did not live up to their full promise of inclusion, leading to broken promises. I contend that the impact of these admission policies is not limited to the application process, but rather the experiences of matriculated students are shaped by the gendered norms and discourses structured within the policies themselves. Because the feminist missions of these colleges continue to reaffirm an ideal of white, cisgender womanhood on campus through the relational juxtaposition of masculinity/ men as a threat to the institutional community, the extent to which these inclusion policies were able to make fundamental structural changes in how gendered power, resources, and opportunities are distributed was limited at best. As such, such formal declarations can have paradoxical effects, including minimal, or perhaps nonexistent, presence and visibility of trans* women, while making trans* masculine students hypervisible and at higher risk for isolation and violence on campus. As I argue, if statements of commitment do not do what they say, then to understand their impacts, we must follow them around to see what they realize, render, or make real.
The Good

So first of all, what is good? When asked, knowing what they know now, whether or not respondents would go to the same college over again, the majority explained that they personally had positive experiences on campus and would return if given the chance. Students such as Jamie (all pronouns) described their time in college:

I ended up going to Minerva [compared to a co-ed school]. It's a very different experience, but it has lived up to my expectations in many ways. It has gone past my expectations in many ways. It has been an overall positive experience.

Such overall positive experiences extended to students’ understanding of trans* inclusion, discussing the application and enrollment of trans* students matter-of-factly. It was almost as if it was common sense that the colleges were trans* inclusive at the policy level, making the protests and policy discussions nearly five years ago seem a distant memory. In many ways, many students articulated that they did feel included on campus, or at least recognized the college’s attempts towards inclusion at the institutional level. Students were openly applying to these colleges while the institutions had done a significant amount of work to provide students support on campus. As I discuss below, focusing first on the impact of the admission policies followed by resources and community culture on campus, the positive outcome of these formal commitments to inclusion is that, at the very least, there is basic infrastructure for support upon which improvements can build.

Admission

Trans* students are applying to, enrolling in, and graduating from gender-selective colleges. While this fact is not new, as trans* students have always attended gender-selective colleges, it is a remarkable and momentous sight, for me at least, to be able to see trans* students
apply to gender-selective colleges *as trans*. During my tour of Minerva, for example, one of the prospective students within my group felt comfortable enough to wear a beautifully painted jean jacket that was in the likeness of Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, but in the colors of the trans* flag—pink, white, and blue—a shirt that said “The Future is Non-Binary,” and buttons decorating the lapel stating “Ask me my pronouns” and “I’ll go with you.” As I wrote in my fieldnotes that day, “God, I wish I could talk to them, but they are a minor.” Jake (he/him), Alfa Nich (he/him), and other alumni in their interviews recalled a time in which, during their enrollment, there was fear that as out trans* people, they would be asked to leave the institution. So for many alumni, especially those who were on campus during the admission policies debates between 2013-2016, the momentous cultural shift from fear to trans* recognition and inclusion on campus was cause for celebration. For example, Asher B. (she or they), a Minerva alumni who was a student when the school’s policy was announced, discussed the impacts of the policy were far reaching:

There was so much conversation around how many trans* women and non-binary people now went there because of how safe that policy sounded to them. It was absolutely incredible to see so many people coming to the college just because of that policy. For many, the adoption of the policy served as a promise, communicating an official institutional stance that trans* students were not only welcome but also belonged on campus, as their inclusion contributed to the mission of the college—these colleges *wanted* them here and they belonged, as the school taglines stated “One Minerva” and “We are Athena.”

Take Alder’s (ze/zir) application story, quoted at length, for example:

Funnily enough I heard about Minerva the first time I was out in high school. I came out to my family as trans* when I was 14, came out to myself and some friends when I was maybe 12 and was out in my high school, my senior year, when I was 17. I knew that I
wanted to go to a trans* friendly college. So, my cursory Google search, like top 10 
trans* friendly colleges in the US actually turned up Minerva because it had just started 
the process of formalizing...a policy to admit trans* students. And that had made 
headlines. They're like, oh Minerva. I was like, okay, so maybe. I'm an environmental 
studies major...and Minerva has a restoration ecology project, and so, I started hearing 
about Minerva through that as well. I got in, they gave me a generous aid package, which 
I needed. I'm a work study student. Um, I visited campus the day, two days after, um, the 
student referendum on that admission policy and was informally hosted by a trans* 
student and some of their friends, who I'm still in touch with, actually, they were just 
freshmen, first years, um, when I was a prospie, so now they’re seniors. I’m a junior. I 
decided to come to Minerva both because of their restoration ecology program and aid. 
And I ultimately decided that if I was going into anything sciencey, I really didn't want to 
be out competing with cis men in the classroom for internships, for a professor's time and 
attention, and I liked the small classroom environment. I was raised semi-collectively by 
approximately 15 lesbians. And it was really important to me to continue both to center 
women in my work and to go to a college that I knew had queer people and a queer 
presence. Minerva is either known or, um, looked down upon for that depending on 
which alum you speak to. But I knew that that was a part of Minerva’s culture. So, I 
ended up deciding to come here.

Discussed alongside other institutional factors such as major, classroom environment, and 
financial aid, Alder claims that Minerva checked all of the boxes that ze was searching for in a 
college. Growing up in a queer and woman-centered community, Alder sought out a similar 
“trans* friendly” college environment that brought Minerva to zir attention, while academics—
particularly STEM— and financial aid are ultimately what sealed the deal. Alder applied to Minerva and four co-educational colleges, and in zir application discussed transitioning because ze knew that if a college was going to be hostile to zir identity, then that was not the right place to attend: “[I wrote about] how that identity was shaping my academic work, my sense of self, what I wanted out of college because I figured if that was going to be a basis upon which I would get rejected, I would much rather get rejected than end up somewhere that wasn't, at least on the surface, um, committed to inclusion and equity work.” After receiving a mix of application rejections and acceptances, Alder chose to attend Minerva because, while ze was skeptical that Minerva would be a “trans* haven,” ze recognized the importance of there being an institutional commitment to trans* students and thought being at a gender-selective college would, at least, be better than a co-educational environment. Because ze identified with womanhood and feminist ideologies, ze felt not only comfortable at Minerva due to the perceived culture of trans* inclusion, but also believed that zir presence further upheld and affirmed the mission of the college.

Similar to Alder’s application experience, many students noted that the existence of the trans* admission policy served an important factor in their decision process, particularly regarding which gender-selective college to apply to. Luca (he or they), for example, shared with me their college search process. Luca was initially interested in Athena after participating in a summer program on campus, and begrudgingly toured other gender-selective colleges including Minerva: “[My moms] literally dragged me on a tour of Minerva and the first time we came it was fall break, there was no one here and it was wet and rainy and dead and gross. And I was like, I hate this place. It's terrible. Take me back to Athena.” Forced to take a second look at
Minerva, Luca returned for a visit in the spring, where their campus tour guide emphasized the admission policy for trans* applicants:

I kind of explained my transness to them. They were like, “Yeah, regardless like, we have, there are tons of people here. We have the most inclusive policy. There is a large trans* community.” And that made me feel a little more comfortable and they were just so friendly and so genuinely nice and excited that I was interested. I think that really drew me in... I applied [early decision] and it was the only school I applied to and I got in and then here I am.

Comparing his initial experiences at both Athena and Minerva, Luca recounted that he just “felt at home” at Minerva, with students welcoming him and genuinely excited to have him regardless of his identity. While students at Athena were not necessarily negative towards him, as he explained, he felt less comfortable, welcomed, and able to be true to himself because of Athena’s policy:

I was aware and my mom was aware of Athena's policy at the time, which I think is the same as now. I was just very aware that not a lot of trans* masc people, or I hadn't seen a lot of trans* masc people at Athena and the ones that I did hear about were not necessarily the best stories. On my application and on the tour, I just tried to keep that to myself only because I didn't know how people would react to that. You know versus Minerva, my first tour here. The first like five people I saw were all trans* masculine people and I was like, “What? Wait, who goes to this school? I'm confused.” And then of course I had to explain the policy because my mom was also very confused, but like there was just like an instant, like kind of difference of like the communities in terms of like my identity I would say. I think that really determined, also added to like where I thought
I would grow best. Like knowing that I wanted to transition and like feeling safe enough to do that.

Particularly citing the fact that Athena’s policy does not admit trans* masculine or trans* men students, as trans* students such as Luca considered applying to these colleges, they were more often drawn to the open promises Minerva’s policy provided. As I discuss in the next section, this decision was also rooted in continuing barriers to the admission process, particularly for trans* masculine students at Athena as well as trans* women at both schools, rendering the admission policy limited at best.

The majority of trans* students, however, neither disclosed their identity in their application nor come into their identity until after they hit submit. Even in instances where the policy may not have been directly applicable to students, many articulated that the presence and content of the policy was a factor in their decision process to apply to a gender-selective college because it communicated to students a sense of safety, a commitment to diversity and inclusion, and a perception of the college as a queer environment including the presence of trans* people on campus. Andy (they/them) for example, recounted that while they knew that they were both gay and trans* during high school, they had yet to come out to friends or family when they applied to college. When looking at schools, Andy was drawn to gender-selective colleges “subconsciously” because they wanted to get away from a hyper-masculine college environment that they saw their older brother involved in. Applying to three gender-selective colleges, including Athena and Minerva, Andy ultimately decided to attend Athena in part because of the knowledge that they could be supported on campus should they decide to come out:

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61 According to the 2015 *U.S. Transgender Survey*, nearly half (43%) of respondents reported that they began transitioning between the ages of 18-24, traditional college-aged years. Especially given significant familial, legal and medical barriers to accessing gender-affirming transition-related care, it is not until legal adulthood that people are able to come out and transition (James et al. 2016).
I can just check off the box and like continue on because I knew when I came and visited Athena, I could see if that there were trans* students, like it wasn't like beyond impossible. So I was like, okay, yeah, I can go here and it's going to be fine once I get here. It's just like getting in… I wasn't out at all at that point. So it was like, no one knew anyway. So it was like I could just continue on.

This was particularly demonstrated for Andy when they toured campus while students were protesting the policy:

It was like good to, as a prospective student, it was good to see like, okay, they're like doing something. Like okay, there's some dialogue happening here. This could be interesting because I wasn't like considering that fully as a student, but it makes you just kind of think about it for a second. So that was cool.

Now serving as a tour guide themselves, Andy strives to take on a similar role, offering up information regarding the admission policy and resources to all prospective students so that, even if they aren’t out, they know that they too can belong on campus: “When I give tours I try to make it clear to students in case they are thinking about it … and try to make sure that prospective students are aware of it because I think that's important.”

*Life on Campus*

Once students arrive on campus, regardless of whether they apply *out* as trans* or come into their identity after enrollment, the next step is how they are supported on campus. As one employee explained to me, “Legally, we can discriminate at the time of admission, but we support all students once they are here.” As I argue in the previous section, the presence and content of the admission policy does more than just determine the eligibility of students. Rather,
the policy also communicates a promise to students regarding the type of environment that they
would be admitted to.

Once the policies were announced on both campuses, numerous offices and departments
on campus underwent significant restructuring to address support systems for trans* students.
Describing this restructuring, one employee recalled, “It was really interesting to see how it all
changed. Because when the college president made that announcement, no one was prepared for
that, no one knew that was coming, so it was kind of playing a catch-up game. The office had to
figure out how they were going to talk about that [the admission policy and the purpose of
women’s colleges].” In addition to the mandatory (and digital) diversity and inclusion training
that all new employees participated in during the hiring process, which focused on legal matters
and basics regarding creating a safe work environment, additional optional professional
development workshops on specific topics including Trans* 101 were offered throughout the
year by Human Resources. I had the opportunity to attend one of these training workshops
offered by an employee at Athena, which was held over a two-day period during the lunch hour
in a large room enclosed by glass windows in the community center. Attended primarily by
administrative and support staff members such as members of the development, alumni relations,
dining and housekeeping, campus museum and gardens, admission, and archives offices, the
workshop was split into two major areas of focus. Day one went over the “basics” regarding sex
and gender including terminology, gender stereotypes, and pronouns. Day two focused on
sex/gender on campus specifically discussing the admission policy and ways in which staff can
support students. Staff were asked to pose dilemmas that they have either faced in their role or
questions they had about interacting with students on campus. As one employee attending the
workshop stated, “We know that [trans* students] are here, but we’re left out of the conversation.
We don’t know how to work with them.” Throughout the two hours together, we discussed various scenarios and talked through inclusive practices to support students, such as pronouns on name badges and in email signatures, as well as the limits of some administrative structures on campus that out trans* students to employees. “What it comes down to is our systems,” the workshop leader described, “Athena will have to revisit our policies and practices on a practical level.”

As the employee described, both campuses had a number of supporting resources for trans* students, though as I discuss in the next section, they often were limited in their impact. Both campuses generally had similar resources available (see Table 3), suggesting that many of these resources are a “best practice” at the institutional level regarding trans* inclusion, proliferating some options for trans* students in order to frame the institution as the response to, rather than the source of, trans* students’ needs. Some resources on campus were trans* specific, created for the purpose of supporting trans* students specifically, such as the admission policy, trans* support groups, and gender-affirming health care and counseling, while the other resources were made available to the broader campus population regardless of sex/gender, but also were adapted to be trans* inclusive such as gender inclusive restrooms, locker rooms, and housing. As summarized in Table 3, both campuses additionally included gender identity and presentation language in their non-discrimination clauses, allowed for name changes on official registrars, had LGBTQ+ resource centers where students could attend events, and transgender trainings and information sessions for all students.

The LGBTQ+ center at Minerva, for example, was a small, single floor ranch-style house located on a side street on the edge of campus. As one walked in the building, you were welcomed to an open living room with a giant fireplace that framed the wall, and a chalkboard
on the mantle decorated, in giant font in alternating colors of the rainbow, with the message, “This is a space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, aro/ace, transgender, gender nonconforming, and queer folx to heal, organize, and celebrate their identities, communities, and ancestors!” Open to students during “staffed hours,” the center was a space where students, as the chalkboard suggested, could come and relax, hang out with friends, organize, and celebrate. In the back of the house was a room that located a free lending library of LGBTQ+ literature donated by students and alumni, purchased by a small annual fund, and old texts the main institutional library was getting rid of; a study room; and a donation closet with gender-affirming clothing. The main room of the house adjoined a full kitchen stocked with shelf-stable food that was considered “communal” to all visitors and a bright purple living room that was available space for organization meetings and community events. Decorating the walls were large print outs of archival documents regarding LGBTQ+ life on campus and “twinkle lights” to soften the harsh industrial lighting. Sometimes, it would just be me and the student coordinator, as we would sit on the couch and drink tea, chat about our weeks and astrology charts as we doodled in coloring books, while other weeks the house would be abuzz with students, employees, and even local alumni for events such as the center’s “birthday party” and “journal and relax” study space during finals.

In previous years, as one employee described, both Athena’s and Minerva’s LGBTQ+ centers were “half abandoned” in part due to institutional neglect, putting little financial resources in upkeep of the space, as well as because it was speculated that “sexual identity is not a salient identity once they get on campus.” Articulating that because these colleges, themselves, are queer spaces both in terms of population size and commitments to feminist and queer missions on campus, one of the difficulties of maintaining these spaces was justifying their
existence: students were not drawn to a dedicated space on campus for that aspect of their identity. Rather, the entire campus felt like a resource for queer and trans* students, safe and supportive. And yet, throughout my time on campus, I came to find that while these centers were not the central hub of the mainstream LGBTQ+ culture on campus, they were one of the central spaces for students marginalized within the LGBTQ+ community—low income, Black, and trans* masculine students. That is, while it could be seen as a “win” in terms of not needing a dedicated space for queer students because the queer community is seen as inclusive, treating this space as unnecessary comes at the cost of supporting those who do not fit within normative expectations of queerness on campus.

Talking with an employee about the center, they explained to me that the main goal of the house was to be a home, a space where

Humans and people were meeting people and random alumni show up, and sort of a space that you actually want to go to… A space that people want to go to that they feel like they can relax in. And see that sort of create something that meets needs rather than just exist[s]… This isn't just a place to, like, hide. It's also a place to celebrate. This is, you know, this isn't just a deficit place. This isn't something you have to get through. This is somewhere that you can celebrate and be in community with.

As the employee describes, these centers still serve an important role on campus, providing space for students to feel like they can celebrate their whole selves and be in community with others like them. For example, at Minerva, the LGBTQ+ center was primarily used for weekly meetings by the only two registered queer organizations on campus—the asexual/aromatic organization and the queer students of color organization. At Athena, on the other hand, while there were no registered queer student organizations during the time of my fieldwork, the space was still used
by more “informal” groups, such as serving as central hub for the creation of student demands (which I discuss later), embracing their informal status and the neglect of the space to their advantage, working in many ways out of sight and out of mind of the institution. As Nell (they/them), who requested that we conduct their interview in Athena’s LGBTQ+ resource center, explained:

One of the reasons that I love this room so much is because it just feels really historical, in terms of all the protest meetings that happened here. And if you just go through the shelves, there's so much history of protest. I think they are from a big push a few years ago with like, accepting undocumented students as domestic students. I think like those posters back behind you are also signs. Some of them are about trans* women. And there's like, in that file box, there's like all these papers that they were giving out at the trans* women protests that were like, do’s and don'ts of interacting with administration, of interacting with police, and how to show up at a protest and who to talk to if you needed something. And just so much really powerful memory in this room that I can really feel. That framed thing on the bookshelf over there under is the trans* organization’s Best Outstanding Org award from a few years ago. And whenever I'm in here I just feel how much organizing history has happened here as well as how much trans* history has happened here and how many trans* people have been in this room before me and with me and after me. It feels really special in a way that I don't feel in a lot of other places on campus. Just such a funny little place of feeling how much community, how much trans* community there is here.

Nell used the center as their own personal study and community area, often falling asleep on the couches overnight, because of just how safe they felt in the space. Exploring the centers
shelves—overflowing with papers and materials forgotten, left, and ignored by the institution but waiting to be found amongst current students—Nell felt more in community with trans* history in the center than on campus by discovering decades of documented struggle, violence, community, and protest that made Nell’s presence on campus possible today. In a campus environment where trans* and queer inclusion was supposedly everywhere, such that dedicated affinity spaces were thought to not be needed, this also created the feeling that trans* inclusion was nowhere on campus, siloing and isolating trans* students from one another. As such, the availability of trans* space and resources served an important purpose for creating trans* inclusion.

Speaking to students regarding trans* space and resources on campus, many similarly affirmed how being at these colleges was better for trans* students than would be elsewhere. For example, as a result of the admission policy, the health center began covering transition related medical care in student insurance policies and offering services on campus, recognizing that if trans* students were being admitted on campus, they would need to have gender affirming care on campus as well. For some students such as Josh (he/him), the adoption of such as resource was vitally important because as an international student coming from a low-income family, it was only through Athena’s insurance policy that he was able to access and afford top surgery, which, as he excitedly told me, would only cost him a $50 co-pay. Another participant, Addy E. (they/them), attended the weekly trans* support group hosted by counseling services, expressing: “Definitely for me like being, having people to like talk to about gender stuff, we like get it and like hearing other trans* friends’ experiences, it's like an amazing thing and I love it every time.” As Sam D. (they/them) described,
In terms of gender and sexuality, I think their efforts seem good. And like it has seemed to me from just like seeing what flyers are up and like about resources, that they've been making a lot of good efforts in other ways… I don't think there would be anywhere being trans* would be like better or more supportive.

While neither admission policy specifically stated what resources would be needed once students came to campus, the discourse of inclusion within the policy thus supported the need for developing resources and practices that would be used by students admitted through the policy. While each respondent acknowledged that there are mixed emotions amongst their fellow students regarding these efforts, particularly accessing such resources and intersecting barriers on campus, they recognized that there at least were resources on campus, showing some sort of commitment to supporting students on campus.

Beyond formal resources, one of the most common discussions regarding supporting trans* students on campus was the hyperfocus on nouns and pronouns. Both colleges, at the institutional level, remained committed to referring to the student population as women and with she/her pronouns in large addresses to the student community or in written publications and advertising. But at the student level, it was almost faux pas not to introduce oneself with your name and pronouns. As Sam D. (they/them) described,

In the Health Center their posters on like every wall, they are like, "If your pronouns have changed, please let us know." I would say it's pretty present [on campus], like social — just is something that's understood, like felt and seen. In most classes when they go around and do introductions, the professor will say pronouns, even if it's like a STEM class, which is pretty good.
In many circumstances on campus, I found myself doing the “pronoun round,” whether led by a facilitator or in mere introductions to a new group of people. Introducing pronouns became secondhand nature, “Hi, my name is Maggie. I use they/them pronouns.”

While there are many noted issues with the (non)performativity of introducing pronouns (see, for example, Manion 2018; Saguy and Williams 2019; Saguy et al. 2019; Spade 2018); as trans* students discussed, this was an important cultural practice campus because it allowed a space for them to both be seen as trans* and to safely explore new gendered possibilities on campus with low stakes. Take Chris S. (they/them) and Emily H. (they/them), for example. Emily H., who described their current gender “trans*, genderqueer, non-binary somewhere in there,” explained,

Coming to Athena, like being around more people who use they/them pronouns and identify as trans*, kind of like made me start thinking about it more. And I came in when I was the first year, I would be like, in pronoun circles, “I'd like any pronouns!” And you know, kind of, quietly hinting.

Similarly, Chris S., who was actively figuring out their gender at the time of our interview and had only recently come out as “not female,” explained, “I came to Athena and the concept of pronouns was introduced to me. I hadn't really heard of it or thought of it before and I was kind of thinking about it, like questioning my pronouns at the end of last year and then the beginning of this year, fall semester. I was like, she/her feels wrong, let me try they/them.” In both cases, *due to the opportunity* to learn about pronouns and gender on campus with low stakes, this provided an environment where they could both realize they did not fit in with the institutional identity of womanhood and yet feel safe enough to explore other alternatives.
For others, learning about pronouns was less so about exploring their own gender as it was to learn how to support others’ genders. Like in the employee training workshop that I attended, much of trainings and workshops on campus were directed towards cisgender allies and focused on learning to support and include trans* students. As one employee described to me, such programs are very intentional in their design, taking into consideration both who could best benefit from these resources as well as who is being centered in these discussions: “I think we're always trying to think about what our students showing up with and the diverse ways that that is, I think, in particular with orientation…So we're really looking at, while recognizing some students may be like ‘I already know all this, I'm so well versed,’ it’s kind of really starting baseline with all new students around like what are the things that you need to know about operating with and living at a gender inclusive women's college.” Ria (she/her), a first-year international student at Minerva, reflected similar sentiments, detailing that the orientation session was important to get a base-level understanding of the community-specific norms around gender diversity that she did not necessarily practice at home:

It was just a learning curve for a lot of people because they were like, “We're not used, used to saying like in our sentence structure”, and I think like, people are also understanding in the sense that you're not like crucified if you like, make a mistake, like your intention is not to, like hurt anyone. It was like a slip of tongue and then you immediately fix it. And then everyone's like, yeah, that's, that's cool. Like, you messed up. That's okay. Yeah, so if you like the fact that there are spaces for discussion, but also that things are just accepted without having to be made into big news. Yeah. It's like something that's supremely different from like back home, especially.
As Ria and other cisgender respondents explained, these sessions were vital to their learning, as they did not necessarily want to burden trans* students with the responsibility of educating them on how to respect their identity. Lola (she/her), a first-generation Latina from Minerva explained, “Like sometimes I would mess up the they/thems because that's, just the plural use of a singular pronoun just gets me. I've never had to do exercises where or just say like, ‘Hi, my name is Lola and I use she/her pronouns.’ So it's very different. And I actually really like that. Because that like you're trying to be more welcoming of people who are not traditionally cis. I just think that Minerva has really taught me a lot.” By offering up basic information regarding gender diversity, Lola and others could then put these forms of respect into practice during their daily lives.

Recognizing that, as the employee quoted above highlights, students come into college with a diversity of knowledges, opinions, experiences, and identities, trans* inclusion on campus requires not only physical access to campus but also resources and a supportive campus environment. Thus, it is important to create at least a baseline education—Trans* 101 if you will—with all community members about operating with and living at a gender-selective women's college. And yet, as I now turn to in the next section, as this baseline is established, trans* inclusive efforts stop. As Jenny (she or they) relented, “People keep talking about Trans* 101 and that's important. But I'm like when can we get to Trans* 201?” Although the campus environments have taken important first steps to recognizing trans* students’ presence on campus, providing access to baseline resources in order to survive, inclusion falls short by not creating environments wherein many trans* students can thrive.

**The Bad**

Despite the shifting tides in campus life, students had much more to say about institutional shortcomings rather than their positives. As Andy (they/them) stated,
Administration is failing completely because they're just not either A) not listening to the students and, B) they're not even providing any kind of resources. They say that they're providing [resources] because you can say that you provide something without fully providing it just by having someone like be there, you know?... They're just not doing actual movement behind it. The policy is there, but it's like, are they actually doing anything important?

Demonstrating the juxtaposition between the ostensive and performative aspects of the organizational structure, Andy highlights the ways in which formal policies and resources may exist, but their efficacy and impact depend upon the “movement behind them.” As Haraway (2003:6) argues, reality is continuously in the process of being made: “reality is an active verb” wherein “beings do not preexist their relations.” As I observed during my year on campus, the reality that was made and lived on campus diverged from the formal commitments to inclusion that were set up in the admission policies. While these policies and emergent discourses were enacted, intended for students’ wellbeing, they simultaneously perpetuated numerous barriers for trans* students to access the full promise of these policies and resources. And yet, these barriers impacted different groups of students differently, creating an intersectional hierarchy on campus. Certain students enjoyed social and cultural benefits on campus because they were determined to embody “the right way to be trans*”—who also happened to more often than not be those students who expressed the positives of the college—while others were subject to institutional and community violence because they did not fit within the institutional identity, overrepresented here in the “bad” and “ugly” of campus life. Consequently, I argue, while these institutional commitments to inclusion opened the gates for some, they also broke that promise for others, rendering them outside of the college’s sense of community altogether.
Admission Barriers

As described in the literature review, previously I have examined the intersecting barriers to admission as set up in the language of these admission policies (Nanney 2019; Nanney and Brunsma 2017). By codifying sex/gender into terms that are meant to exclude and include, policies restricts the infinite number of lived possibilities regarding gender identity, presentation, and embodiment that potential applicants can experience. For example, the use of the Common Application requires a legal definition of sex with only binary options. Recognizing that admission policies more-often-than-not only require self-identification to be admitted, the systematic process by which the Common Application is used to screen and filter potential applicants stands in stark contrast to the intent of the policy. Additionally, with compounding administrative barriers such as access to legal sex-marker changes, which often depend on medical intervention, which in many cases are funded out-of-pocket and are illegal in some states, the performative practice of the trans* inclusion policy actually becomes nonperformative, not bringing about the change that the policy claims—inclusion (Ahmed 2012; Fogg Davis 2017; Nanney 2019). Rather than reiterate those points here, however, I focus on two particular barriers to admission that students articulated through my fieldwork and interviews that later became salient for their experiences during matriculation.

First and foremost was the fact that, while the discourse leading to the creation of these policies centered trans* women’s inclusion, contending that trans* women are women, trans* women are not openly applying and enrolling in these colleges nearly five years later. For example, Cole (they/them), who seemingly knew everybody on campus through their involvement in numerous campus organizations, discussed the invisibility of trans* women on campus:
[Coming to Athena] I didn’t know how invisible trans* women would be on campus and how... if you say trans*, the automatic assumption is trans* masculine. [So] far, I don’t know anyone on this campus who is out as a trans* woman.

While I was aware of at least two trans* women at these schools during my fieldwork (noting here the problems imbued with quantifying and being able to “identify” someone who is trans*), they both declined participation in the study as they felt that they could not be guaranteed confidentiality, as there were so few trans* women on campus. As a result, Cole describes, this created an environment wherein “trans*” was understood only in terms of “masculinity,” which only further marginalized and made invisible trans* feminine individuals from being seen (should they desire) as trans*.

Students discussed multiple theories as to why trans* women were not applying, or at least applying out as trans*, in larger numbers on campus. Arguably, many recognized that there was no need for trans* women to apply out as trans*, as they are women applying to a women’s college. As one employee described to me, the only true requirement for applicants was to “check the female box” on their application, and their application would be considered like the rest. Carter (he or they) explained,

When we talk about trans* women at Athena, oftentimes people want to have a conversation that's like, well, trans* women at Athena should be so safe that they feel like they can be out. And I'm like, hmm, that's a very particular way of thinking about like womanhood and trans* womanhood. Like being a trans* woman at Athena should just mean that you are safe and that you have resources if you need them. But you shouldn't have to be, like if you identify as a woman, like you shouldn't have to go everywhere and be like, as “A Trans”. Like, if you just want to be at a women's college and just be at
Athena and just like be, you know, a woman in the world, a woman of the world, if you will, like that shouldn't be contingent upon also having to disclose being a woman of trans* experience… What we should be talking about is, how does Athena create pathways for trans* women to get here from the fact that they are women so they do not need to out themselves to belong, to reasons of safety in environments that have historically been hostile to their presence?

As Carter describes, because the admission policies only require self-identity as a marker for one’s sex/gender, then trans* women’s inclusion at gender-selective women’s colleges is a prima facie fact. Indeed, all but one of my participants, 125 of them, indicated that yes trans* women belong at gender-selective women’s colleges because they are women. And yet, Carter urges us to shift focus from who and how many trans* students there are/should be—a fact that then can be used to the institution’s advantage to engender a positive reputation as “trans* inclusive” without evoking any structural changes to support these students—to the ways these colleges can bring trans* women to the college without needing them to disclose their trans* experience as well as how to support them once they get here. As a result, the conversation shifts from whether there are one or two or ten trans* women to what barriers persist in coming to campus and what is risking their safety?

On that note, many students mentioned that despite formal inclusion in the policy, there was no pathway for trans* women to safely and easily apply or enroll to these colleges, and no support systems once they arrive. Denali (they/them) explained,

It’s codified into policy for trans* women, like Athena says it will admit trans* women and it will presumably, but also like Athena doesn't have any infrastructure to support trans* women. Navigating trans* healthcare is a disaster. Like there isn't good access to
hormones or good information out there about how to access those and like Athena insurance covers some sorts of adrenal hormones and such. But it's really hard to find that information, especially if you're a prospective student and also like with the way everything, it’s gendered and phrased, like it's very much built around cis women. And so like I think trans* women are so important to Athena's mission. Like even within like what you look at today and what Athena says about itself it’s so important but like Athena needs to take the steps to make that happen.

Similarly, Grey (they or he) explained,

I think we could be doing more for trans* women, I think they don’t really want trans* women here...The most radical aspect of [the admission policy] is the fact that you're including trans* women and then we have three trans* women here basically. Yeah. And I think if you're going to make that a part of your admission policy, that could be a really strong argument to make if it's a safe place for someone like that. Because there aren't a lot of places where it is safe. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or a place when you're explicitly welcomed, I think we could be doing a little more than I think we could be doing a lot more too for those that are on campus. Perhaps the salient point here is that people know they are there (or think they know), but they are not out. (emphasis in the original)

Noting a tension between claims that students should not have to apply out as specifically trans* women and the need for structural change to make existing on campus possible for trans* women, students cited numerous specific actions that their campuses could be doing to support trans* women on campus. For example, in crafting the student demands during the spring protests at Athena (discussed at length in the next chapter), students attempted to center trans* women whose access to Athena has been historically non-existent, and only recently become
possible (noting that no trans* women were involved in the creation of the demands). Some demands included an admission recruitment program and officer specifically for trans* women, language in admission and institutional documents about trans* women’s inclusion, and a support group for trans* women specifically. While, as Carter suggests, trans* women on campus should not be reduced to solely their trans* experience, recognizing that their trans* identity is just one of many intersecting experiences that these women can have, the demands took issue with the continued marginalization trans* women could experience on campus as opposed to extending the feminist mission of eradicating gender inequality to women who experience transmisogyny. In other words, students felt that while trans* women are welcomed, there exists a mismatch in the intent of the admission policy and the structures on campus, where they are pushed to the margins, told that they do not belong.

While both colleges faced problems with the application and admission of trans* women, Athena additionally faced issues with the admission of trans* masculine, non-binary, and trans* men. As the admission policy for the college formally stated, the college remained committed to its mission as a college for women, and thus saw fit that at the time of admission, students had to identify as women, inclusive of trans* women. As Blue (they/them) explained, drawing upon the language of the orientation leader who had stated all students belong because there is no box to check and in contrast to the employee who stated you just have to “check the female box,”

Like who is woman enough, like what is woman enough to be able to check that box first of all? Or like what does it mean that like I identify as a woman when I checked that box, but like now I don't? Like I have a friend who is also non-binary and didn't apply to Athena. They were assigned female at birth but they didn't apply to Athena because it's
bad, the admission policy. So I just think there's also a lot of vulnerable non-binary people and trans* masculine people who could really benefit from this community.

In speaking to the value of the campus community, Blue contended that there is something by which trans* students can benefit from even if they do not necessarily fit within the institutional identity as a woman.

In fact, a number of trans* masculine and trans* men at Athena discussed what drew them to Athena, even though the policy explicitly excluded them, and for those who were out prior to admission, how they got around the policy (and why they justified their decision). Recalling Ezra’s (they or he) story in the introduction of this dissertation, for example, they recounted that their mother had asked an admission counselor about masculine applicants, to which they were directed, “If you're willing to check female on the Common App, we don't care what you do once you're in.” Ezra reflected that this signaled to him that by requiring students to play the part and jump through the hoops as a ritual to admission, this served to protect the image of Athena more so than the students. They ultimately decided to apply, “checking the female box,” however, because he had been raised as a woman and Athena was an educational environment where he felt safe(r) as a trans* person. To him, applying as a female served as a means to an end.

Similarly, Nova (they/them) transferred to Minerva after multiple unsuccessful attempts to attend Athena. As Nova explained, they really wanted to attend a gender-selective college after learning about them in a women’s history course in community college and wanted to share that same experience as well as attend a prestigious college: “I sort of thought being read as a woman had never really been convenient. So I may as well take this one thing.” To Nova, they felt that because society still determined their gender to be a woman, and therefore was treated as
a woman, despite their actual identity, they should be allowed to experience the benefits of attending a women’s college. They described:

I actually looked at everyone's, all of the [women’s colleges] about what they had online about the trans* policies because I wanted to know if I had to lie to get into any of them. I sort of was like, I can lie my way in and then just be out there, like no big deal. So I had looked at what everybody had online about their policy. So I knew the history of Minerva and trans* admission as well… Yeah so at Athena I was like, “I'm a woman. I love women.” ‘Because I could just like lie and just come out when I’m there. Yeah.

Detailing a sense of an internal debate similar to Ezra regarding if it was okay to “lie” on the admission document, Nova expressed that they ultimately were okay with the decision at Athena particularly because they believed in the mission of the college and felt that it was justified.

Many other trans* masculine students noted that they came to Athena either because they felt that the mission of the college, despite the policy, should extend to them, or that they only discovered after enrollment that they were in fact not women. Cole (they/them), for example, in response to me asking why they thought people go to Athena and how trans* students fit within that, answered,

The reason that we think it's the best place for us when we're applying to college is because of the way they put up themselves online and their college mailings and tours and all of that, and all of that is like this is the place where you will be empowered. This is the place where we care about women’s leadership and gender minority leadership. It’s complicated, but I still feel a strong connection to women even though I don’t identify with it… for me, personally I still identify so strongly with the experience of being a
woman and growing up being seen as a girl and being able to come into this space is a good one.

Citing the institution’s “message for women for the world” that was sent out via mailings and tours, Cole explained that Athena was the right place for them because they felt connected to their feminine upbringing and understood the social importance of women’s spaces as a source of leadership, which could too apply to them as a non-binary person.

Josh (he/him), on the other hand, grappled with both of these categories, explaining that while he personally knew his identity before applying, he never had any intention of coming out or transitioning due to an unsupportive family. Very quickly during his first year, however, he decided to embrace his identity including changing his name and begin the process to start hormones. In many ways, Josh felt conflicted about his enrollment, expressing semi-jokingly at first that, calling upon the naming of Athena, he felt that he should be able to attend a gender-selective college because he was, as he stated, “historically a woman.” On the other hand, however, he also expressed that if he got to do it all over again, he would not go to Athena as he is a man at a woman’s college. Josh recognized that he, like many other trans* masculine students and alumni, will now constantly face outing himself as trans* as he would have to show his transcripts and diploma to future employers.

While other non-binary and trans* masculine students at Athena, such as Blue and Milo, wished Athena adopt a broader policy like Minerva so that they would not face such admission barriers, students such as Josh and Harry S. articulated a contrasting opinion, stating that it would be contradictory to even “transphobic” (according to Josh) for Athena to admit trans* men as a women’s college, arguing that because the college was for women (inclusive of trans* women),
admitting trans* men would be denying the fact that trans* men are actually men. As Harry S. (he/him) explained,

I want to see other non-binary people encouraged to like apply to Athena and I don't think it's great that you have to apply as, identify as female. Like thinking about like trans* men applying to Athena, that's something where I'm like, I'm a trans* guy and I go to Athena. But like, I don't know, like that's like a tricky one, because it's like, I dunno, I mean like if you identify within the binary and are a trans* person and you're like, I'm a trans* man first and foremost, like that's who I am. I am a man. Like, great, you're a man. Cool. So, then I guess don't apply to Athena because it’s a historically women’s institution but yeah, so where you draw the line is like, and no, it's a personal opinion that everyone has kind of a different, different feeling about. Yeah. So, it does get tricky but gender is so complex and so multifaceted and different for every single person. And so, like trying to create a policy that is going to make everyone happy, is like impossible at this point.

Grappling with the tension that trans* masculine students are on campus but not recognized in the policy, students felt that it only further proves the fact that the college does not want them there, and thus will do little to support them. But at the same time, they too could understand the politics behind why they were not written in the policy, unlike Minerva, as a college for women. But, regardless of the policy, students at both schools experienced continued barriers to inclusion on campus, as I discuss below.
Limits on Campus

Josh and I walked down the street of Telford to dinner at a local restaurant on a cold, rainy evening. Joshua, boasting that he did not need an umbrella, dashed quickly from storefront to storefront to stay dry(ish) underneath the entry overhang as I walked alongside with my bright pink umbrella. On the other side of the walkway, we passed a row of benches where local residents without homes tended to gather asking for change in exchange for a song, craft, or small piece of artwork, when one resident called out, “Hey ladies, would you like a bracelet? Try to stay dry!” Josh and I both heard the comment but refused to acknowledge the misgendering that we both had just experienced and kept our heads down while walking at a slightly faster pace. Shortly after, Josh came to a sudden stop underneath the overhang of the local pharmacy and went in. I followed, as he informed me that he needed to pick up his medicine (his testosterone) and would be back quickly. After a few short minutes, he returned empty handed, and explained that he had to come back with his passport since the pharmacy would not accept his international or student ID.

To many, this minor occurrence—so minor that when I later asked Josh about my retelling, he had forgotten that it happened—would be a normal day. In fact, for Josh and for myself, in many ways, it was a normal day. Josh and his fellow peers were used to daily occurrences wherein they would experience small barriers, invalidations, and microaggressions to accessing gender-affirming resources and support. Students were accustomed to constant misgendering because it was assumed that, since they attended the local women’s college, they would be women. Additionally, like Josh experienced at the pharmacy, while he technically was

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62 It does appear that all it does is rain at these two schools. In fact, it was the wettest year on record—it rained every Tuesday for 2 months!
able to obtain gender-affirming healthcare through his student insurance, it was one hoop after another to actually access such care, from having to walk downtown to the local pharmacy because the campus health center did not fill prescriptions, to needing to have additional sources of identification and financial resources in order to actually purchase the medication. As Josh eventually recalled the event, he described that it was “annoying, yes, but fine.” Yes, he was able to go back and return the next day at a slight inconvenience, but this series of events reflects and speaks to the larger social structure of trans* inclusion on campus. Formally, yes trans* students are admitted and, technically yes there are resources, but the effectiveness of those support systems are limited in their impacts as students have a hard time accessing them.

Students often criticized a number of resources on campus. For example, while technically available to all students, trans* students felt that continuing education and workshops were primarily about trans* students rather than by or with them. Consequently, students felt displaced and used as token educational tools to learn about gender diversity without having an avenue to center their own voices in the call for change on campus. At Minerva, formal training was limited to either the orientation panel during students’ first year and a student-led peer educators’ group that offered gender and sexuality training to offices and organizations should they request the services. At Athena, staff and faculty all underwent mandatory diversity training during the onboarding process as well as optional professional development training through Human Resources while students were able to participate in a broader diversity training during orientation. During the year, both campuses also hosted a number of one-time events for trans* students and allies, including brown bag talks, community “fire-side” chats with their halls, and workshops at the campus diversity celebrations.
Early that fall, Josh and I attended one of these workshops together held in the campus’s LGBTQ+ resource center. Athena’s LGBTQ+ center, a converted room in the basement of a residential building, was accessed by keycard (at any hour, as opposed to Minerva’s staffed hours) to brightly painted orange walls lined with pamphlets and posters about events both past and present. The center, like Minerva’s, featured a kitchen and lending library, as well as a number of chairs and couches arranged in a circle. In the corners of the room rested memorabilia of student issues from the past, including old protest posters from the admission policy change and notes and documents from student organizations that no longer exist. Despite the bright walls, the room sat in a general darkness due to the lack of windows, reminding visitors of the space’s neglect—both its underuse by students and forgotten upkeep from the institution—as well as the symbolic neglect on campus regarding the populations that the space is intended for—keeping LGBTQ+, and trans* students in particular, in the dark away from campus. As we sat on the sunken-in couch that I was sure had not been cleaned in over a decade, the room filled with about 25 students as we sat around and talked about sex/gender issues on campus. The workshop was open to all students to attend regardless of their identity, to learn and ask any questions about gender and trans* students on campus. After introductions including each student stating their name, pronouns, year, residential hall, and their answer to the ice breaker “Would you prefer fish for hands or fish for feet?” the facilitator opened the floor to questions, stating that the hour could be whatever the attendees wanted it to be. A minute passed and the

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63 I asked Nell (they/them), who favored the center as a study spot due to its seclusion, about these documents. They explained that they wanted them to stay in the center rather than send them to the archives so students can happen upon them. It was rumor that because the college did not want to preserve non-women’s history on campus or acknowledge that trans* students existed, any donations about trans* students’ experiences on campus have been thrown out. While not directly confirmed, it was a well-known fact that the campus archives had almost no collections regarding trans* life on campus. Thus, there was a general lack of institutional memory regarding trans* presence on campus and a mistrust of students to donate materials in fear that the archives would not preserve them.
facilitator eventually broke the silence by offering to tell the “story” of the trans* admission policy on campus. The room murmured and nodded, and for the remainder of the hour the facilitator detailed a linear timeline of trans* exclusion, events, and protest on campus. On occasion, the facilitator looked to me for a detail or date, wherein I filled in gaps with information learned from the archives or my interviews. After the event, I spoke with the facilitator and a few students, and we realized that the reason for the early silence, and thus justifying the need for these events, was the fact that students were unaware of what to even ask, unaware of the history of protest and violence on campus, and unaware of trans* students before them, despite or perhaps indicated by the archives of trans* history amongst them in the center.

While our workshop was a history conversation, other students who attended similar workshops that year mentioned that theirs focused more on what is jokingly referred to as “Trans* 101”—meaning the basics. By focusing on teaching people about sex and gender or how to use pronouns, trans* students articulated that these workshops and community spaces are no longer for them, but to teach the cisgender majority about trans* people through difference. For example, Blue (they/them) noted,

There was this trans* tea, where it was open to like trans* people and their allies which made it really weird. I went to one and it was mostly like allies asking, “How can I be a better ally?” And I was like I don't need to be here for this. I think it is really important that there's a space just for trans* people.

More often than not, trans* students desired having community space wherein they could find support amongst other trans* students, and not necessarily just to pathologize or therapize their identity. As Blue continued in their conversation with me,
I'm pretty sure like the only support group is in counseling. I don't want to go to counseling but like I do want to have space with other trans* people. Having counseling services can be important but at the same time it's like maybe I don't want or need counseling. Maybe I need to have a space for myself. In a way counseling makes me feel like there's something wrong that needs fixed. Not saying that trans* people are wrong or anything like that but that's different than just having a space that's not in this cis space.

Previous reports have found that counseling and therapy is considered relatively normative and unremarkable amongst Generation Z (those born in 1997-current, i.e. those currently in college), with nearly 37% seeking treatment or therapy from a mental health professional compared to 26% of Gen Xers, 22% of baby boomers and 15% of older adults (American Psychological Association 2019). For trans* communities in particular, rates of mental and psychological distress are higher, upwards of 39%. However, there is a tense relationship with mental health services as trans* identity has historically been medicalized as a mental illness and 33% of those who sought out care experienced mistreatment by their mental health professional related to being trans* including verbal harassment or were refused treatment (James et al. 2016). Like the majority of trans* respondents in this study who are currently or have previously sought out mental health care, Blue is not resistant, per se, to counseling. But rather, they argue that by counseling being the only space on campus for trans* students, this further medicalizes their experiences and identity, needing to be fixed because they are “different” from the rest of campus. Rather, Blue wishes that there were both options: a space for people to seek the care and the support they need for their mental health as well as community spaces where students can just be together.
On both campuses, as I discuss further below and in the next chapter, neither school had a dedicated student organization *just* for trans* people. In years prior, as the documents lying about the resource centers reminded students, students used to gather and create community, often coming together for a political cause on campus. Once the admission policies were adopted and students graduated, however, those organizations broke apart, leaving students to fend for themselves on campus—supposedly no longer needing community because they formally “belonged.” Only counseling services had a trans* support group on both campuses, though this was capped at ~12 people, and Minerva additionally had an informal “trans* housing community” capped at 11 single rooms that are inaccessible to those who cannot use stairs. As a result, while some students such as Addy E. (they/them) enjoyed the support group or Ren (they/them) who is the community advisor for the trans* housing community, others were unable to access the same resources.

This articulation of no longer needing community due to formal inclusion also permeated life on campus more generally. As scholars such as Ahmed (2012) and Thomas (2020) have noted, however, this framing of inclusion actually is used to *uphold* systems of inequality—serving as a commitment that the institution can fall back upon without actually making any purposeful changes. For example, as I highlighted above, it was generally common practice on both campuses for students to participate in “pronoun rounds,” stating their name and pronouns to groups and in classes. While this generally was good practice on campus, highlighting cultural recognition and inclusion of trans* students, trans* students more often than not articulated that they *disliked* the pronoun go-around because the practice was more symbolic of inclusion than actually producing it (that is, nonperformative). Josh (he/him), for example, explained to me that he detested the go around, wherein you often hear “she/her, she/her, they/them, she/her,
they/them” and then one singular “he/him,” singling him out as a stranger in a sea of women. Violet, who uses all pronouns except for she/her, similarly explained, “I hate the start of the semester because I forget that we have to do the stupid like ‘say your pronouns thing.’ That’s a fucking nightmare all over again.” Recounting one experience in class, for example, Violet had a group presentation wherein Violet’s partner was referring to a statement Violet had just made. Despite the fact that they had done pronouns as a class and this was a group project, Violet’s partner audibly paused, stumbling “sh-I mean, the-, uh” and eventually just ended up saying awkwardly “As Violet said…” The problem with pronouns particularly arose with faculty members and administrators who refused to recognize trans* students. Milo (they/them) detailed one experience with a tenured faculty member:

It was like a large lecture and we had name tags— but [the professor] misgendered me once and then everyone [inhaled sharply and tensely]. And then about two weeks later, she misgendered me again and so I went after her, after her class and I was like, “Hi, I just wanna let you know that I actually use they/them pronouns and you misgendered me earlier in class. I understand like I don't have my pronouns on display but this is just so you know…” And she basically gave me like an entire body eye roll which was like [sigh] “I'll try to remember, — I just started remembering your name but I'll try.” And I was like, okay lady thank you. She definitely has been at Athena for a long time, but it is still one of those things where I was like I have to explain myself. It’s exhausting, and it’s something that I think about all the times that I can’t just exist as an anonymous student, like I have to make myself be known to the teacher.

While the context of gender-selective colleges were historically defined in part by excluding men so that women could be seen and centered, advertising them as a place where women are able to
stand out, Milo’s comment at first seems contradictory to this mission, and thus evoking the fear of many trans* exclusionary feminists have, claiming that a focus on trans* students will displace (cis) women. And yet, in wishing to be an “anonymous student,” Milo evokes what Ahmed (2012) describes as the phenomenology of diversity. That is, the institutionalization of gender diversity through the performative practice of pronoun rounds allows womanhood and cisgender to recede into the background, becoming routine or ordinary. Thus, in such instances like Milo’s, wherein they embodied diversity by providing the institution with trans* masculinity, this calls attention to the embeddedness of cisgender womanhood, making Milo a stranger to the sea of women. Thus, they never could be an anonymous student, as is it only those who are able to recede into the background who are able to be anonymous. Feeling that the faculty member did not take their pronouns seriously, Milo articulates the nonperformativity of pronouns as a form of inclusion. Pronouns are part of the campus culture, you go through the steps, but the ostensive function of the pronoun round is lost in its action. Or rather, the performative action of stating pronouns stands in for, rather than producing the outcome of actual gendered possibilities and legitimacy.

Other students mentioned many other instances of misgendering, from using people’s birth names to referring to groups of students as “ladies” or “women.” For example, during Athena’s graduation ceremony, the commencement speaker addressed the audience of over 1000 people, including eight of my trans* participants and their partners, families, and friends, stating:

You are graduating from one of the premiere institutions in the world, that is entirely focused on the potential of women—all women—Black, brown, native, white, gender non-conforming and trans*—all women to lead and change the world. Let me say it again—you are graduating from one of the premiere institutions in the world that is
entirely focused on the potential of women—all women—to lead and change the world.

(emphasis mine)

Students immediately took to Facebook and created memes joking about the misquote of “women of different gender identities” (see Figure C), using the comedic form as a source of emotional relief and community building. One participant, Spencer (he or they), responded on a meme created by another participant, Arden (they or he), commenting that as a trans* graduate,

I expected to feel far more erased by the whole commencement process (to the point where I have not looked forward to the ceremony for years)... I would love for Athena to officially become a gender minority college and adapt its language and actions to reflect the student body), currently Athena *is* an institution where the official mission is focused exclusively on empowering women.

As I sat with Arden’s meme and Spencer’s comment for a while, my initial reaction was that it was sad that 1) students had to, yet again, deal with the daily microaggressions that rendered them invisible, especially on their day of celebration, and 2) students came to accept these microaggressions as a part of the terms of their inclusion. One would think that it should be at least common practice to inform the speakers to use gender-inclusive language when addressing the larger campus population.

As I talked with students about this event and others like it to make sense of why trans* erasure became so ingrained and tolerated on campus, they described institutional diversity and inclusion efforts as “performative.” Josh and Blue, for example, described a similar event regarding graduates wearing pronoun buttons that read “trans students belong here” at graduation as “performative wokeness” while James (they/them), discussing drag ball, stated, “It’s shitty because a lot of the changes that other folks made were like really performative.” When I first
began talking to students about these seemingly inclusive resources and actions and they
described them as *performative*. I initially thought that they were using the term—as defined by
Butler (1990, 2004)—incorrectly. When students referred to drag ball or trans* affirmation
buttons as performative, I misunderstood them to suggest that these efforts were “false” or
“fake,” such that someone was pretending to be trans* inclusive. I later came to realize that in
many ways, the students were right without even possibly knowing it. I am disinclined to read
Josh, Blue, and James’s frustration as a call to end the use of pronoun rounds, not wear buttons,
and stop hosting drag ball as fake markers/performances of inclusion. Rather, I came to realize
that their disappointment stems from the fact that these individual student actions lack meaning
and capacity for broader structural and cultural change on campus. That is, perhaps these
institutional “mishaps” are indeed performative after all, bringing the institution into existence
by naming itself as a women’s college that performs trans* inclusion. As such, they are not
calling for these performances to stop, per se, but rather, they are calling for these efforts to make
a difference, bringing about actual progress on campus. Rather than wearing a button saying
“trans students belong here,” create resources and policies that make it possible for trans*
students to easily access, survive, and thrive on campus—a button isn’t going to do that work,
but it can point to the work that needs to be done so that trans* students *can* belong.

Many students experienced both elements of the good and the bad during their time on
 campus, dealing with misgendering, having trouble accessing resources, and feeling frustrated
with the slow and relative reluctance towards broader institutional change. Within the gender-
selective college context, as students transitioned from cis womanhood, they were consciously

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64 As Butler (1990, 2004) defines, when something (or someone) is performative, new meanings are created through constant iteration. Thus, extending the concept, Ahmed’s (2012) explains that *non*performative is when the effect that is named *is not* brought about.
aware of the possibility that they may experience some, however minimal, resistance on campus either from peers, faculty, staff or administration because they were now at a college not meant for them. As Harry S. (he/him) described:

It's hard to not identify as a woman and go to a women's institution. There is a certain amount of hyper visibility among the students and invisibility from the administration… Everyone kind of knows like the trans* people on campus and like it's just kinda like a thing that you have to think about it a little bit.

Acknowledging that it is not easy to attend a gender-selective college as a trans* student, many students recognized and appreciated the initial steps that these colleges have taken. And yet, they also recognized that there is always more work to be done. As Emily H. (they/them) explained:

There are some elements of like, [the] bare minimum, understanding and embracing that trans* students are here already. And also embracing that trans* students potentially want to come here and like people are finding it hard to come here because of what they have set in place. I mean, I think that there already is some sort of like, it's not as bad as it could be, I guess. But it could be better. Yeah. At least for me.

But this was not the case for all students. Rather, as I turn to in the next section, transgender students can be isolated from not only the campus community as a whole due to a lack of access to resources and support, but also from one another as a result of normative understandings of gender that create hierarchies of inclusion based on intersecting identities of race, class, and sexuality. Consequently, those most vulnerable on campus are also most visible, standing out and not fitting in the larger community identity of who belongs on campus.
The Ugly

As these colleges grappled with the tensions of institutional feminism and womanhood in light of trans* inclusion, trans* students found themselves caught in the middle, formally included, but said inclusion was predicated on how well those students conformed to the institutional identity. Consequently, as gendered organizations, the discourses around gender inclusion and the institutional mission of gender-selective colleges shape “available gender identities and the ways in which regulatory power (all concepts central to performativity) function to promote gender performances that adhere to the contextual and cultural acceptable gender roles” (Hart and Lester 2011:203). In other words, student experiences on campus are not siloed from institutional structures. Rather, it is the interaction between the two that create the lived realities and gendered (im)possibilities for trans* students on campus.

As Harry S. quoted in the previous section began to describe, previous scholars have documented at length that trans* students experience a dualism of hyper/invisibility within the gender-selective women’s college environment. According to Hart and Lester (2011), this dualism is mutually constructive: on campus, trans* students—and particularly trans* masculine students—are largely ignored at the institutional level, rendered invisible from rhetoric to physical resources on campus because they do not fit within the institutional discourse as colleges for women. And yet, because of this erasure, this also renders trans* students hypervisible, either existing in stark contrast to the institutional population and image and/or are expected to perform on campus as tokens, conforming to and upholding the inclusive brand (see also Jones 2014; Weber 2014, 2019). Take, for instance, this exchange with Blue (they/them):

Maggie: So do you feel like you fit in here at Athena?

Blue: Yes. Yeah.
Maggie: What makes you a good fit?

Blue: Well I don't know. It's hard because I think sometimes, I feel like trans* people'll get fetishized.

Maggie: Like fetishized sexually or fetishized like you stand out?

Blue: Definitely like, fetishized sexually, just like people know who you are. People will say hi to me all the time. And I'm like, I have no idea of who you are. That's what's hard because it's like “Athena famous” or like “Athena popular.” I dunno, it's very weird.

Maggie: Do you ever feel invisible on campus?

Blue: Yes.

Maggie: How so?

Blue: I mean definitely like by the administration, like all of their language. It's like everything is, like never acknowledges the presence of trans* people, which is sad. And I think also like in that way tokenization happens.

Talking about the intertwined relationship of institutional invisibility and social hypervisibility, Blue paints the campus climate of trans* inclusion as one wherein trans* students are never fully a part of the campus community but play very specific and circumscribed roles on campus as objects of desire and evidence of inclusion.

Luca (he or they) similarly described this tokenism on campus, especially as a Black trans* masculine student and leader on campus, involved in residential life, athletics, and social justice work on campus. As Luca detailed, this work became particularly taxing as he felt that all eyes were on him, watching his every move, while there almost an expectation that he would
gladly represent the college for any request because he should be thankful for being allowed to be on campus:

Everyone's very aware of that I can navigate both worlds, and so I think they use that as an asset, but it also can become very taxing for me lately, like in terms of labor. I don't think they always recognize that they're using me for that reason. It's like this assumption that like, that is what I am currently like, always in the mood for always doing, always ready to go. I think sometimes people forget that I am a student and they're like, I'm not, like most of the stuff I do, I don't get paid for it either. It's all volunteer work with all of my labor. I think people forget that a lot. That can be very exhausting… I feel like sometimes that is the case where people would bring me in to stand here, or they'll be like, “Oh, talk about all your various identities.” And I'm like, “What if I don't want to?”

Like, “What if I don't want to tell you my whole life story for the 19th time this week?” I think it becomes this like expected labor, where people are like, “We're giving you this opportunity, we're putting your face on the front so you owe us this, you owe us this and performativity or something like that.” Sometimes I want to just disappear.

Connecting the two experiences, they describe a series of events wherein the invisibility of trans* students makes them stand out, further tokenizing them on campus and embedding them in a social hierarchy of popularity due to their transness. As Squash (they/them) detailed, “There weren't that many of us and everyone knew who we were and so there, like, no, you couldn't just be a person going about your day. You were a trans* person at Athena” (emphasis mine).

While generally my findings align with the previous literature regarding students’ experiences with hyper/invisibility on campus, where I turn the conversation towards is regarding institutional and intersectional structures. As scholars such as S. Weber (2014, 2019)
and Hart and Lester (2011) have noted, the dualistic relationship between hyper/invisibility occurs within a feedback loop, wherein acceptable performances of gender on campus are constructed through traditional notions of femininity, thus rendering those who do not conform as outsiders. And yet, previous discussions of how social hierarchies and experiences with visibility on campus have focused on the social aspect between students themselves, remaining separate from the institutional policies, practices, and discourses surrounding gender on campus. As S. Weber (2014: 192) states,

Inasmuch as the category “woman” is prefigured as belonging to a group of individuals with cisgender feminine embodiment, masculine-of-center women-identified individuals, as well as trans women, are typically denied institutional visibility and social capital at women’s colleges. It is important not to overstate how much female-bodied masculinity is valued within “the women’s college” as an institution concerned with fundraising and public relations, especially given the ways… that female-bodied masculinity is tied to assumptions about same-sex sexuality. Since markers of visible queerness very quickly can become liabilities rather than assets in larger homophobic society, we must be clear in discussing the ways that female-bodied masculinities arise as the most desired within queer student cultures (that is, within sexual fields) and not at the administrative level. In this section, I contend that the resulting social hierarchies that favor white trans* masculinity on campus is not in opposition to, but rather a product of the institutional focus on women and femininity. As a result, this leaves particular trans* students who do not conform to these institutionally created and socially imposed norms of the “right way to be trans*”—particularly as these norms are rooted in race, class, and gender embodiment—at higher risk for isolation and violence on campus.
In the weeks leading up to the event, the Minerva students such as Violet, Luca, and Rachel W. were abuzz, talking about tickets, their outfits, and plans. The annual drag ball hosted by the campus queer students of color organization was quickly approaching, which was one of the biggest parties on campus each year. Able to secure a ticket to attend as Violet’s (all pronouns except she) guest, I met Violet and their roommate Rebecca at their building and we walked to the building next door—the very same building that orientation events were held in—which students had magically converted to a dance hall with streamers and balloons, strobe lights, and a DJ on stage.

That year, a policy had been implemented by the host organization where a number of tickets were reserved for queer and trans* students of color in order to center these marginalized communities and call attention to the history of drag and ballroom culture. Additionally, while an unspoken rule, though Violet later explained that these instructions were shared over student social media, students of color were supposed to have access to the space closest to the stage while white students were to be further back.

The event began with a series of dance routines by various student groups, which evolved into the room filled with hip hop and reggaeton music as students danced with their peers and sang loudly to their favorite songs. The dancing was then interjected with two 30-minute drag performances by local artists, featuring regional award winners in the categories of drag queen, drag princess, bio queen, and drag king. While the performances were going on, Violet, who is relatively short in stature, held Rebecca’s and my hand and pushed through the crowd to the front so they could see.
After the second show, Violet and Rebecca decided to leave, as they were tired from wearing heels, so I spent a few minutes looking around the room behind me before I too made my departure for the evening. I noted in my fieldnotes:

I ran into [name redacted] employee as I was walking around. Her face, normally adorning a smile, looked tired as if the evening wore on her. I approached her just to say hi and asked how the evening was going from a staff standpoint. She mentioned that “I need a drink, but I’m on call” and that “I'm seeing a lot more titties and asses than I thought I would see.” We joke a little bit longer about me being at the party, to which I reply that “It’s a big gender night!”...Thinking about who was present in the space, however, I wonder how much this gender night was ingrained with ideas also about sexuality, class, and race because the night was all about centering QTPOC specifically.

What makes or allows someone to look “queer?”

In my notes, I continued to document the various styles and fashions of the evening, everything from lingerie and glitter to suits and “bro tanks” to harnesses and collars. Some students who I knew as more masculine played on feminine stereotypes and other feminine students did the reverse, though most wore exaggerated gendered clothing within their own area of comfort. Violet, for example, wore a white lace bodysuit that they had been eyeing for a few weeks online, while I spent nearly three hours at the mall earlier that morning going from store to store to find an outfit “just right” for the event that communicated “party” and “queer,” while maintaining some sense of comfort for myself. Ultimately settling on an outfit that played to a mixture of masculinity and femininity, which an intoxicated party-goer described as a “sexy

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65 During this time, I turned to Lee’s (2016) candor about being unsure how to dress and act to not feel like one was “pretending” or stand out in college social settings during ethnographic research.
Ernest Hemingway vibe,” I purchased a pair of navy blue tapered leg pants with a blue pinstripe oxford and maroon suspenders and high heels that “I can use again,” as I texted my fiancée to justify the expense that likely would not be reimbursable from my grant.

As I observed the drag ball at Minerva, as well as throughout other queer and trans*-centered events on campus, sex/gender on campus was performed in direct conversation with the institutional discourse of womanhood. As the colleges continued to center women, womanhood, and femininity, this constructed a social norm amongst students that, in order to be recognized visibly as trans* on campus, student’s gendered embodiments and performances must queer femininity and womanhood, which was interpreted through masculinity as well as race, class, and sexuality. As S. Weber (2014:166) discusses, “To be masculine is to be visibly queer, and to be visibly queer is typically to be the object of public approval and desire. Queer femme-ininities, then, are rendered comparatively invisible at both campuses, whereas masculine-of-center gender presentations are elevated and granted erotic capital.” As S. Weber argues, despite the institutional context of gender-selective colleges, wherein women and femininity are placed front and center, larger societal discourses prevail amongst students and continues to give white masculine identities cultural, social, and erotic capital on campus.

Owen (he/him), a relatively visible and active member of the Minerva community as an Asian trans* man and athlete, outlined how the social system—nicknamed the “queerarchy”—on campus worked:

At Minerva there's sort of this backwards system of the more queer a person is the higher up in the social hierarchy they are hence the name queerarchy. But then also there's all sorts of racial, socioeconomic, everything, things tied into that as well. But typically the people at the top are white, trans* masculine people. Which is interesting because in a
way the queerarchy is both—it’s a sort of upside down version of the rest of the world where like, you know, straight people are sort of the top, but at the same time it's like, you still have masculine people at the top. So, and some ways it's flipped, but in other ways it's not. Yeah. But that's generally the picture, the more “queer” you are.

Owen postulates that in many ways, this hierarchy reflects the larger social structure within trans*, queer, and even cis-het communities wherein masculinity, as it intersects with other social identities, is afforded more social power and sits “on top” of the social pyramid. Thus this presents the reality that gender-selective colleges are in fact not all that separate from larger society and the possibility that these institutions have failed in their mission by not creating new and safe ways for students to explore gender; failing to progress beyond simple rejection of the old hierarchies. And yet, Owen also notes that this hierarchy differed in many ways given the institutional context. There is space at gender-selective colleges, he affirms, to identify and express gender in a multitude of ways, especially beyond the coded text of admission policies. Particular bodies become visible on campus when they stand in stark contrast to the institutional image of womanhood. Meanwhile, by highlighting the embeddedness of racial, classed, and sexual intersections within this, Owen argues that only visible bodies are afforded capital because such contrast is interpreted as “queering” the institutional identity. In other words, it is white, upper-class, queer non-binary trans* masculine students—not necessarily all trans* men—who hold the social power on campus. Owen highlights that other students are unable to access such forms of capital either because they seemingly blend into and affirm the institutional commitment to diversity of womanhood “as women” or because they are seen as ideological and physical threats to the campus community “as men.” Perpetuating a border war within
masculinity (Halberstam 1998b), this suggests that there is some line in the sand wherein the “right way to be trans*” on campus is both fluid and a tenuous position.

As I learned to navigate queer life on campus myself, attempting to be recognized and validated as a queer non-binary femme, students modeled for me the prevailing social hierarchy of transnormativity on campus (see Figure D). Articulating similar themes to Rubin’s (1984) figure “Sex Hierarchy: The Struggle over Where to Draw the Line,” students discussed that there were generally “right” and “wrong” ways to be trans* on campus, while there are major areas of contest as to where to draw the imaginary line between the two. Compounding factors in addition to their identity, including gender presentation, pronouns, race and skin tone, sexuality and sexual behaviors, body size and ability, socio-economic status, and involvement in activism greatly varied where a person would fall on the queerarchy, and therefore how included they were on campus both at the social and institutional level.

To map this social hierarchy,66 I asked a number of my respondents to describe the “trans* look” on campus, to which student after student continued to name similar features. Grey (they or he), for example, described the “trans* look” as:

It's a strong stereotype of like there's students that are really wealthy people who go shopping and buy things that someone else took from a thrift shop and then you put on their curated Instagram page to sell for 400 times more money with perfect looking Doc Martens… You have your pair of Doc Martens and skinny jeans and then you have your nice button-down shirt and your hair has your perfect undercut and you don't wear any

66 With special thanks to Violet and Josh who I continued to ask annoying questions during the writing of this section to ensure its accuracy.
jewelry, but your face is covered in jewelry. And your septum’s pierced of course.

Because how else will they know that you use they/them pronouns?

Other students shared similar ideas down to naming the same clothing brands, expressing how trans* on campus is an *embodied* experience as opposed to, or perhaps in addition to, an identity, wherein to be properly read as trans*, one needs to be androgynous-to-masculine with a hint of femininity, skinny, undergo top surgery, be on hormones, and change their name to, as Josh (he/him) joked, “one of ten trans* names.” Able to name not only *how* to express gender but also *where* and *how* to acquire such resources from, Grey constructs an image of the “right way to be” trans* on campus that is rooted in a very particular and specific kind of queerness, whiteness, masculinity, and wealth.

Many of my respondents, in part due to the demographic composition of the institutions as predominantly white, private, and elite institutions and in part due to the level in which particular trans* students felt seen enough on campus to participate in a study about trans* community on campus, fit this image of the “right” way to be trans*. Finley (they or she), a white non-binary student, for example, acknowledged their social privilege, explaining, “It’s all white trans* masc. That is very much my impression of that space—of white trans* men and we all look alike. I walk into [a group of trans* people] and I’m like ‘I look like these people’ And like I do. I mean it’s a very homogeneous group.” Meanwhile, another white non-binary student, Milo (they/them), described how they noticed a shift in their social visibility the more masculine they appeared:

Something I’ve noticed is that there is a huge fetishization of white masculinity on campus… It’s something I noticed as soon as I cut my hair. Last year, I came here to Athena and my hair was like this [pointing to a dark crew cut with a slight fringe on top].
Halfway through the year, it was kind of shorter and then at the beginning of summer, I really just like chopped it off. And I then noticed like in the beginning of this year, I feel like I became more- I’m like on the radar of the student body and a lot of people would like to tell my friends like, “Oh, your friend’s so hot and whatever, whatever.” And I said, “Why did this happen only once I cut my hair short and why is that happening once I started wearing more button downs?” And so, that’s really interesting because there’s also huge like, we hate men but we are going to fetishize people who look like them, but don’t identify as them necessarily.

Drawing upon the language of fetishization as a marker of popularity, a point that becomes salient in the next section, Milo notes that there is a prevailing social value in looking masculine. And yet, as they also note, there is a paradox in which this value is also unexpected especially in an environment wherein men and toxic masculinity are so resisted. Rather, this masculinity is inherently tied into a particular queer masculinity, such that students do not identify as men and so they are interpreted on some level through a lens of femininity. As Halberstam (1998b:291) argues, “There are a variety of gender-outlaw bodies under the sign of nonnormative masculinities and femininities.” Therefore, the social valuation of trans* masculinity on campus could be understood as the feminist mission of the colleges reasserted, embracing and fetishizing some aspects of “safe” masculinity as determined by the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender—therefore women, too, can exhibit this masculinity—while protecting students from the “threat” of toxic masculinity and “real” men as determined via the presence of the penis. This does not suggest, however, that either: 1) trans* masculine people had free rein in all spaces on campus, as they in many ways were pushed out of the institutional community by the administration; or 2) that I am contending that non-binary trans* masculine students are
feminine. But within the trans* social sphere, students such as Milo and Finley generally came out on top because the alignment of their gender identity, presentation, and other social identities presented them as safe within the women’s college context:

Something that I’m really very, very cognizant of is the fact that Athena is so white and Athena is so wealthy and I have a lot of privilege within my own identity. I’ve experienced oppression that, you know, is super real and it is related to my gender identity but I’m just a very privileged trans* person and I’m very aware of that… I walk through the world and people they look at me, they just see like a white 14-year-old boy who looks harmless. If I can pass fairly easily and that in itself is a form of safety— so at Athena I’m seen a lot and I see a lot of people who look like me. (Milo)

On the other end of the queerarchy spectrum sits, as Milo pointed to, trans* men. Perhaps because of shifting language and visibility of non-binary genders, the majority of respondents on both campuses identified outside of the gender binary, while only a small handful self-identified as “binary” trans* men, which was in reverse to the trans* social sphere that alumni from the 2000s-early 2010s described. Josh (he/him), for example, often expressed how isolated he felt on campus, in part because he did not feel like he belonged at a college for women. He explained, “I feel like masculinity is only celebrated on campus when it's in reference to people that don't identify as male. Whereas if you're a trans* man, I feel like [you need to be] be more feminine, just to like fuck gender roles or whatever.” As Josh explained to me, he struggled on campus as he increasingly was recognized more and more as a man because on the one hand, this validated his identity, but on the other, this made him stand out even more on campus as a stranger.

Because he aligned both his presentation and identity as masculine, which he interpreted not as a queering of gender within the context of the gender-selective college, but an embrace of
manhood, his presence contradicted the mission of the women’s college environment. Non-binary students, even if masculine presenting, he felt, experienced at least some—if not the most—amount of social capital on campus because they did not cross that metaphorical line-in-the-sand to identify as the antagonist—a man—on campus.

This does not suggest, as S. Weber (2014) reminds us, that non-binary trans* masculine students are fully embraced by the women’s college administration as doing the work of the college. Their rejection of womanhood and/or femininity can be interpreted by the administration as a rejection of the gender-selective college mission as a whole. But, Josh’s experience on campus testifies to the ways in which masculinity within some gendered contexts presents a problem when it becomes too “real” or when some imaginary line has been crossed between play and seriousness. As Halberstam (1998b) explains, this suggests a kind of masculinity continuum on campus, where the intensity of masculinity is intensely re-essentialized with manhood, and as if a “gulf” exists between masculine women and trans* men (see Catalano 2014; Gottzen and Straube 2017; Jourian 2017a for discussion on alternative trans* masculinities pathways). Because non-binary and masculine women both have not crossed that metaphorical line to identifying as men, perhaps thought to represent some sense of fluidity in gendered possibilities while remaining stable in bodily comportment—still seen as female—they are seen as “safer” because they are not men.

And yet, as Halberstam (1998b:301) continues, some bodies are never able to find a home within gender, always living with inherent instability of identity: “It is time to complicate the models that assign gender queerness only to transsexual bodies and gender normativity to all others… it masks, for example, the fact that gay/lesbian-versus-transsexual/transgender opposition is very much a concern in white queer contexts but not necessarily in queer
communities of color.” Recalling that communities of color, and Black communities in particular, have been subjected to hyper-masculinization, race interacts with gender in a manner that informs how individuals read and categorize others. Consequently, within the gender-selective college context, along with trans* men at the bottom of the queerarchy are located trans* students of color because they are denied any claim to femininity.

For example, Luca (he or they), a Black trans* masculine student on campus, shared an event that occurred on campus the fall after my fieldwork. One early morning, after helping a fellow student, Luca was accidently locked out of his residence hall. Luca’s hall was located in a central area of campus next to where numerous students pass to get to classes and the dining hall and happened to be the location of the LGBTQ+ living learning community of which he is the head resident hired and paid by the institution. Luca was also relatively well-known on campus as both a senior and an overly involved diversity fellow. As he asked passersby to swipe him in, his peers continued by in a rushed manner without even making eye contact with him. As he wrote on Facebook later that morning,

I never approach any stranger without them knowing I am coming. Especially women, and especially at 7 am. 9 people over the course of 45 minutes saw me and continued to walk past me. Even when I was sitting in front of the building (in my pajamas). Even when I explained that I am a student and an RA. Do any of you know what it's like to be a senior in college and still have to prove that you belong at the institution you're graduating from?

Luca went on to detail, especially for a Black male-passing person, how scary that moment was, and how quickly that could have escalated should a student try to call campus police. As Luca described, while Minerva formally admitted him, someone who had been around for nearly four
years and is obviously a student, it was because of the intersection of his race and gender that 
people read him as a Black man, which then was interpreted as someone who did not belong and 
was a threat to the predominantly white women’s student body.

As I discussed earlier, there are some contexts wherein students such as Luca are called 
upon by the administration as tokens, an attempt to show how “diverse” the college is in regard 
to its student population without altering their sense of safety or inclusion on campus. While 
Luca discussed how he felt that his participation was expected of him, a test in some ways, as an 
owed favor to the institution for permitting his existence on campus, in another such instance, 
Carter (they or he) explained the tensions between being hypervisible and hyper-vulnerable as 
both a Black and trans* masculine student who is also often called upon to participate on panels 
or speak to prospective students.

If you are a white, masculine presenting woman on campus, you can just do anything, do 
anything you want to, anything, including hurt people. If you are trans* identified and a 
person of color, people already assume that you're going to hurt someone. Like it's 
already the assumption that you are both being heralded and also that you are a threat, 
that you are dangerous. That like anything that you might do with somebody is subject to 
the assumption that if anybody in that interaction feels uncomfortable, that like you were 
at fault. And that if you have any discomfort, that like that couldn't be possible...

I have been a speaker at Athena events. I was the speaker of the prospective student of 
color weekend and when [the dean] reached out to me about, like, me doing it, I was like, 
“You know that I use they/them pronouns, right?” … I think that that's something to 
remind ourselves of when we're talking about Athena as like both a safe haven and a 
place that enacts violence on us. Right?
Contextualizing Luca’s experience outside of the hall, Carter explains that by virtue of being both trans* masculine and a student of color, this serves as a kind of “double whammy,” perpetuating the idea that they are inherently violent. Neither student, though male-passing, identified as men, but their race crossed them over that imaginary threshold of “acceptable” gender on campus, thus allowing others to interpret and determine their gender as a potentially unsafe form of masculinity. As such, in instances when they are called upon by the institution to do its bidding, as Carter explained, their bodies provide diversity to the institution of womanhood, effectively reinforcing the notion that students like Carter and Luca were not like the "other people" on campus.

In the reverse, students who embodied womanhood or femininity were less visible on campus, rendering trans* feminine students (all of whom were non-binary and assigned female at birth in this context) as “not really trans*.” Unlike Luca and Carter’s hypervisibility as trans* masculine and Black, Hannah (they/them) blended in with the student population with their long blonde hair and their general shy demeanor, often wearing jeans and homemade sweaters, which made it difficult to be recognized as trans*. Even after instances where Hannah would share their pronouns, students failed to use they/them for Hannah, thereby delegitimizing their identity:

I know it's partly a recognition thing for them. I feel like they [Hannah’s teammates] look more recognizably trans* than I do, and I guess that's maybe part of it. I don't like saying that, but in terms of what people associate with it, in terms of short hair, and androgynous figures and I’m jealous of that for sure. And they're tall or thin and a lot of them have dyed hair, short hair, which I think is a big marker from that. I don't like the association that that carries but there definitely is one look especially for people who are part of that
identity. It's like a signifier. It's just like, oh, man, why can't you extend that to me, even the most boring looking person on the planet?

As they discuss, there are signifiers, particularly masculine ones, that signal to others that one does not identify as a woman in the women’s environment such as short hair, a “boyish” figure (meaning no curves in the chest, waist, and hip area), masculine or “men’s” clothing, using testosterone, wearing binders or having undergone top surgery, and changing one’s name to a neutral name. Carter (he or they), for example, explained that they were originally given a neutral name by their parents, but changing it to another neutral name was important to convey their masculinity: “[My first year] I was still going by my birth name, which is technically a gender neutral name, but when you grow up with it in a gendered way, it like, doesn't really feel like that.” Others such as jazmine (any pronouns) and Asher B. (she or they) described how some aspects of their bodily comportment restricted any possibility for them to be seen as masculine, and therefore trans* on campus. During our interview in a local coffee shop, for example, jazmine grabbed both breasts with their hands, shook them, and said,

Not that other people don't, but I don't have any dysphoria. I enjoy my tits, I love them! I mean of course there are times when I'm like “You guys should go away” but it's not to the extent of being dysphoric about them... But it's very hard to find other non-binary people are feeling the same way. I feel like there is a certain way to be non-binary or trans* masculine on campus and it's just hard in general to navigate that because I don't know, I think you really get to explore your identity when you're surrounded by other people who are also exploring it in the same way they are exploring it. I haven't really been able to explore that side of masculinity because … I definitely don't feel like anyone on campus is exploring it in the same way that I am. I don't feel like really trans* or non-
binary because I can always fall back on my femininity and a lot of people don't have the luxury of doing but at the same time it's still hard.

Describing “not feeling trans* enough” jazmine evokes the queerarchy in the sense that there are particular forms of embodiment that are more valued than others; those that are considered more “stable” in their embodiment—even if that is not the whole case, and rather they are more “stuck” due to intersecting barriers such as class or race—become invisible on campus. Asher B. (she or they) explained

When I went to Minerva, I was actually very masculine presenting. The reason that I picked femme was 1) because I do not wish to have any medical transitioning done, if any. That thought has been kind of ruminating, it's been going back and forth. The only thing that I really would wish to get at this point might be top surgery, don't know yet. Um, and 2) femme stuff, it's prettier. They always say like, you're either a plaid gay or a floral gay. I definitely identify as a floral gay. So, it was just a lot easier for me to not only get stuff that I liked to wear but also that was *more likely to fit me and my body*. I also identify, I keep forgetting identities I just want to throw out. I also am fat, and I identify as fat and so it's a lot easier to find clothing that fits my body type that is more likely going to be at like regular chain stores rather than having to order it offline.

(emphasis mine)

Consequently, for trans* femme students such as Hannah, jazmine, and Asher, as well as myself, while femme is a valid queer identity, and is particularly a valued identity by the institution because it upholds its image as a college for women, it is not valued or seen as queer by students in an already feminine community. Rather, in the words of Nell (they/them), it is the “rejection
of femininity [that is] inherently a part of transness and a rejection of things that are perceived as feminine.”

In between the two ends of the queerarchy located a major area of contest, wherein inclusion was more fluid for students who did not clearly fit within either category. Students who straddled different aspects of their identity, such as butch lesbians, queer students of color with lighter complexes, and more gender non-conforming individuals were located in this grey area, wherein their social inclusion varied widely. Ezra (they or he), for example, grappled with visibility throughout the year, questioning how their own sense of gender presentation and identity mapped onto social conventions of transness on campus. As we would meet for dinner each week, he would update me weekly about other students who had recently come out and how they had the means to throw away the entire contents of their closet when they came out and purchase a whole new wardrobe as well as pay for top surgery, which Ezra had been working up to for years. As Ezra described, “They bought all the binders overnight. And here I am trying to make my old clothes work.” Ezra’s style, which had been described by others as “edgy” and “goth adjacent” for their fusion of masculine and feminine in their presentation including dyed hair, elaborate jewelry, and a playful mix of tops and skirts, made it difficult for many to place him in a “gender box,” but at the same time could still easily be recognized as not woman. As they described,

I just think it's funny now, anytime I do something a little bit, not the normal way, like I'll say, "My god, we're queering wearing brooches today folks." And it goes over really well. It's a funny joke. So, I figured out how to turn it into a joke, but I don't really understand it. There’s a very specific [look]... I just have a big, big fear of like, do people think I'm attractive as perceiving me from like a male direction of gender? Or do they
think I'm attractive because I look like a funky lesbian? Which is not true. And like it's fundamentally not like a cool thing to think.

Generally, Ezra felt that Athena was a safe place for them to be able to express, explore, and “fuck” with gender. But at the same time, they recognized that there was some sort of unspoken rule regarding gender norms on campus wherein their social and erotic capital depended upon his gender presentation.

Assuming a domino theory of queerness, the queerarchy presents a rather fluid line that stands between acceptably queer and unacceptably queer to even not queer or too queer. What is queered then is not just sex/gender on campus, but also notions of what trans*, womanhood, and even what queer are, as structured by notions of who is perceived to be safe and welcomed on campus. As a result of this queerarchy, for those students who were not seen as a part of the institutional community, those that walked this line, and especially those who were determined to be doing transness “wrong” on campus were placed at higher risk for further marginalization and violence on campus. I now turn to some of the hardest writing that I’ll do in this dissertation. Take care, dear reader, as this is not easy to read.

Violence

A prevalent discourse in the small, but growing, body of literature on trans* college students is the violence, isolation, fear, and hatred they face on campus (Nicolazzo 2017). Previous reports have found that trans* students in higher education experience heightened rates of harassment (78%), social exclusion (69%), and assault (35%) due to their gender identity and presentation than their gender conforming cisgender peers (Grant et al. 2011; James et al. 2016; 67

Please note that there is a reading content warning for this next section dealing with transphobia, sexual assault, police violence, administrative violence, drug and alcohol consumption, and physical abuse.
Rankin et al. 2010). As I began this project, I initially wanted to examine the administrative violence that trans* students experienced on campus, focusing on the barriers set up in the admission policies and resources that formally are meant to include them. I did not want the focus of my research to contribute to the discursive and disciplinary understanding of trans* identity to be that of a deficit model wherein trans* students are the problem, but rather it is the institutional structures that make trans* lives administratively unlivable on campus. The more and more I spent time on campus, especially with students who did not seem to fit the transformative ideal within the queerarchy, I noticed how easily administratively unlivable lives could become physically unlivable lives, and how such physically unlivable lives were administratively unlivable. As Spade (2015: xiii) writes, “The impact of these conditions ranges across subpopulations of trans people: even those with class privilege, education, white privilege, US citizenship, physical and mental ability perceived as average or above, and English-language skills experience many of these hurdles… The most marginalized trans* people experience more extreme vulnerability, in part because more aspects of their lives are directly controlled by legal and administrative systems of domination… that employ rigid gender binaries.” As I conducted my research and began organizing themes into chapters, it became clear to me that in many ways, all trans* students experience administrative barriers on campus, from difficulty accessing admission to shortcomings in support systems on campus. These were all very real forms of discursive and symbolic violence that served to (re)enforce gender norms. And still, some students experienced heightened rates of physical violence through the unequal intersecting life chances as set up in these norms. This leads us to think not about trans* student violence as an individual experience, but rather of how systems of power work through subjection and control
to interrogate the empty promises of “equality” and “inclusion” promoted in these policies. Allow me to share Devon’s story, which I quote at length.

I was introduced to Devon (they/them) as a “person I should absolutely speak to for my project” through my campus sponsor at Athena, who had Devon as a student in class the year prior. After a series of bounced-back emails and months of no reply, Devon finally responded and asked that we meet at the local diner because they did not feel comfortable meeting anywhere on campus. We sat at a small round table in the back along the wall, where the track lighting didn’t quite reach the table, allowing us to sit in a warm glow surrounded by the sounds of silverware and plates clanging and instrumental experimental jazz playing over the sound system. As with all my interviews, I offered to buy Devon a small treat or coffee for their time, upon which they asked if they could order a meal. After I happily obliged, they ordered an orange juice and a plate of scrambled eggs, toast, and orange slices. Throughout the interview, Devon took long pauses to shovel down mouthfuls of food and thoroughly chew, taking longer periods to eat than to talk. As I came to find out, this was their first full meal that week. It was Thursday.

Devon’s route to college was not unlike that of their peers—Devon was an exceptionally bright scientist and talented athlete who was recruited for a varsity team at Athena. Devon made friends early in their first year and landed a campus job in student housing that paid for room and board. And yet, as Devon came into their identity as non-binary, things quickly turned south, describing their experience as one steeped in “institutionalized transphobia:”

I guess it started with my team. I had a lot of shitty things happen just between the team. I had a team member who, I worked for reslife and there was just this unfortunate incident that happened, and I was not supported by my coaches or team at all… I was shutting down someone's birthday party or whatever. It was under-age and not registered and extremely loud and that person happened to be on my team and an ex-friend. And that person was friends with the house president and that house president was extremely drunk. Everyone
was drunk there, and they harassed me and were making comments about my appearance and a lot of like shit that's just very not okay to do. And also, as like a non-binary person who's like struggling with their own self-image. It was just very shitty, and I ended up staying over at my assistant coach's apartment that night because I was suicidal. The coaches ended up suspending the person on the team. [The coach] had said multiple times “This behavior is absolutely unacceptable, and I don’t want this on my team.” They didn't address the team about this person or about what had happened. And then they end up giving [the suspended teammate] the coach’s award at the end of the year.

And then... I had established a very close relationship with this person who was also on the team and then we kind of got together ‘cause they, they had a huge crush on me. They had never kissed a queer person. And they kind of used me in a not so great way, but that was my only friend from the team. Yeah. So that was really painful.

And then I ended up wanting to quit the team because I didn't feel like I was being supported as an athlete or a person. I ended up having a face to face conversation with [my coach]. Before that, I think probably three or four other people from my class had quit the team and had only emailed her, so I was like, I have to make sure that I have an in-face conversation. And I was like, “[Coach], I want to let you know that I'm quitting, I know you can’t understand that, but I want to start taking testosterone, and I can’t compete obviously.” And that was an extremely difficult conversation for me because sports have been a part of my life since I was two and a huge part of my identity was being an athlete, and to not only have to quit the team that I loved and the sport that I loved, but have to do it to make that decision of like, “Okay, I need to figure out my identity stuff here.” That was extremely hard. And then instead of being a supportive person, she actually got up and yelled at me, this was outside the gym, and she said how she spent so much time and effort in me, that I wouldn't have gotten into Athena if it wasn’t for her...and she got up and left. [Later that evening] she sent me an email saying “I expect a written explanation as to why my number one athlete quit, and I will be sending this to your teammates, other coaches, assistant coaches, other head coaches and the administration as to the number one athlete left.” And so, I wrote that and sent it to them, and I ended up reading it in front of my entire team as well while crying.

But you move on and you do things with your life. So yeah, that happened, and then from there started the isolation. Because I didn’t have my team, they were my friends and family.

So that summer I had gotten Potato [Devon’s emotional support dog]. I adopted her from a shelter, and I submitted all the paperwork but it hadn't gone through and so they put me on probation. And I'm fairly close with the people in res life, so they felt that they- they said that they needed to put me on probation to not show favoritism, which makes sense. I was still kind of bitter because I was like, I had my fucking paperwork. But then, I think it was like all within one week that I had been disowned by my grandma and she like told me

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68 The NCAA (2010) policy for transgender athletes states that while participation in intercollegiate athletics is a valuable part of the education experience for all students and that transgender student-athletes should have equal opportunity to participate in sports, “The integrity of women’s sports should be preserved.” Therefore trans* masculine athletes who receive testosterone treatments are no longer eligible to compete on a women’s team. Trans* feminine athletes may compete on the women's team after one year of taking testosterone suppressants. See Griffin and Carrol (2010), Griffin (2012), Pape (2017), and Skinner-Thompson and Turner (2013).
all this shit about mental illness and how it wasn't a thing, she doesn’t believe in homophobia, homophobia, can’t say that. Homo, homo, the homos. So that was upsetting.

But then another student who was in my house had been like flirting with me and in a span of four days was very transphobic to me, asking a lot of extremely personal questions. Like taking my binder off, asking about if I pack, just stuff you don't ask somebody, especially if you don’t know them… Not a very positive relationship at all. We had been talking about previous relationships and I had noticed they were only seeing trans* masc people. I didn't call them a chaser, but I brought it up as like being like, “Are you aware of this? This is a thing. And now I'm feeling kind of objectified because you’re, like, doing some things to me that I don't really like.” And she flipped out and then I flipped out and I was like, “I have to leave because you hooked up with somebody who I really don't like, and I think he’s really toxic.” And so, I left… She went to res life and said, “I’m reporting this person and I feel uncomfortable blah blah blah.” So, I got fired, well not fired, but I left, and I got moved to [a new hall] and so I was really isolated. Didn’t have my team. Didn’t have my res life team who I was really connected to and there was no house community, and there’s a lot of transphobic shit that’s happened... I literally had no friends, which is bad… That's when things really took a downturn…

One night I just started drinking a lot and that led me to my first hospital stay. I was in the hospital for 17 days... and then I came back for two weeks and within those two weeks I ended up having a really bad altercation with campo [campus police]. I had been drinking and I was going to go back to my friend’s apartment… I had gotten into [a campus police] officer’s car and asked can I have a ride to [another building on campus] because it was like a mile away and I was drunk, and it was cold. And he was like, he didn’t believe I was an Athena student because I had been on T since last October, it was probably like five months or so or four months, so he didn't believe that I was a student. He made me show my student ID like five times throughout the ride. And then he passed the lot. And when I get really uncomfortable, I start to laugh and he thought that I was kidding, that I was suicidal, and he was like “You’re on something, stop fucking with me.” He literally was like “Stop fucking with me. What are you doing, what are you doing here?” So, he called another campo person because he thought I was suicidal and they called an ambulance and I got a little combative with them because I really didn’t like that the officer was using she/her pronouns for me after I said my pronouns and he misgendered me. And there was another campo officer who was making fun of me and so I kicked his car. And then they held me down, forced me into the ambulance. I had bruises all down my arm because the officer was on this side and the other officer on this side and I got to the hospital, and they forced a catheter and all I remember is screaming and them like putting me on suicide watch and me begging them not to do it. It was very traumatic… That was something, the worst 10 days of my life.

Devon went on for another 20 minutes, detailing the twists and turns of their forced hospital stay, only to be followed by a second stay days after their initial release that led to them being drugged without consent or knowledge (and after disclosing an addiction to drugs and
alcohol), and was sexually harassed by another patient. Additionally, Devon’s doctor refused to provide them with testosterone because they were considered “too aggressive” and was eventually roomed, after their time in isolation, within the women’s wing.

At the time of our interview, Devon had moved back to Telford after a month-long outpatient treatment program and was in-between jobs. Currently in a bad housing and roommate situation and behind in paying bills, Devon was struggling to make ends meet. As they told me, “I’ve just had a lot of trust and betrayal stuff happen.” The only sign of relief for Devon was a single advocate from the residence life office: “I don't think I would have survived the past year because [the employee] has been there for me a lot. They were the only one who visited and helped me through just literally getting out of there because [the doctors] wouldn't let me.” Additionally, only by pure luck, Athena backdated their medical withdrawal to before the extended hospital stay so that they were able to be refunded a significant portion of that semester’s tuition and fees.

Devon’s situation was not the first nor only of its kind. In fact, just weeks later Josh (he/him) had a similar experience—harassed, deadnamed, misgendered, and assaulted by the very same campus police officer and forcibly institutionalized in the local hospital. Like Devon, Josh was told that he “didn’t seem like a student at Athena” at first because of his passing masculinity. Throughout my year with Josh, while he only hinted aspects of his story to me, in part because it was too difficult and in part because he had blocked it out, it created a lasting impact wherein he attempted suicide twice. I will never forget that day where he called me asking to pick him up from an inpatient stay a state away after the second attempt—I had only spoken with him the day before about doing some archival work together. The experience weighed on him, and yet he felt so isolated on campus because he stood out. He hated attending
the campus support group because, as he said, they were all “baby trans*” and non-binary, none of which related to him. Josh kept to himself most of the time if not attending an event with his boyfriend, rehearsing for the school play, or working. He wanted community, he wanted to be around other guys, but felt that there were none.

Multiple students such as Luca, Violet, Issac, Owen, and Felix shared stories about instances when trans* students’ appearances, identities, and demeanors did not seem to fit the institutional image, leading to moments of isolation and violence on campus. As Carter (they or he), who was hypervisible on campus due to their race and gender presentation to the point of being “hypersexualized” and “fetishized,” explained,

[One of the reasons people go to women’s college because] historically women’s colleges are like safer when it comes to like sexual assault... [But it’s] honestly a problem when it comes to talking about sexual assault at Athena, because sexual assault does happen at Athena. As somebody who has been sexually assaulted at Athena, I was sexually assaulted by a femme person. And that was a huge reason why I did not report. Because I was really afraid of what it meant for me as a trans* masculine person to say like, this femme person assaulted me. There's no social protocol for that. There’s a feeling of a lack of support in that scenario and all of this is complicated by the fact that femininity is absolutely devalued on campus. If you're a femme person, if you're a femme queer person, like you have to, you're expected to do so much more work to not be erased by the community.

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69 This is, generally speaking, consistent with cis men’s experiences with sexual assault. See Curry (2019), Marine (2017), and Tillapaugh (2017).
Meanwhile, Alfa Nich (he/him) detailed multiple run-ins with administrators and employees who continually told him he “was not a student.” After an incident on campus where students reported him to campus police for matching the description of an “unwanted male stalker” on campus because he was masculine presenting and tended to smoke outside his own building late at night, he decided it was time to get a new student ID that matched his new name and presentation. And yet, he was denied the opportunity because he could not afford it:

At that point I wanted an ID card that didn't have my face from when I was an 18-year-old girl on it. Getting a new ID card costs, for voluntary reasons, $50. I didn’t have $50. Most days I barely had $15. If you were on a certain amount of financial aid percentage, you were supposed to get that fee waived once a year… The ID office man denied any knowledge of the idea, denied any knowledge of financial aid granting a new free one card to a student and refused to consult his records, refused to call financial aid and ask financial aid. Financial aid [also] wouldn't call [the ID office] to be like, we're sending Alfa over now, give him his ID card. He told me, “you're also not a student, so I'm not going to be tricked.” And I was like, “Would you just look it up using the ID card number, I can show you a New York state ID with my face on it, and this name.”, I was routinely getting told I wasn't a student and therefore I couldn’t have an ID card, I couldn’t take advantage of some program that was being offered. And when I would attempt to prove to people by showing them an ID card they'd say, well that doesn't exactly look like you anymore.

Interview after interview, participant after participant, I heard stories just like these about insurmountable barriers, placing students at risk because they do not “look like a student.” Even after the admission policy had changed, and even before, trans* students are formally included
and recognized on campus, but because their faces and names and documentation do not match that of the admission pamphlet, trans* students were thrown to the wayside by the institution, treated as a problem that can be ignored.

I share these stories especially, quoted at length, not because they are the most extreme example of transphobia and violence on campus. As Carter (they or he) stated, “It’s not cool to be transphobic”—most instances of transphobia and trans* violence were underground, as it was the norm on campus to at least outwardly express neutrality towards trans* inclusion. As others have noted, in many ways, trans* exclusionary discourse has recently become reinvigorated with the advent of online community spaces (Earles 2017), and gender-selective women’s colleges are no different. Especially given the age of these students—first years who were, much to my chagrin, born in 2000—the student population was largely one that is brought up using media and digital platforms as a primary form of communication. As a result, most trans* violence resorted to online forums such as one called the “Unofficial Record” where students are able to speak openly and candidly, often on taboo subjects, under the guise of anonymity. Students must have a university .edu email address or be on the institutional Wi-Fi, though the campus has no ownership, oversight, or power to regulate the forum. Consequently, this can also cause problems wherein students may express not only unpopular opinions, but possibly harmful ones—and the campus does not have the ability to track down or stop such bullying. Harry S. (he/him) explained, “There is transphobia here but it's good that it's kept under wraps at least. I mean I'm not gonna lie and say it doesn't happen. At least it's consigned to the Unofficial Record. Oh God, I never go on because it's just, it's, it's a hell hole. It's garbage.” Josh (he/him), on the other hand, was a particular fan of the record, though rarely posting, often reading it during down times for its drama and sending me screenshots of particularly interesting exchanges. Some
topics included: “Athena is a woman’s college, and I love all of my sisters here, even the ones with gender dysphoria;” “Why is it transphobic for someone to say ‘I don’t believe biological males... are women’?”; and “The trans agenda is regressive and it’s misogynistic to say that women don’t have the capacity to feel things that men (trans women) feel.” As Carter explained, If you think that there's not racial resentment and gender related resentment at this college, go on the Unofficial Record. Literally, you don't have to scroll to the second page. Just the first page, those sentiments exist, and it doesn't really matter the percentage. Like they do exist here, and they manifest in a lot of small like micro ways and macro ways too, right? So, part of it is like “How do people feel about the idea of trans* people being admitted to Athena? How do people feel about trans* people asking for space at Athena? How do people feel about when students of color bring up racism that's in the classroom?” The kind of like gaslighting of like, “Maybe you're just reading too much into this” or like the kind of general resentment of like, “Well why do students of color get to like, blah blah blah blah blah. Like isn't that just like different treatment? Like aren't we all the same?” kind of like that kind of energy I think is very prevalent at Athena.

Regardless of the anonymity of such posts, the fact, Carter argues, is that they are there. Students are able to read them. And because of the anonymity of the posts, trans* students are thus unable to know where they can be safe on campus, unsure if those making such comments are in their classes, across the hall, in their friend group, or their roommate.

I share these experiences of violence on campus to explain that even in “inclusive” environments committed to diversity and challenging gender inequality, such formal commitments may not be lived in reality, nor are they mutually exclusive from being exclusive
spaces. Everywhere students looked, they were exposed to discursive and physical reminders that these campuses were not meant for them, that their inclusion was resisted and ignored by administration, that they did not fully belong. Noting that this violence was experienced differently along the lines of gender, race, and class, at some level, these campuses were hostile towards any form of difference that challenged the unity and mission of the college.

I also do not mean to suggest that trans* students’ experiences on campus can only be understood in terms of violence and isolation. In fact, at the time of this writing, many of these students are doing well. I drove Josh (he/him) to the hospital for top surgery during my fall follow-up visit and he is preparing to apply to math PhD programs in the fall. Carter is thriving at their new position at an educational non-profit for low income students of color. Luca is considering multiple job offers and Owen is happily in graduate school. Violet was able to be placed in the Latinx housing community and has become the “life of the party” amongst their new friends. In many ways, as I discuss in the next chapter, these students figured out how to survive and thrive on campus; despite these institutional barriers (see Nicolazzo 2017 on trans* student resilience as a verb). While others, such as Devon, have continued to struggle due to lack of support and recognition of these barriers as part of the larger institutional structure.70 As such, these narratives detail the compounding effects of institutional and social barriers to inclusion for

70 I had originally written on March 8, 2020, “I am happy to announce that Devon is now in a much better place emotionally, mentally, and socially. They found a new residence where they feel safe, and they are re-enrolled at Athena, set to graduate in 2021.” On March 9, 2020, I found out via a Facebook post by the one advocate that Devon had named, that they had returned to an in-patient facility for the next two months and this advocate was looking for someone to care for their emotional support dog. As an ethnographer, this demonstrates in many ways the struggles and continued barriers these students face without institutional recognition and support. I am absolutely devastated for Devon. I spent the morning crying just as I had after our interview, in a mourning of sorts, worried about Devon and what is to come. Mad that I couldn’t be and haven’t been there for them. I considered taking out their story as a sign of respect for their struggles. Devon’s experiences are tragic, but Devon is more than all of this. I want to make sure that I humanize them and show that they are a full person with dreams and hopes and friends and love and interests and talents. I don’t want Devon’s story, or anyone’s story for that matter, to only be about their violence. But then I remembered them saying that stories like these need to be told because the institution doesn’t want them to be shared. So I leave Devon’s story here, while I note that it is still ongoing.
trans* students *despite formal commitments. Athletics, Title IX, student affairs and housing, health services and counseling services, academics, administrative systems, student employment, and campus police all play an integral role in Devon’s experience of isolation, just as it does for Josh, Luca, Carter, Owen, and Violet. Trans* students are failed by a host of offices, employees, and support systems with a snowball effect—all on account of how their trans* identity intersects with other axes of vulnerability—that then leave them isolated and vulnerable on campus both within the trans* community and the institution as a whole. As Diamond et al. (2015:4) write, “A policy on transgender admission alone, while critically important for institutions of higher learning to have, cannot change the rampant transphobia and cissexism in education systems and society. Education and properly instituted safety measures are vital for a healthy campus community.” For those especially on the margins, written out of policy and unable—or uninterested—in conforming to transformative expectations on campus, open gates can lead to broken promises. Therefore, the solution lies not in just opening more gates, but thinking about how these norms and structures are ingrained in everyday life and centering those that they impact the most.
CHAPTER 6: BUILDING BRIDGES

A small group of students, employees, and faculty members gathered in a classroom in one of the academic buildings at Athena. Overlooking the main academic quad, watching others file to other buildings to attend events as food trucks line the drive to set up for lunch, we sat at desks pushed together to form tables as the workshop facilitators called our attention to our inner selves with the sound of a gong.

All of us were attending a workshop regarding art and the healing process, as it was Athena’s Day of Inclusion, a declared day of learning, workshops, performances, and reflection regarding diversity and inclusion on campus. With the ringing of the gong echoing through our reflective silence, we were given a prompt to use the available craft supplies to envision an inclusive Athena. That’s it. No further instructions. My group, consisting of 1 student and 2 staff members and myself, decided to each draw what about Athena made us feel at home on a large sheet of paper laid in front of us. Up in the corner, I wrote out our prompt, using my nicest cursive, “When I think of Athena, I think of…” and surrounded it with a cloud-shaped bubble of green glitter glue and the words, “and I hope all Athenians can enjoy and have happy memories of our home.” I drew images of various campus traditions both formal and informal, from an apple to represent the fall celebration day and an ivy plant for graduation to a milkshake for the students’ usual late-night snack in the campus center. My pictures were then connected by embroidery string glued to the paper, moving from my drawings to my partners’ to represent the interconnectedness of each of our experiences, with the staff members drawing kids playing with soccer balls to call attention to how families are connected to the institution and books labeled “our stories: the past, the present, the future” to have us think about the academic and the social. In the top right corner, the student attached a sheet of paper and drew various campus buildings.
from the chapel to the lake (complete with a duck floating) to call our attention to the mixture of both physical and natural beauty on campus.

After about 45 minutes, we were encouraged to walk around the room and look at other groups’ posters. One group drew a large tree to represent the trunk and roots as the structure of the institution and the leaves as changing culture and knowledge; another group used construction paper to build 3D representations of campus buildings and trees; while a third thought more concretely and diagramed a model of identity that documented a circular pattern of fears, cliques, growth and failure, collaboration, and self-reflection. The poster that stood out most to me, however, was a fourth group, which, arguably had one of the most simplistic posters in the room (see Figure E). On a sheet of large pink paper, the group members drew an entanglement of lines and placed origami around the drawing. On the side located two pieces of paper and a drawing of a bridge. The papers read:

*Gate ——> Bridge*

*Gate ——> Bridge*

*A gate can be opened to provide access, but we envision beyond this to full inclusion ——*

> *multiple paths through campus*

*Inclusion vs. accessibility*

- *Our symbol of a closed gate is not one of inclusion*
- *Even an open gate is not accessible for everyone*
- *Using a bridge and paths allows everyone to show their different paths of life*
- *Shows that we are an open & welcoming community*

A bridge! I thought. In so many ways, in quotes and imagery throughout the year, both campuses were hyperfocused on their gates. Gates are literally at the front of both Athena and Minerva’s property used to keep someone out as well as someone in, which is further reflected in their logos, communicating the idea that there is a boundary to the institution. Gates are barriers. Even when they are opened just a slight bit, say, for transgender students, they can still be shut for others: “*Even an open gate is not accessible for everyone*” as the poster stated. A bridge on the
other hand, as the poster creators explained, provides an accessible path over the barrier, allowing all to enter and take different paths to success.

Finding the Movement

That spring served as a particularly important moment during my field work, as some would suggest, hitting “research gold.” Tired and frustrated of secrets and barriers, broken promises and violence, students at both Minerva and Athena organized, protested, and demanded better from their institutions. As the community art session would suggest, these students found ways to build bridges in their communities, reaching out towards one another. While in many ways the violence and exclusion described in the preceding chapter was experienced at both institutions, this community work is really where these two campuses diverged. Students at Athena felt emboldened to directly fight the institution, taking over the Day of Inclusion and organizing a sit-in with a list of student demands. Students at Minerva, however, were more doubtful and distrustful of the possibility that the administration would ever change, leading students to do this work internally, taking care of their communities outside of the reach of the institution.

Thinking of Nicolazzo’s (2017) notions of resilience as a verb, kinship networks, and application of trickle-up activism and Spade’s (2015) counter-institutional mutual aid, wherein marginalized students must be at the center of their liberation, in this section, I draw upon these community organizing efforts to discuss how we may build bridges and repair the promises that have been broken. As a result, I highlight the strategies trans* students have developed and employed to overcome individual and structural trans* oppression in these environments, building community along the way, whether or not they recognize it as resilient, and how such strategies can be centered in struggles for liberation.
A Deliberate Protest

After the collective art session, I made my way to eat lunch with Ezra (they or he), who I ran into right outside the building. Sitting at a table eating our lunch, we watched the long lines at the food trucks and talked about the ongoing student protests. Things were generally tense on campus, as a number of student groups were organizing to make a list of student demands (see Figure F). The Day of Inclusion, as the protest posters plastered around campus described, was a hoax. All a show for the institution to point to in order to say that they did something, even if, in reality, they did very little. Evoking notions of nonperformativity, wherein claiming inclusion stood in for, rather than bringing about, inclusion, the protesters highlighted how reality does not pre-exist its relations (Haraway 2003). Marginalized students were the ones volunteering to put together panels, laboring on this day of learning to teach the majority about minority experiences on campus, and having to add yet another item on their busy to-do lists while the institution got all the credit without changing the overall daily practices on campus except during this one-day event.

Ezra and I talked specifically about the organizing efforts of trans* students, led by Nell, Carter, Blue, and Milo, of whom Ezra was friends with many. We questioned why other trans* students were hesitant about the protests and the reinstatement of the registered transgender student organization which had been dormant for nearly five years. As one anonymous student on the Unofficial Record had stated, the trans* demands detracted from the focus on students of color and that “trans* students generally have it pretty okay on campus.” Discussing this with Ezra, we noted how it was white trans* students who were at the center of creating the trans* demands, and that the anonymous student poster’s point was to center students of color—including trans* students of color. We talked about the racial tensions that arose within the
notion of a trans* community on campus, wherein whiteness becomes invisible and assumed in such spaces. Indeed, as the preamble to the demands read: “The image of womanhood perpetuated at this college is deeply connected to racist and classist understandings of gender and is intricately connected to the oppression faced by cisgender students of color and poor students. In solidarity with the movements of students of color organizing against racism; poor students organizing against classism; undocumented students organizing against state violence; trans, non-binary, and GNC students are voicing the needs of our communities.” The demands gave a nod to the notion that womanhood is connected with racial and classed understandings of gender, and yet, the demands go on to separate the need of trans* students from these other communities, once again creating a flattening effect wherein to be trans* is to be white, and thus the needs of trans* students are not understood through racial or classed lenses. Carter, who attended the first organizing meeting for trans* students, but was one of two people of color in the room, explained,

People don't think about identity in an intersectional way. And so, everything is kind of like, students of color are students of color, so none of them are trans*. Trans* students are trans*, so none of them are students of color… Like I think that as a person of color, I identify my transness within being a person of color. And I think about the trans* community, when there have been like trans* support groups and stuff like that, those spaces have been incredibly white. Even when we were working on the trans* demands for the protests, I think I was one of like two trans* people in the room who were of color. And I think that kind of speaks to the way that people think about trans* community at Athena, is they think about it as being very white.
As Carter leads us to think, the construction of identity-based demands (as well as those who were at the table making such demands) constructs flattened, unidimensional notions of community on campus. Trans* students are trans* and students of color are students of color, thereby leaving no room in the imaginary for trans* students of color.

After I left lunch, I joined Josh in a small seminar room in the social sciences building. The room was meant to fit only 15-20 people around a large rectangular table that filled most of the space. Nearly 50 trans* and non-binary identified students, staff, and faculty who all came to be in community together sat in the room. This was the first space on campus that year that was formally designated for trans* people only. At the time of these conversations, I had been doing this research for nearly 8-months, spoken with over 100 people, and still did not know most of the people in that room. And that was the general consensus of others. They were so happy to be in that shared space and yet articulated a sadness that in many ways they were so isolated from one another on campus. It felt, as one person described, trans* people were everywhere on campus, ingrained into the daily life and yet erased from the institutional image so that it felt that they were nowhere to be found. And yet, this does not suggest that all trans* people were present in that space. Those in the room overwhelmingly white and masculine, as other events were co-occurring on class diversity as well as two panel conversations on race, thus making trans* students of color and low-income students have to choose which identity was more salient and which community space they should be in. Thus, the formal designation of a trans* autonomous space became, yet again, a white trans* space.

After the gathering, a number of changes happened for trans* community in a matter of weeks: a trans* listserv was created for students to connect and share information about events and resources with one another, the institution heard about the overwhelmingly positive feedback
about the gathering and asked the organizer to continue holding similar spaces throughout the year, a trans* buddy program started where older students and alumni adopt a younger student to encourage and support them throughout the year, and the room collaboratively created a list of ideas and goals for what a truly trans* inclusive Athena would look like that then were incorporated into the student demands delivered to the administration the following day. But because so many voices were missing from the room, these demands in many ways did not reflect the needs of those who were left out of the trans* community. As Carter (they or he) continued,

I think part of being a person of color is that I have different priorities when I think about demands. So, like, some of the demands I was like, I see why this is important, but this does not matter to me. Things like changing all pronouns on the Athena College website to be inclusive, like I don't really care about that. Honestly, they can keep their she/her pronouns on the website... I think it's difficult when you're talking about trans* issues to talk about them in ways that intersect with issues for people of color, like I think it's hard for that to, it's, I think it's difficult to make that coherent in the demands for a lot of people. A lot of people don't know what that language is supposed to look like. Like how do we, how do we do that aside from being, like prioritize, like writing in every demand, like prioritizing trans* people of color. I think that that is something that again, gets back to this thing of Athena's whiteness.

Noting that pronouns and language create visibility and room for trans* presence, a concern for the predominantly white trans* community on campus, what is at greater stake is the very livability of trans* students of color on campus. Rendered invisible both by their institution and
the trans* community, what becomes imagined as trans* inclusion does not fully include all
trans* students.

An Open Community

Across the way over at Minerva, students were also gathering that spring, but in very
different capacities. The same day that I sat in the basement at Athena helping craft student
demands, a student from Minerva shared on Facebook news of a police related event listed on
the campus calendar that was not made public knowledge to the campus community. The
concern was that the event was 1) kept secret from students due to the administration’s
recognition of its problematic practices, and therefore desire to “sweep it under the rug” 2) the
very real threat of violence that queer, trans*, and communities of color have faced by police—
noting that these communities are overlapping and often inseparable—especially since the event
was to be held in a building next door to the residence halls that were home to the student of
color and LGBTQ+ living learning communities. Luca (he or they) clued me into the events on
campus and asked me to join him and a small group of students that were meeting in a residence
hall that night to come up with a strategy on how to proceed. In the hours leading up to the
meeting, a conservative right-wing internet troll had created a fake Facebook profile and was
able to join various Minerva Facebook groups for students, which happens to play upon trans*-
exclusionary fears of men pretending to be women in these spaces as a form of violence against
(cis) women. And yet, most violence was incited upon trans* students, wherein the troll
published personal information—including pictures and addresses—of various students who had
spoken out against the event, deadnaming trans* students, and made fun of their weight and

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71 A graduation for the local police academy was to be held in a rented building on campus. The event was
unaffiliated with Minerva.
appearance, and incited their followers to show up on campus with guns and, as one commenter stated, “Target women. Harass women. Attack women.” Though the administration met with the individual students, no public statement was made and the plans for the event continued in full force.

In comparison to the organizing meeting at Athena, the atmosphere at Minerva felt tense, which seemed particularly off-putting given the typical feeling of warmth and friendliness of campus. Luca and I were joined with Felix, Sam D., and about 8 other Minerva students, including those named in the attacks, as we sat on and around the living room couches. Some students online had proposed to protest the event, but those plans were rejected by trans* students and students of color because such public dissent would likely be tense and draw attention to the event and target vulnerable students, giving the trolls exactly what they wished for: opportunities to harm cis women and “prove” trans* students and students of color were violent. The plan was simple; find a way to keep students safe on campus, especially if things began to escalate. A phone tree was formed wherein students were responsible for calling and texting everyone they knew should anything go awry, while the priority was keeping students indoors as much as possible. Since classes were scheduled as normal, yet the police and their family were expected to be walking around campus and able to be in common buildings, the phone tree was also to be used as a “buddy” system, so that should any person not feel safe on campus, they could be partnered with a white or cisgender passing student to walk them to and from class. Safe rooms for students were marked by posters hanging in the window. Additionally, one of the doors to a cultural community center on the edge of campus was going to be propped open, skirting the “staffed hour” rule, and students were going to use the kitchen space to provide food and shelter all day so that students could have access to meals without
having to go to the large dining commons. As Luca kept repeating, pounding one fist into their open palm, “I’ll lay my body on the line. This is war. No one is getting to any of us.”

The next day, I returned to campus to be of any support I could be, especially as I had a car and could easily get people off campus if needed. I had a lunch scheduled with Violet (all pronouns except she), who asked that I meet them at his hall to walk to the restaurant together. I asked about the morning’s events, to which Violet replied that things were surprisingly calm. White and cisgender students listened to their trans* and peers of color’s requests and did not protest the event, while marginalized students remained indoors, making Minerva’s campus seem even whiter and straighter than before. As we ate, Violet asked to sit with their back to the wall so they could keep an eye on a family that had obviously come from the event, and as we finished eating, they asked that we stay seated until after the group left. “You just never know,” Violet said, “You can never be too careful.”

Perhaps because I was experiencing both incidents at the campuses simultaneously, the events that transpired over the course of 48 hours could not have been more different from one another. Students at Athena were upfront and combative, making demands and using their bodies to take over the physical space of campus after the Day of Inclusion. Minerva students, who had been directly threatened, were quiet, secretive, but no less effective, taking caution to care for their communities. When I talked with Luca about this series of events later on, he described to me the notion of *community care*, wherein students became so distrustful of the institution due to broken promise after broken promise—especially in an environment wherein *all students* were told that they belonged and were wanted—that they had to find ways outside of the institution's reach to take care of one another. Rather, they found support in one another, reappropriating
institutional systems and resources to create community networks of mutual aid and ensure one another’s safety.

After the tense events on Minerva’s campus, the sense of trans* community on campus appeared, on the surface, to once again fizzle out and fade from view. Students returned to their daily lives, focusing on final exams and end-of-the-year celebrations. In some ways, this was because of a feeling of disappointment, yet again, that the institution was willing to put trans* students at risk. In other ways, this was because as the students were organizing, they came to the realization that they were unarmed to take the institution on—using Luca’s war metaphor—without a sense of institutional memory on campus. Trans* students were vaguely aware of previous debates and protests on campus, but those memories were not passed on to younger classes as older students graduated, thus restarting the process all over again. In a similar vein, these memories remained siloed within the institution, as trans* community remained secretive and invisible from the administration as well as from other trans* students. I came to find out that those whom I met with during the organizing meeting were also members of an unofficial trans* org called “transpace” for trans* identified students, faculty, and staff to gather bi-weekly and just be in community together over lunch. Bec (she or they) explained:

I've gone to transpace a couple of times. It's like trans* people in the community gather. It's like not every week, it's like every couple of weeks. I think the one thing that just like I think is relevant is the fact that it is open to anyone. It's like sometimes faculty come, sometimes some staff from that community will come as well. It's not an official group and they don't want to be official. It's like an intentionally private group. Part of the reason for that is that they don't want Minerva to co-opt it and advertise it themselves and do all that kind of stuff. But at the same time, that makes it difficult to do things like
connecting alumni… [it] would be easier if you had [a] slightly more official presence on campus. The alumni association could probably help with that kind of thing, but they don't want to contact them because of keeping the space kind of sacred… The trans* community and trans* people on campus are definitely trying to build community, which is really cool to see. Because I think that that's something that's not necessarily happening from the administration, but like also maybe not even possible necessarily from the administration. I don't know. In some ways you have to allow people to create the community that they want to have. That makes sense.

Alder (ze/zi r), who was friends with the central organizers, clarified:

The admin knows about us. We kind of wish they didn't, but they definitely do. And that's okay. But we've chosen not to act in an unofficial capacity because we don't want to get bogged down with bureaucracy. Already the health center will reach out to [name redacted] who is one of the main organizers of that space along with [name redacted] and has said, “Hey, can we have the health center talk to you to get feedback?” It's like, well, if you want a focus group, you should first pay us. Also, you've had trans* focus groups so many times. And you know what you've done. You've done nothing with that information. Absolutely nothing but like. Use the data you already have. We don’t want to be spokespeople for the trans* community on campus. That is not our intent. Our intent was to put together something more akin to, not quite a support group, but a space where trans* students, faculty, staff could be together, share experiences, share stories, and have a sense of intergenerational community, which is sorely lacking on this campus.

As Alder and Bec described, transpace was purposely unregistered and undocumented, thereby students could only learn about it via word-of-mouth, to ensure that the administration could not
regulate it or claim to have any part in its existence for marketing benefits. While Alder was almost positive that the administration did know about the organization, the students tried their hardest to keep it underground so that it remained theirs to form community support networks because they knew from previous experiences that the administration would mess it up with institutional bureaucracy and fail to make any real changes in the lives of trans* students.

But as a result of this secrecy, this still rendered it relatively inaccessible to those who felt or were told that they did not belong to the trans* community and thus failed to create a passageway for such institutional memories to be passed down. As Alder described, there was a rumor on campus that transpace was only for white trans* masculine students who were medically transitioning because three of the leaders (though not all) matched that description. Similarly, Finley (they or she) detailed,

Nobody from the trans* community ever reaches out to me. Like nobody ever reaches out and is like “Hey”, because they have trans* get-togethers and they don't advertise them. You have to get invited. They don't like to put flyers up or post on Facebook or anything... I went to like one of them once and it just felt like, to me, it was trans* men. It was trans* men. I only know one trans* woman on the whole campus... I had some unsavory comments made towards me by trans* men assuming that my current identity is like a stepping stone to being a trans* male. People asking me like when do you think you're starting T?...I think that there's definitely people who get erased from it, like femme presenting trans* people do not get invited to things. You need to be like a certain level of androgynous kind of to be welcome to the circle and it sucks so I like don't really participate in the trans* community on campus...I wish there was a space specifically for non-binary gender fluid people on the campus. Because I think trans* men definitely
dominate the space… I think possibly because it's a very unofficial thing. I have friends who seek stuff off campus because the culture here is not for them.

Because news of the organization was word-of-mouth, information about the organization could only be passed to member’s friends or those whom they recognized as trans*. Acknowledging that students often congregate in communities and friendships that are more alike than different, this reproduces trans* spaces as white masculine spaces because all their friends are white trans* masculine who looked like themselves. As a result, certain students, such as Violet (all pronouns except she), felt these spaces remained inaccessible to students like them, even if that was not the intention of the community.

To build bridges on campus is not an easy task. While the majority of transgender students on campus and in this study are white, trans* masculine students, recognizing that they do experience visibility and resistance on campus, this does not suggest that there is one monolithic experience of gender or “transness” on campus. By predicating inclusion on flattened, unidimensional, and singular dimensions of gender, as I show with these examples at Minerva and Athena, even deliberate and community centered efforts can reproduce barriers to inclusion. As such, this leads me to ask where do we go from here? What is the purpose of gender-selective colleges in light of trans* inclusion? How can we envision affirming all students’ gender within a gender-selective environment? It is these questions that I turn to in the next section, not fully answered, but offered up as provocations for moving forwards.

**Overview of Study Findings**

The purpose of this dissertation was to witness and examine what inclusion does; that is, what discourses, practices, and experiences emerge in the day-to-day lives of students as a result of formal, institutional commitments to inclusion. Conducting a nine-month ethnography of a
policy at two gender-selective women’s colleges that have adopted transgender inclusive admission policies, including 126 interviews with students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administrators, attending events on campus with trans* students, analyzing institutional texts, and generally being “present” within these communities, I sought to understand how, if at all, these colleges can go from trans* admitting to trans* serving. Gender-selective colleges are an environment that depend upon gender exclusion to exist, wherein womanhood cannot cease to have meaning. This reality raises the question of if and how institutions can transform to open the gates to, and build bridges for, trans* students.

I first contextualized contemporary trans* inclusion by locating my study within the history of “the woman question” within women’s colleges. I then discussed how these colleges were founded as feminist projects to advance access to a comparable education for women that was denied them at all-men’s institutions. And yet, I highlighted that despite such advocacy for access, the presence and justification for these colleges has always depended upon exclusion of those who were determined to not be the “properly educable woman.” That is, women’s college history can be understood as a form of elite education that was largely primarily restricted to only white and upper-class women. The few Black and lower-class women who attended these colleges in their first few decades were subject to constant institutional exclusion, pushing them to the margins of the community. As access to higher education increased for diverse groups of women, these legacies only continued, however more informally, haunting students with the reminder of who these colleges were meant for.

This provides a historical context in which I situate current discussions surrounding transgender students within women’s colleges, and within longstanding historical debates regarding trans/feminist boundaries and communities more broadly. Examining both the
ostensive and performative functions of women’s colleges as organizations, I took up the question of what women’s colleges say they do (and their purpose) and what they actually do. As Haraway (2003) states, reality is a verb, constructed by dynamic and continuously changing elements and is always in process (Hayward 2019). Due to declining interest and enrollments, gender-selective women’s colleges have had to rebrand their institutional purpose and mission, while acknowledging their historical founding, shifting from a focus on access to one of equity. The gender-selective college mission is articulated through a focus on feminist empowerment, creating safe spaces for students to explore and succeed, by created safe spaces from men and toxic masculinity. While it is imagined by respondents that such a gender-focused mission can and should include trans* students, challenging essentialist notions of who a woman is and what they can do, the performative functions on campus provide a mixed answer. I discussed both the positive as well as the negative—and sometimes violent—experiences my respondents had on campus, particularly after the adoption of these policies. Particularly, I noted that while these policies have encouraged and provided avenues for (some) trans* students to attend women’s colleges, and that trans* students want to attend these colleges, there remain a number of barriers that students experience, making them present on campus but not belonging to the community.

Creating broken promises, particularly because such policies and institutional structures flatten intersecting gendered identities, reducing students to singular and unidimensional tokens of diversity, perpetuates a hierarchy of visibility and belonging on campus. As I argue, as a result of the institutions' continued commitment to womanhood, embedded in its language and practices on campus, this creates an environment wherein masculinity is both hypervisible and invisible. For some students, this masculinity provided social and cultural capital, wherein they fit in because they stood out and queered masculinity and femininity on campus. Those whose
embodiment and performance of masculinity was rendered “too masculine,” however, particularly trans* men and trans* students of color (and especially trans* masculine students of color), were thought to be unsafe and threatened the mission and identity of the college, thus marking them as strangers and placing them at higher risk for isolation, exclusion, and violence on campus.

A thread runs throughout the findings of this study, focusing on what the purpose of gender-selective colleges are, how institutions view policy, and which students are provided access and support within the institutional community. While the participants in this study had diverse experiences, identities, and perspectives about the ways they interacted with trans* inclusion at their gender-selective women’s college, together, their narratives present a number of implications for theory, policy, and practice regarding the production of gender, policy and practice, and women’s colleges.

Implications for the Production of Gender

Examining how gender is normalized, regulated, and produces discourses of livability, I approached this study with a trans/feminist lens, centering trans* communities as the focus of inquiry (Johnson 2015; Koyama 2003; Stryker and Bettcher 2016). As gender-selective women’s colleges consider the adoption and implementation of trans* inclusive admission policies, such a lens allows us to understand how the discourses of bodies, identities, and performances of appropriate sex/gender within these policies create an environment where students are oriented and subjected to particular norms on campus, unevenly distributing visibility, access, and support. As I have argued, the production of sex/gender is inseparable from the production of other axes of inequality, including but not limited to race, class, and sexuality, producing a hierarchy of identities on campus. This is not to say that we are to combine individual identities

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“[strung] together by commas,” centering womanhood and denoting experiences that deviate or differentiate (Tillapaugh and Nicolazzo 2014:116). Rather, key to intersectional analysis is the governing strategies through which particular identity categories are arranged and given access to privilege and power over others.

Despite—or perhaps because of— their commitment to womanhood, the existence of women’s colleges has always been predicated on the intersectional exclusion of those who have been deemed “not woman” enough—Black and other women of color, low-income, and queer and trans* women. Denied their femininity and claims to womanhood, the historic exclusion of non-white women within these institutions has served the purpose of defining the properly educable woman. And yet, as Hart and Lester (2011:212) remind us, “At every moment the essence of a women’s college is disrupted because gender performance shifts continuously. This means that a women’s college defined by who is admitted may never truly exist.” The woman in women’s college becomes a moving target, never quite able to be defined when the category is abstract and constantly changing (Enke 2012). Through the formation of both formal policies and informal practices, these colleges inscribe meaning into womanhood—as well as manhood—upon which is used to both include and exclude. Thus, it is not enough to ask whether womanhood on these campuses includes trans* representations, but rather how trans* conceptions might transform sex/gender, how we think about, value, and enact it.

Consider, for instance, the gender-selective women’s college mission and image once more. Following the founding purpose of providing an equitable education for women, women’s colleges promote the notion of “taking women seriously” on campus, centering womanhood in all of its capacities and possibilities. In theory a message of diversity, the women’s college mission focuses on gender empowerment and leadership, creating environments where students
are supposed to feel safe and free to explore the gendered possibilities before them. And yet, the continual invocation of womanhood on campus still perpetuates the importance of femininity, reifying and essentializing gender to particular bodies. As Carter (they or he) described this image:

The Athena image is like femme women from all over the world. Femininity from anywhere. Like femme, cis women from all over the world. Like if you look at the Athena’s brochures, it's like you can be like black and femme, you can be Muslim and femme. Like you can be low income and femme, but it's all centered around this very particular normative idea of what femininity is. And even, and Athena still even has trouble with like just blatantly saying like there's a lot of fucking lesbians on this campus. Like everybody on campus is fucking gay. Like I think it's like a 60/40 split for like queer people like, like the straights are literally in the minority like, and yet on the Athena website when it's like “Are there gays at Athena?” the answer is the worst, [they] say something like, “Well if your student doesn't like gays, like they shouldn't go to any college” and it's just like, just say yes … We're like rodents, like we're everywhere. You cannot get rid of us. We're like cockroaches, fuck, like you can't kill us. We're still here. If you cut our heads off, we can still eat pussy for 10 days. Like it's fine. Like, like you can't get rid of us.

In a tongue-and-cheek tone, he describes an environment wherein gender-selective colleges have a formal commitment to diversity, recognizing the intersections of womanhood on the basis of race, class, and religion, but that diversity is predicated on the stability of femininity. Thus, the notions of womanhood may have changed from the earliest founding of women’s colleges, adapting to expand the definition inch by inch to increasingly include more identities within the
college gates, but the institutional necessity to exclude has prevailed. Those who threaten that image are made strangers on campus. Describing queer life—and especially trans* students—as “cockroaches,” Carter constructs an imagery of trans* and queer students fighting the institution against all odds, surviving, and thriving in even the worst of conditions.

As such, findings from this study show trans* inclusion has become a “happy point” (Ahmed 2012:14), a point wherein all differences—race, class, sexuality, gender—are seen to matter on campus, suggesting “a harmonious empty pluralism” in order to manufacture an impression of cohesion and difference, without understanding how these various identities and experiences with power are co-constructed. In other words, the meaning of intersectionality has become blurred and flattened. But it is in this blurriness that Ahmed (2012) encourages us to enter our analysis, in the words of Nicolazzo (2017:163), to understand what intersectionality does, seeing what possibilities are made and what others are foreclosed for individuals based on their identities and the systems of privilege and power that shape the context in which they live. As a result, this allows us to further reimagine not only the ways that policy and practice work to include such students, but to produce new gendered possibilities altogether.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy can be thought of in terms of both formal policies and informal practices. Drawing upon the work of Sara Ahmed (2012), Dean Spade (2015), and Z Nicolazzo (2017), this research contends that gendered diversity policies are formal commitments to inclusion, but may also reproduce the inequalities in which they seek to redress by failing to make fundamental changes to institutional structures and distribution of resources on campus (Thomas 2018, 2020). Through this ethnography of a policy, I have detailed the in-depth and daily experiences students have on campus as a result of both the text of formal admission policies as well as prevailing discourses.
and practices surrounding sex/gender embedded within them. In an environment that depends upon some notion of womanhood to exist, policies that determine the access to such spaces do more than just open the gates to admission, they create and regulate categories of being, living, and doing within these spaces. In other words, once written, these admission policies acquire a life, institutionalizing and making routine particular identities, structures, and norms that comprise the organizational community.

At the same time, however, such policies can also be nonperformative best practices, standing in for the effect for which they name (Ahmed 2012; Nicolazzo 2017). As I discuss in chapters four and five, gender-selective women’s colleges take deliberate and calculated steps to justify their importance in a contemporary environment wherein gender-selective college is nonnormative. In some ways, they could be considered evidence-based women’s colleges, citing empirical research on the social, academic, and personal benefits of attending a gender-selective college in a socio-political environment where women continue to face persistent sex/gender inequalities, arguing that the institutional feminist mission of “taking women seriously” works. Through these justifications, it can additionally be argued that these feminist missions can—and should—extend to include gender diversity and gender inequality more broadly. As one employee described, “The real importance of a women's college is that it's gender affirming. And by gender affirming, I'm not using a binary. I am saying the real role women's colleges can play is to take a stance on equity.”

As I talked with students about their experiences with gender on campus, observing the various supports and barriers to their sense of inclusion, I doubt that many would agree that these colleges are currently gender affirming, though students might hope that these colleges are working towards such a purpose. Rather, on one hand, the institutional commitments to trans*
inclusion, gender affirmation, and eradicating gender inequality—all of which are different goals, but interrelated—were never fully realized. Because barriers persisted on campus, including limited knowledge of and access to resources, prevalent microaggressions, and violence, commitments to inclusion were nonperformative. As Ahmed (2012:65) states, “The sign of inclusion makes the signs of exclusion disappear.” On the other hand, however, as students pointed out, it is possible that these commitments are performative, bringing the institution into existence by naming itself as a women’s college that performs trans* inclusion.

In response to this tension, students grappled with other naming conventions of these colleges, as language is a central site of meaning making (Valentine 2007). Considering terms like historically women’s colleges, gender-inclusive colleges, and gender minority colleges, this redefinition sought to alter the connotation of what these colleges are for. Throughout this dissertation, I ultimately chose to use the term “gender-selective.” This term attempts to provide an intervention in how we can imagine these colleges while making room for new gendered possibilities, recognizing their history and their future. Gender-selective points to the way in which these colleges both have student populations who are not all women, while also recognizing that these colleges still place restrictions in their admission policies regarding the admissibility of particular gender identities and embodiments. Perhaps one day they can become gender affirming colleges or perhaps even gender expansive colleges, focusing on the positive environments that these colleges create, but in order to do so, much more work beyond saying these colleges are inclusive in a policy needs to be done.

All too often, however, that work stops at the creation of a policy. Policy is seen as the solution to social problems, even if those problems were created as a result of policy. Even our texts—our books, our articles, our scholarship—ends with policy recommendations. One of the
challenges in this research was to take up policy as a starting point, theorizing what we can examine if we put policy under the sociological lens to see how policies live lives beyond their text. As Ahmed (2012:12) suggests,

> We need to follow the documents that give diversity a physical and institutional form. Following documents is also about following the actors who use these forms. The question of what diversity does is also, then, a question of where diversity goes (and where it does not), as well as in whom and in what diversity is deposited (as well as in whom or in what it is not).

Using policy ethnography as a methodology, this research provides an important intervention in our understanding of institutions and policy. By following policy around, examining not their text or formal outcomes but the discourses that influence and emerge from policy, we come to recognize that policy in itself does very little depending on the actors who use them. As the employees at the colleges explained, “All you have to do is check the box.”

At the formal and practical level, this is what the admission policy on campus stipulates: students have to fit within a particular identity category at the time of admission. But, as students’ experiences have shown, such rigidity of how such policies are implemented also provides the possibility for students to find ways to “read between the lines,” checking the box **despite** not identifying as women and/or transitioning **after** enrollment, thus rendering the spirit of the admission policy useless. Simultaneously, however, this creates incalculable but observable ripples through a students’ matriculation—by institutionally codifying who the properly educable woman is, this serves as a constant reminder to students of whether they belong to the institutional community. Additionally, after the creation of the admission policies, this then also required the institution to implement other policies and practices on campus to
support these students. As another employee explained, “Title IX protects the college to
discriminate at the time of admission but not graduation, not during enrollment.” While the
institution cannot discriminate against these students, this does not mean that they have to
support them, especially if their presence contradicts and threatens the institutional mission and identity.

Nor does it mean that institutions are necessarily considering the compounding impacts
of their policies and resources. Rather, identity-based policies flatten the intersecting effects of
whom these policies are intended for and whom they disproportionally impact. In other words,
while this study focuses on and centers gendered policy for trans* students, it is just as much
about racial, classed, and sexual policies on campus. For example, as I have noted here and
elsewhere (Nanney 2019), the text of the admission policies codifies varying identity, legal, and
bio-medical requirements of sex/gender to define womanhood, embedded in these understanding
are classed and racialized barriers to these categories of embodiment. The practice of “checking
the box” on the Common Application requires legal sex, which requirements vary state-by-state
to change sex identification, costing between $25-3,000 if a state requires medical interventions,
if a state allows legal sex changes at all, particularly for minors. Returning to the case of Calliope
Wong, it was her financial status that outed her as trans*, had Smith not use her optional aid
form (though this practice is no longer used) that asks legal sex for purposes of selective service,
it is probable her application would have been considered just like any other applicant. On
campus, such compounding effects continue, suggesting that sex/gender discourses from these
policies, practices, and resources are embedded everywhere on campus. For instance, in the
example in chapter 2 of Smith’s campus police being called on a Black student eating lunch,
racialized incident was also gendered, wherein the caller interchanged pronouns when referring
to the student, articulating that not only a Black student—but a *masculinized* Black student (as Black women are denied their femininity)—does not belong on campus.

Consequently, by following a singular policy around, taking it up and seeing how it lives, findings from this dissertation urge us to think about the entire context in which policies and practices are created, performed, and maintained, both in terms of the official record, and the systems of power that are embedded in their creation and implementation that reflect the values and belief systems of the institution.

*Implications for Gender-Selective Colleges*

So then, this returns us once again to the question: what is the purpose of gender-selective women’s colleges in contemporary society? I would be remiss if I were to suggest that they served no importance or to suggest that they close or become coeducational (see Fogg Davis 2017 for opposing view). As recent evidence shows, at least amongst some of the most prestigious and larger gender-selective colleges, this is not even a question, as they are currently experiencing a resurgence of applications and enrollments, nearly doubling in size (Jaschik 2018). So then, what is drawing students to these colleges?

Reports suggest that the recent and growing influx of interest regarding gender-selective colleges is precisely *because* they are gender-selective. Students are deliberately seeking out educational environments where they are promised to be the center of the educational mission, focusing on sex/gender and challenging gender inequality. As Jennifer Fondiller, Vice President of Enrollment at Barnard has been quoted stating, she believes that those enrolling are “acutely aware of what is happening in the world as current events have motivated them to fight for social justice and equality … They are looking for colleges that will prepare them to enter these challenging spaces and navigate these conversations with confidence” (qtd. in Jaschik 2018: 270).
para. 12). While certainly gender-selective colleges are not the only colleges that are committed to social justice, they may be drawing students in with their promise of an empowering campus environment and their track record for post-grad success for students. As previous evidence has shown, students who attend gender-selective colleges experience greater achievements and gains in cognitive areas (intellectual development, involvement, academic self-confidence, and academic ability), non-cognitive areas (self-esteem, confidence, leadership development), and overall satisfaction than women at coeducational institutions (Kim and Alvarez 1995; Kinzie et al. 2007; Miller-Bernal 2000; Sax 2008, 2015; D.G. Smith et al. 1995; Stabiner 2002; Wisner 2013).

Just as women’s early exclusion from higher education was justified on their presumed physical, mental, and social inferiority, the promises of the educational benefits of a gender-selective college education has been predicated on assumptions of inferiority and safety. As one alumna once wrote to Smith:

The people who are attending Smith these days are A) lesbians or B) international students who get financial aid or C) low-income women of color who are the first generation in their family to go to college and will go to any school that gives them enough money. Carol [Christ] emphasizes that this is one of her goals, and so that's why the school needs more money for scholarships or D) white heterosexual girls who can't get into Ivy League schools… I can tell you that the days of white, wealthy, upper-class students from prep schools in cashmere coats and pearls who marry Amherst men are over. This is unfortunate because it is this demographic that puts their name on buildings, donates great art and subsidizes scholarships. (North 2012)
Oh the horror! The days of cashmere and pearls are over. As the alumna fears, the increasing
diversity of her alma mater is detrimental, lowering ranking and prestige. As she claims, they are
not Smith. But are they? Are those days really over?

Findings from this research suggest a “yes, but” answer. Yes, in that these colleges have
instituted formal commitments to diversity and inclusion, expanding the notion of womanhood
beyond just biology (as their historical foundations challenged) to recognize the intersecting
identities of womanhood via race, class, religion and other identities of difference. As Carter
(they or he) presented in seemingly contradictory statements, “The Athena image is like femme
women from all over the world” and “People don't think about identity in an intersectional way.”
What he means to suggest is that the women’s college mission focuses on intersectionality only
in terms of femininity and womanhood—there are “diverse” ways to be a woman in the world.
As a result, this flattens identity so that it is not intersectional, but rather additive. Students'
complex lived realities on campus are only realized through a lens of womanhood, reducing the
multiple possibilities of embodiment and sex/gender that other axes of identity create. Only seen
as a student of color or a trans* student, but never both, the gender-selective women’s college
mission is reaffirmed as a college meant for women. So perhaps, after all, the alumna was right in
her letter, in that in some respects the reality of pearls and cashmere are over on campus, but the
legacy lives on.

As the mission and image of gender-selective colleges has increasingly expanded, this
has made room for the possibility for trans* students on campus. Noting that, as the presence of
trans* alumni participants reminds us, trans* students have applied and attended gender-selective
colleges even before the adoption of admission policies, recent debates and discourse
surrounding trans* inclusion is the woman question renewed: asking who is the woman (and
subsequently who is not the woman) in women’s colleges? As one employee argued, “This issue got to the heart of Athena being a women’s college.” Ultimately, the differing policies at these colleges lead to different answers. In other words, womanhood is defined in context. Formally, both colleges were committed to the focus and education of women, and both policies defined this through self-identification. And yet, Athena’s policy only saw womanhood through self-definition while Minerva adopted a more expansive view to include trans* men and non-binary students. When I initially began this work, I was aligned with the idea that policies like Minerva’s were better, because they were more inclusive. And yet, through my field work, students like Josh (he/him) challenged this, as he explained, “Accepting trans* men is transphobic. You are a women’s college and accepting trans* men is saying that they aren’t really men.” While not all students agreed with this sentiment, and others contended that these colleges should reconceptualize their mission to no longer be women’s colleges per se, but colleges focusing on gender inequality more broadly, I now believe that this tension is not as easily answerable as yes or no, in or out. By using an intersectional framework, such policies can never fully encapsulate the complexities and nuances of the gender-selective college mission, categorizing sex/gender to fit within the particular institutional identity. But what I do stand firm on is that these colleges have always served an important, historic mission in the role of higher education and gender, and that this mission can and should extend to trans* students.

Making Space for New Gendered Possibilities

Reconceptualizing the role, the purpose, the mission of gender-selective women’s colleges in contemporary society, the answer is not clear cut. Yes, women’s colleges can continue empowering women, and they can find ways to also empower those who are not women within their communities. If we recast gender-selective colleges as institutions where
people from multiple marginalized gendered backgrounds can come and feel safe and
empowered to explore their gender, we will be able to sustain these campuses as historic and
vital spaces that promote gender diversity, leadership, and equity (S. Weber 2014). As I discuss
in below, this can be done by reconceptualizing what a feminist college looks like, particularly
kinds of feminisms that these colleges should practice. I first offer up the wants, needs, and
desires of how these colleges can improve to support and foster diverse students’ sense of
belonging on campus in the respondents’ own words. Following, I then outline the beginning
steps of how these colleges—and all colleges—can embrace trans/feminist methods in their
organizations, continually reflecting and moving beyond inclusion to make space for new
gendered possibilities.

Before I turn our attention to these recommendations however, I offer a word of caution.
As Nicolazzo (2017:150) argues,

On the surface, the creation of best practices, or sets of recommendations that all
educators should seek to emulate and reproduce on their campuses, seems like it would
be a good idea for me and others working toward gender equity and trans* inclusion on
college campuses. Indeed, creating best practices seems like a best practice.
The discussion below is not to be read as a list of best practices, a checklist to complete. Best
practices suggest that there is a singular point of arrival, a state of being, an end to which an
institution can stop diversity work and claim that it is inclusive. Rather, as a trans* justice
framework leads us to think, inclusion—and more importantly equity, justice, and liberation—
are continued practices: practices of resistance, practices of collaboration, and practices that
center trans* people in their own liberation.
In Their Own Words

At the end of each interview, I asked respondents to imagine what they would like their institution to look like. What would they like their institution to do to help realize and practice on campus? Below I offer their ideas in what they envision for their colleges. As the students note, citing bathrooms and aid, admission and housing, diversity and communication, all issues are trans* issues on campus, and one inclusion policy cannot be the only solution.

Students and Alumni

“...I think that I would just like to see the administration continue to stay, um, aware of what's going on with the students and really listen to them because I think that they are the ones who are there right now and, well, alums and staff, sure they matter to some extent. I think that the voice of the alums shouldn’t be louder than the voice of the current students.” -Timothy (he/him)

“Gender neutral bathrooms. [My hall] has a couple, which is nice. And it's just like the lab hallway has one. It's a handicap restroom. But I get out and I have to pee after class, but there are the men's and women's bathrooms. I'm like okay, where do I fit into this? I'm finally having the bathroom crisis… That's just like one symptom of things that I would like.” -Ezra (he or they)

“I'd like to see Minerva be more racially diverse. I'd like to see Minerva admit more trans* women, and I'm not in the room where those decisions are made. So maybe genuinely trans* admitting. I'd like to see it more transparent at Minerva. I guess I'd like to see the college become more of a sanctuary for people who don't feel that they're safe in other places. So, I would like to see more people of color. And I would like to see more like trans* women.” -Nova (they/them)

“I think Athena should give out more grant aid. It has the money to. Like there's no need for me to have a loan. Right? Athena could have shelled out that extra $3,000 a year which is nothing, that is nothing for them and it increases every year. I had a $3,000 loan last year; $4,500 this year and Athena can easily afford that. And Athena could afford the financial aid of every student without federal aid or and that's also work study could easily be abolished so people wouldn't have to work.” -Josh (he/him)

“There needs to be specific protection for trans* students in housing. I think that it was a really important space to have a place for trans* students to live without fear of being looked at weird or like microaggressions that can really wear a person down.” -Asher B. (she or they)

“Minerva needs to...come to terms with the fact that they need help and are broken and desperately need to bring in other voices that are not white and cis….Hopefully they get more diverse people and not just POC who are also rich because that's not the same thing. Like it's a little bit the same thing, but not immensely. There's still a lot of our intersections that they can go into and I think they just need to fix that.” -Violet (all but she)
“I think we can have trans* and non-binary or genderqueer students here and continue to create a space, every year getting better and better at being more inclusive and creating a safer space for marginalized students and minority students, especially queer and trans* people of color. I think that in that space we can continue to do that and sort of model what it can look like outside just the bubble.” -Sam G. (they/them)

“From the top down I make it less expensive. I change it to be like a traditionally — no, I'd say historically women's college. I’d stress parts of history that aren't great. Like I'm pretty sure everyone's a big flying racist...I think the thing is, if you're going to try and change something, you're going to have to change it for 2,600 people. And that's hard. Like if I were to change anything, it would just be more change. I don't even like change all that much. Like I still think it's important.” -Hannah (they/them)

Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

“I think that Athena could and hopefully has looked at what Minerva did, what their process was like, what accommodations they made because if you had some group that has already done it you can ask people, you know, “okay, what was the implementation?” Like, “what problems cropped up that you didn't foresee? What things would you have done differently now that you've already done it?” So, in a way, Minerva would be a resource for Athena if they were able to reach out and use them that way.”

“I think one of the biggest issues is transparency or lack of. I understand, you know, a lot of stuff is kind of like PR or like damage control or like, um, or just it's confidential, you know, and you can't talk about a lot of the behind the scenes stuff that's going on with regards to changes to policies or changes to initiatives and stuff that's in the works. There's a lot of stuff where we had all these great things going on and all these great conversations happening, but until something was finalized or until something was cleared by like, whoever, then we couldn't say anything. So, I get the sense that there's probably a lot of stuff like that that the students don't know about.”

“You learn by your community. So, like, for example, here, it's obvious things like you need to be able to write a five-paragraph essay, but then it's also much less obvious stuff like how do you write it? How do you dress for an interview? That kind of thing? And so, I feel like [the college] really tries to fill those gaps. But a lot of times, like, if you don't know what you're missing, then you can't fill the gaps until it's too late.”

“So, I think honestly like, figuring out and making sure our policies actually match how we're operating and what are our practices, right? And then looking at, like, what are the supports and resources that we provide. And I think being able to match that to the front end with admission, like being able to be transparent and honest around like, “I want you to come here, we're so excited. And these may be things you're looking for. And those are things we can provide.” Right? I think it's like, how do you balance those things around like we want gender diverse students here. And we want to recognize like, these may be the resources you want, and we know that and we're not going to be able to provide them for these reasons. So, I think it's more that and making sure students know.”
“When you think about change, you need people inside the organization who are going to help people move along. Then you need people pushing really hard from the outside. When you push from the outside you get to be the intellectual purist or the social purist. When you push from the inside, you enjoy some benefits of membership, but you also can feel a little queasy about compromising. I think to affect real change you need both of those individuals. I appreciated both that sort of external hammer and the internal nudge. Which is I think how you really do affect change.”

“My hope is that there are, at least large pockets of individuals who have propelled the college to be a bias free or a discrimination free environment. And so, you know, I think that our biggest effort right now is both access and affordability, right? Little things. So, ensuring access to students who will benefit from this environment and who may or may not be able to afford an education and making sure that everybody gets that opportunity would really benefit from it. Ensuring that they are supported and affirmed throughout their journey. Right so that for me, that that means fewer incidents of bias and discrimination. Few microaggressions, far less deadnaming, misgendering people with pronouns. Just a greater awareness of inclusivity and in every dimension so that you know people can really thrive here, because it's not just about graduation, it's about thriving on the way and leaving feeling as if this is a gender affirming space.”

“I know you're probably going to come up with recommendations, right? … How do we talk about [things] in an intersectional way? Because one of the things that I think has been a major resistance to trans* inclusion not just at women's colleges, but just in diversity, equity inclusion spaces...I've heard some of my friends talk about this, like whiteness and transness, that these things are separate…. But I think it's so, so, so important because, um, it will help our students because I think our students, our faculty, staff struggle with this... Like they haven't done individual work, and we're actually not equipping them in the ways we could. And we're also not doing enough to like to, to challenge those norms or even be outspoken about the fact that like, name it as an issue, right?”

This is What a Trans/Feminist College Looks Like

By titling this section “This is What a Trans/Feminist College Looks Like” I do not mean to suggest that I am advocating for colleges to only appear feminist. And in fact, I do not believe there is one feminism, nor do I believe that all people within these colleges identify as feminists. Suggesting that there is one way to “look” feminist suggests that feminism is a best practice, inscribing particular bodies and spaces as feminist if certain elements are achieved which then creates vulnerability and exclusion of those who are rendered “impossible” feminists (Nicolazzo and Harris 2014). Rather, I begin the section this way as a provocation of sorts, imagining the
possibilities of what a trans/feminist space can be through praxis. Put simply, to borrow the language of Haraway (2003; see also Kreitler 2014), trans/feminism is a methodology, a verb, constituted through liberatory dynamism and action. In theorizing feminist spaces, Nicolazzo and Harris (2014:6) write:

I wonder, however, if fully investing in feminist praxis can help the movement itself beyond needing to rely on a “feminist look.” For example, instead of looking a certain way, one would be doing feminism. There may be many different (and overlapping) ways in which feminism is done (e.g., making conscious choices about what products one buys), but the primacy of doing feminism rather than looking feminist is exactly what hooks meant in Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center when she stated, “To emphasize that engagement with feminist struggle as political commitment, we could avoid using the phrase, ‘I am a feminist,’ (a linguistic structure designed to refer to some personal aspect of identity and self-definition) and could state, ‘I advocate feminism’” (p. 31).

Feminism is a praxis, a constant state of doing. It is in this way that a college can never be trans/feminist, but it is in the ways in which the colleges reflect on their structures, policies, practices, and resources; to do trans/feminism. As students matriculate through the educational system, graduating an entirely new student body every four years, reframing institutional practices through trans/feminist action places responsibility on the institutions themselves, consistently reflecting and adapting to meet students’ needs instead of inviting students into broken systems that which they must then attempt to fix.
Drawing upon the work of Martin (1990), Jourian (2017b), and Johnson (2015), I propose to reimagine and trans*form organizations through trans/feminism, such that they can become trans/feminist organizations in practice. As Johnson (2015:23) contends:

Others may wonder why a feminist methodological approach is insufficient when applied to transgender research participants or transgender-related social phenomena. These readers, while accepting that the sociology of transgender may have fallen short in earlier years, might argue that this was a product of the cultural moment and that proceeding with a feminist methodology will ensure that these missteps are avoided in future research. Yet by failing to recognize the possibility that the sociology of transgender might require additional transfeminist methodological considerations in addition to those developed within the feminist methodology, skeptics would be endorsing cissexist or gender identity blind research practices that further marginalize transgender people and phenomena within academia.

While there is not necessarily a universal formula on how to practice trans/feminism, there are a number of considerations, which I outline below:

1. creating a trans/feminist environment and advancing trans/feminist goals through the organization’s missions, policies, and practices;
2. fostering trans/feminist values of reflexivity, agency, intersectionality, and subjectivity;
3. confronting ways in which genderism and cissexism/transphobia, objectification, and anti-factual logic are embedded in institutional structures;
4. providing safe avenues for gender exploration and embodiment and education; and
(5) working in collaboration with, and centering, trans* people as a central component to
the institution’s mission.

Together, these elements focus on institutional and societal-level structures and their impacts on
individuals, “exposing a lack of coherence when we assume we all know what we are talking
about based on dominant and default representations of that construct” (Jourian 2017b:416). In
other words, a trans/feminist methodology is grounded within transgender communities and
developed to understand how gender is normalized, regulated, and produces discourses of
livability. As Stryker and Bettcher (2016) explain, the slash between trans* and feminism marks
a break between the two halves of trans/feminism to make space for a wider range of work and
methods that explores the many ways trans* and feminist work can relate to one another,
providing a space for feminist perspectives on trans* issues and trans* perspectives on feminist
issues, noting that these issues are often overlapping or the same.

**Advancing Trans/Feminist Goals**

The goal of trans/feminism is to create environments wherein trans* lives are livable.
Drawing upon critical trans* justice frameworks (Spade 2015), this demands more than
visibility, recognition, and inclusion. Rather, such goals seek to trans*form the regulatory
functions of organizational functions. In order to do so, organizations must constantly reflect the
ways in which various policies and practices are both structured and implemented, focusing on
both the ostensive and performative functions of the organization. As I’ve shown, commitments
to equality are not enough, as they can be inequality regimes in new form. Rather, such a
methodological approach must critique and challenge seemingly neutral systems that invent and
produce meaning for the categories they administer, and that those categories manage
distribution of life chances. A trans/feminist organization asks: Does the organization have an
agenda that helps members see both cis and trans* women as an oppressed group, and that
gender is relational, oppositional, and intersectional? Does the organization have an agenda
aimed at improving trans* people’s status or opportunities in society? Does it take steps to
pursue these goals?

*Fostering Trans/Feminist Values*

To achieve the goals of the above, a trans/feminist methodology fosters trans/feminist
values of reflexivity, intersectionality, and subjectivity. What Johnson (2015) describes as
operating from a “transfeminist standpoint,” fostering trans/feminist values engages with the
multiplicity and fluidity of lived experiences, identities, knowledges, and embodiments. These
are intentional practices in that they are constantly reflecting, critically examining, and exploring
the organization’s role in the production and regulation of gendered possibilities. As Johnson
(2015:26) writes, “Acknowledgment and reflexivity are essential to breaking the cycle of
transgender marginalization wherein transgender people and their experiences are talked about
rather than to.” In so doing, a trans/feminist methodology strives for mutual agency and
liberation by pushing back against normalized, stable, and unified understandings of gender. A
trans/feminist organization asks: Does the organization emphasize the importance of reflexivity
and empowerment? Is work conceptualized as social justice? Are organizational policies and
practices adaptable to change as needed? In what ways are current structures and processes
intentional about deconstructing barriers and provide opportunities for mutual growth?

*Confrontation of Genderism and Oppression*

Related to the development of a trans/feminist standpoint is the acknowledgement of
unequal distribution of power. A trans/feminist methodology raises the question as to how power
is both embedded within and produced by organizational structures and practices. As Nicolazzo
(2017:75) finds, embedded within organizations are gender binary discourses, “constellation[s] of words, phrases, actions, rules (written and unwritten), and social realities that regulated ‘appropriate’ gender identities, expressions, and embodiments.” Such discourses restrict and police the availability of gendered possibilities for all people, oriented in both overt and implicit ways regarding how they should think about, present, and do gender (Nicolazzo 2017). To counter and dismantle such discourses does not suggest that gender will not or should not exist within organizations, but rather gender as a regulatory system is redone to make room for new gendered possibilities (Nanney and Brunsma 2017). As a result, such an imagining becomes the responsibility of organizations—not individuals—to challenge these discourses. A trans/feminist organization asks: What are the organization's normative processes and arrangements? What are the characteristics of members (e.g., gender, political views, age, race and ethnicity, social class)? What status distinctions are made within the organization? Who is trying to access the organization but can’t? Whose presence is under constant threat of erasure and exclusion (Stewart 2017)? What conditions have we created that maintain certain groups as the perpetual majority here?

**Gender Exploration**

Trans/feminist organizations actively work on creating safe and inviting opportunities and environments for all people to learn, explore, and celebrate their identities. This is not to suggest that, as diversity and multiculturalism rhetoric has been taken up, that trans/feminism celebrates difference flatly. Rather, a trans/feminist methodology actively works on proliferating possibilities for practicing sex/gender while recognizing that all gendered embodiments and identities are legitimate. This also requires creating space and resources to support members as they undergo this gender exploration work, including, but not limited to, physical and mental
health care, access and ease in changing documentation, cultural practices of pronouns, and ally training. At the core here, again, is a focus on power: who are placed at the center within the organizational environment and who recedes into the background, creating institutional norms? A trans/feminist organization asks: Do organizations create supportive and open environments for gender to be embraced, liberatory, and euphoric? Whose safety is being sacrificed and minimized to allow others to be comfortable? What opportunities do organizations provide to learn and grow their understandings as gender develops? What resources are available to members as they explore gender?

*Working in Collaboration*

Finally, everyone in the organization needs to be involved in challenging, uncovering, and resisting the ways gender regulates all our lives, and particularly the ways it regulates the lives of those who identify as trans* (Nicolazzo 2017). And yet, as Nicolazzo (p.155; see also Dockendorff et al. 2019), warns, “It may be seductive to think of grand gestures from upper administrators regarding gender equity and trans* inclusion as providing the best way to counteract genderism.” As prior student engagement and development research has documented, the history of identity-based organizations and communities on campus are reflective of perceptions of need, visibility, and student activism. For example, as noted by Marine (2011b), the first student gay rights organizations have existed on college campuses since the late 1960s and the first gay and lesbian resource center was founded at the University of Michigan in 1971 (Beemyn 2003; Dirks 2016). Originally focusing on gay and lesbian sexuality, these college resources have expanded to include bisexual, queer, and transgender individuals in the mid-1990s, most notably through adoption of gender identity and expression to campus nondiscrimination policies. Beginning with the University of Iowa in 1996 (Dirks 2016), the vast
majority of campuses today—nearly 1,050—have such policies that mark the institution's commitment to transgender inclusion and diversity (Campus Pride 2018). And yet, as critics have noted, by establishing safe spaces for marginalized communities, this denotes all other spaces as unsafe. Consequently, what might be more important than new policies is a focus on the process by which these policies are developed. As such, a trans/feminist methodology asks: What would organizations look like if the members who these policies are for envisioned the policies themselves? Who is at the table making decisions and whose voices are represented? Whose voices are silenced? Are there any potential unintended consequences or parties who will be impacted by the organization’s policies and practices?

Forging New Paths

The findings from the present study take a look into the past and present experiences of students within gender-selective women’s colleges with hopes to create a better future. As a speaker at the Day of Inclusion at Athena stated, “We critique our school because we love it, we want it to be better.” In many ways, I found this to be the unspoken motto for many of the students on campus. Faced with barriers, erasure, exclusion, they persisted on, resilient in their paths, because they loved their school. They wanted better of the institution for future generations, so they can have better experiences than they did (see Nicolazzo 2017 on epistemology of love; Marine 2009 on ethic of care).

When thinking about how to build bridges rather than gates on campus, the challenge lies in the unknown. What will become of these colleges? Where do we go from here? As I have argued throughout this dissertation, in many ways, these colleges are well equipped with the tools that they need to not only support trans* students, but to help them thrive on campus. At the same time, I have shown that commitments to inclusion are not enough; inequality persists on
these campuses, elevating whiteness, class-privileged understandings of the world in light of and as a result of the lasting legacies of exclusion that these colleges depend upon to exist. But, I want to go beyond merely pointing out the flaws in institutional notions of community. Thinking through the ways in which these colleges are embedded in and reproduce hierarchies of power, by imagining the ways in which all members of these colleges can do trans/feminism on campus, we can also envision new paths that create space for new gendered possibilities on campus. As S. Weber (2014:277) argues, drawing upon Munoz’s (2009) concept of queer futurity, “What else are the positive, celebratory aspects of queer culture at [women’s colleges] if not a form of utopian performativity—a social reconfiguring of how we might organize our sexual and gender lives to contest heterosexism, heteronormativity, and cissexism?”

**The Other Side**

As new paths are forged and new possibilities are created, we must continue to reflect and think of what is to come and ways to grow. What are the emerging challenges and barriers that persist? From here, I turn inward to think about the limits of this research and where it is to go forth from here.

**Limitations**

Despite best efforts, there are always going to be challenges, trials, and tribulations within research. Within this dissertation, I note three main limitations within the study design and implementation: 1) Missing voices and selectivity bias; 2) IRB constraints; and 3) Context.

First and foremost are the missing voices of trans* women from this dissertation. Throughout my fieldwork, I was only made aware of two trans* women enrolled at these colleges. I invited both to participate in the study, but both declined, as they felt they could easily be identified. They were not wrong. While recent discourse and panic around trans* inclusion at
women’s colleges has focused almost completely on trans* women, the truth of the matter is that they are not enrolling at these colleges in large numbers. Though some students noted that “there were so many trans* women” at the colleges now, this was based on a 200% increase from 0. Two felt like “a lot” in that they were hypervisible on campus, and not nearly enough at the same time.

On the reverse, however, there were a significant number of white non-binary trans* masculine students who volunteered to participate in the study, and an overrepresentation of Athena students. This overrepresentation is likely in part due in part due to those who felt included and comfortable enough to participate in a study about “diversity and inclusion” regarding trans* issues on campus. In other words, this study attracted the extremes—those who felt included and those who felt so excluded that they viewed participating in my study as an opportunity to be seen. This overrepresentation is also likely telling of trans* networks on campus. On the interest form for the study, I had asked students how they heard of the study and the vast majority responded, “from friends.” Noting that students are more likely to maintain friendships with those who look like them, the word-of-mouth method only passed mention of the study to more white, trans* masculine students.

Finally, also missing from this study are those trans* students who considered but ultimately did not attend a gender-selective college as well as those who opposed trans* inclusion. For instance, during my tour of Minerva, I shared the experience with a trans* applicant, but I cannot be sure if they chose to apply or if they would end up enrolling in the upcoming years. Additionally, while I welcomed the participation of any person affiliated with Minerva and Athena, despite opinion or identity, to interview, knowing that there indeed are people who are resistant to trans* inclusion on campus, only a small handful of people initially
volunteered to participate and only one completed an interview. While it is likely that such people did not desire to participate in a study about and centering trans* inclusion, these missing voices are imperative to understanding the tensions and debates that occur in these spaces. As such, there are groups of voices missing, where trans* students are potentially most vulnerable for exclusion.

Second, one of the largest challenges in setting up this study was receiving Institutional Review Board approval. Three different boards oversaw this study, meaning three different boards had to approve three different protocols. Each institution had a “territorial” issue with this oversight, wanting their language and letterhead to be used. Ultimately, after a few emails, the boards decided to default to my home institution’s IRB, though this, too, was fraught with tension. The review board, unsure of ethnographic research, placed strict restrictions on what I could and could not do on these campuses, including being prohibited from attending classes or entering residence hall rooms. And yet, as I came to find out, this is where students spend a majority of their time. I learned to adapt on the spot (and a few frantic phone calls in tears to my committee) and find ways around these restrictions, incorporating questions about these spaces in interview protocols and having students observe on my behalf, but having second-hand accounts is not the same as observing in person. Also included in these restrictions was the requirement that I had to aggregate all employee data. Seeing that many of the negative experiences (as well as positive) students had on campus were impacted by faculty, staff, and administration, I was unable to make comparisons regarding how these various employees understood and practiced trans* inclusion on campus.

Third is the fact that this study occurred at two colleges (simultaneously) during one academic year. Part of the trouble with multi-sited research was that I would inevitably miss
events while in the field because I was unable to be in two places at once. Although I was able to see, hear, and experience a lot, there was much I missed due to my limited amount of time on campus. This extends beyond the year to currently, being unable to continue fieldwork while knowing that life does not stop on these campuses. For example, participants sometimes told me they had been waiting to tell me things or share stories about particular experiences they had on campus. I live vicariously through Facebook and texts from participants, updating me on the goings on of campus life. I am deeply grateful for the lasting relationships I formed and their willingness to share even a piece of it with me.

This dissertation is only a snapshot of campus just as it is a snapshot of women’s colleges as a whole. While providing the ability to provide comparative elements, as Nicolazzo (2017:171) argues, “It would be disingenuous, risky, and unethical to assume one could easily or quickly transfer the findings and implications from this study to other contexts without having a handle on the way gender mediates students' experiences in other contexts.” Although some of these findings and contexts may be commonly shared with one another as well as among other colleges and universities, both gender-selective and coeducational alike, findings from this study are rooted in and influenced by local, community, and place-based dynamics shaping sex/gender at both school sites (Enke 2007; P. Morris 2011; Reger 2012). Collecting data at two elite, predominantly white gender-selective colleges, this means that findings cannot be generalized to trans* students at all gender-selective colleges, especially those that are religious, historically Black or Hispanic-serving, financially unstable, men’s, and/or coordinate colleges.

Next Directions

Moving forward, findings from this study uncovered two areas of unanswered questions about trans* inclusion at women’s colleges, and a third that leads to new paths to explore.
Specifically, future directions for research focus on trans* women in women’s colleges, historically Black and Hispanic serving gender-selective colleges, and trans* inclusion in other gendered spaces.

As noted in the limitations above, missing from these pages are the voices of trans* women. While trans* women were present during observed events and thus are reflected in this research in some aspect, it is not possible to know the experiences of these students first-hand, if they were affected by the practices or policies on campus, or whether and what such practices are wanted and needed to support these students. As such, future research must find ways to include these voices as well as explore what barriers have prevented them from coming to the forefront before. Such examinations should not ask whether trans* women are women, as prior (and current) research has done (for example Jeffreys 2014), but rather should analyze the ways in which trans* women experience the regulatory norms of womanhood within gender-selective colleges. Such an analysis would both seek to examine trans* women’s inclusion as well as providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between sex and gender within these spaces.

Second, one of the emergent themes from these data was the importance of intersectional analyses in policy. The two institutions within this study are historically and predominantly white colleges, enrolling between 25-35% students of color. As a result, sex/gender on campus was co-constructed through race, defining both womanhood and trans*ness as white. Trans* students of color, on the other hand, struggled with balancing the intersecting aspects of their identity, forced to separate their gender and race into unidimensional categories as if they could be experienced individually. Noting that, as Snorton (2017:8) argues “the condensation of transness into the category of transgender is a racial narrative, as it also attends to how blackness finds articulation within transness,” this leads us to think about the ways in which transness in
these spaces are also *Black*, articulating an attack on the beingness of trans* students of color within these gendered and racialized environments. Within the US, there currently exist three historically Black gender-selective colleges—Bennett, Spelman, and Morehouse—and one Hispanic serving gender-selective college—Mills. Future research should seek to examine the co-construction of race and transness within these environments, understanding the ways in which the production of these categories are intertwined and experienced.

Finally, future research should apply the concepts developed from the woman throughout this research to other trans* inclusive feminist contexts such as bookstores, sports, and womyn’s lands. Taking up other environments with formal feminist commitments to trans* inclusion (beyond non-discrimination clauses), such a question seeks to examine the tensions surrounding sex and gender, particularly within feminist environments. Not all radical feminists have historically been trans* exclusive (Williams 2016). Therefore, rather than just thinking about individual subjects who may fall under the rubric of trans*-exclusionary TERFs, and rather than merely replicating such this study in a new context, such research would attend to the ideology upon which these environments construct their boundaries. In other words, such an analytical project would lead to new questions such as in what ways can a trans/feminist methodology apply to communities and social movements? And what drives some feminists towards these trans* exclusionary illogics and not others?

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the data from this ethnographic study of trans* admission policies indicate that women’s colleges are educational institutions that have held steadfast in an ever-increasing coeducational world. This success lies in their dedication to their mission, revising and adapting to current socio-political climates, but overall remaining true to their founding: providing access
to an equitable education. As the meaning of womanhood has shifted over time, expanding to include intersectional axes of difference, this has required these institutions to ask the “woman question” anew, institutionalizing these meanings within the structures and practices of the organization. As trans* visibility reaches its “tipping point,” it is the legacies of these exclusions that contemporary trans* debates respond to, once again defining who is a woman within these spaces and within these missions.

The transformation of gender-selective women’s colleges from trans* hostile, to trans* admitting, to trans* serving is nothing short of remarkable and essential to students’ liberation. And yet, there is so much more left to be done. The first step is clear: it is the institution’s responsibility to create a culture of belonging. Gender-selective women’s colleges, along with all others, must begin to determine how and whether they will embrace trans/feminist futures that include liberation for transgender people (Marine 2009). Until that decision is made, trans* students are invited into broken systems, never fully “at home.” In order to truly, as the Bryn Mawr (2015) admission policy states, “Take an inclusive approach to fulfilling their mission as an institution that values diversity as essential to its excellence,” we must continually acknowledge and ask how gender complexity is central to the gender-selective college mission.
CHAPTER 7: INTERLUDE

We sat there in the rain for what felt like hours, watching the windows of the car fog and people rush to and from their vehicles into nearby shops on that dark, cold, sleepy fall night. It was fall 2019 and I was visiting Telford for the week to catch up with some of my respondents and conduct some follow-up interviews that I had had difficulty scheduling the year prior.

Following dinner with Josh (he/him) at his favorite local Vietnamese restaurant, our conversation continued late into the evening as if I had both been gone forever and yet like I had never left. Josh had a rough start to the new semester, having his top surgery cancelled due to some health complications, but he was in the final stretch—his surgery having been rescheduled for the upcoming Thursday, the same day that I was to return home. As he told me about his upcoming procedure, I pulled up my google calendar to find a way, any way, to at least give him a ride to the hospital that morning. It’s tight, but I could make it work. He didn’t protest, and I was glad.

In many ways, I feel like the time of this project was marked by Josh’s and my relationship. He had his altercation with the campus police the around same week I conducted my site visit in the spring of 2018, he came out to his mother a few weeks after meeting me, he began testosterone later that semester, and now he was finally accessing one of the major milestones he had waited nearly a year (formally) for. And yet, I was still worried for Josh, as I knew this would make him feel at home in his body, but it could further ostracize him on campus. That’s why we were in that car that night.

After dinner, I had driven him home and he asked that I drive him somewhere, anywhere, that wasn’t his hall. We ended up parking in a back lot of one of the only open coffee shops, and he says that he hasn’t been here for so long because an ex-friend used to do homework there so often that she “practically lived there.” I knew this ex-friend, as she also volunteered to
participate in the study, telling me that it was important to share the story of her trans* friends. I also knew that these two were not really friends anymore but did not know why. Any time I had previously gotten close to asking, Josh would shut down and just tell me, curtly, “I don’t want to talk about it.” But this time was different. We sat in the car, with our seats reclined, just looking out at the rainy sky as he opened up and told me the story of what he refers to as “the April incident” from his own point of view, noting gaps in his memory because of the trauma that has prevented him from recalling those moments. He tells me that it shouldn’t have been such a big deal, then the next moment explains how triggering it was and how he really doesn’t talk about it. That’s true. But this time was different. He wanted to share with me. He wanted to talk to me. He trusted me.

We spent over two hours in that car, just talking about his experiences, his friendships, his goals and dreams and struggles. We joked about how I couldn’t pronounce “folk” and how I am bad at math. We talked about my future wedding and how he wanted an invite, “even if he ended up not coming. It’s the invite that mattered.” We talked about how he wanted to go to grad school and so I should get a job at the same institution. We talked about what the dissertation would look like and how it should “feature” him. After those hours, I finally told him that we should probably get moving, as it was late, and he really should get a move on for his homework and get some sleep. I went home and I cried. Not sad tears, but yet maybe they were. I was so happy to share this experience with him. And yet, it makes me so sad, so frustrated, so mad with how Josh’s college experiences have been shaped by so many factors beyond his control, making him feel that he has no one else. It makes me angry that I can’t be there for him at all times. Sure, there’s digital technology that bridges some of that gap, and we have a running Facebook messenger thread wherein he consistently reminds me that Bitmojis are not cool. But there’s
nothing like that night, just watching the rain, talking about anything and everything under the moon. This wasn’t just research to me, it was friendship.

As I traveled to visit some of the participants this past fall, I continued to get questions about what I found, what the next steps for this project were, who would be reading this, what may come of this research. Again and again I had trouble articulating answers to these questions. Sure, there were formulated, sugar coated, generic answers I had for family and strangers that would couch the radical goals that I had envisioned into more digestible language, but what would I tell the people to which this research mattered most— the people the research is about, produced by? In many ways, I still fail to have complete answers because in many ways this project is so much bigger than myself, my degree, my departmental requirements for graduation. This project is about a whole community of people—connected formally and informally—who have constantly been rendered second-class status by the institution that had promised to welcome and support them. This really is our dissertation.

Another point of trouble for me in answering these questions is the fact these colleges, while slow to change in many ways, as they are rooted in their traditions and structural inequalities, too are not static. So much had changed from when I had started my fieldwork to even that fall. Minerva was in the process of hiring a dedicated, full-time LGBTQ+ liaison in the diversity and inclusion office. Additionally, one employee explained to me that there were big plans for the LGBTQ+ center, with goals of creating a free-access pantry filled with gender affirming clothes and school supplies; organizing monthly outings for students to develop queer community; and more events in the space. Similarly at Athena, students were in the process of chartering an official transgender student organization and the administration hired a new Chief
Diversity Officer and an Inclusion Facilitator to follow through with meeting student demands from the year prior, the first of their acts being creating a trans* working group that consisted of trans* faculty and students to lead these initiatives—a huge shift from when Athena’s trans* policy group consisted of only one trans* person. So, would the book that took over a year to write even be relevant if the campus environments had already shifted in a matter of months?

As I was back on these campuses, walking along the same paths to attend similar events that I had observed the year prior, talking to those whom had become my friends, however, the answer came to me. It was in fact because these colleges both change and stay the same, growing and adapting while guided towards a founding mission that this dissertation mattered. It is the constant iteration—the performativity, in the words of Judith Butler (2004)—of the college, that produces the woman in women’s college, imitating a “phantasmic ideal” of gendered identity. And yet, it is in the process of imitation that, in many ways, these iterations are set up to fail. It is in this failure—the nonperformativity—that the college survives. As a consequence of such failure, it was the experiences of transgender students who have been rendered “stranger” to the institution that would be erased. This work, then, mattered, to become a space to preserve the history, the experiences, the stories of this community, knowing that these stories continue on beyond the scope of this writing and time. This is only an interlude to the story, not the end.

Over nine months, I conducted a total of 123 interviews (with an additional 3 conducted in subsequent months either due to scheduling conflicts or later expressed interest), and formed lasting relationships with dozens of interviewees, their friends, roommates, and others. I had meals, worked alongside over tea, attended events, and watched YouTube and just hung out with them. Out of this sample, 62 voices are represented by quotes, but the experiences and opinions
of each and every one of the participants have been taken into careful consideration and are represented in the words I share.

I do not know what is to come of these colleges or the students within them, whether students’ call-to-actions become fully realized, or the student population graduates and such efforts are once again forgotten. But this work will serve as one reminder of what has happened, what is happening, and what could happen if we build bridges instead of gates.
FIGURES

Figure A. Theoretical Framework
Figure B. Number of Postsecondary Institutions in the US by Gender 1870-2020

Data Source: Tidball et al. (1999); National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Digest of Education Statistics, Table 317.10 Degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control and level of institution: Selected years, 1949-50 through 2018-19.
Figure C. Athena Facebook Meme

Image Source: Athena Student Meme Facebook Page
Figure D. The Queerarchy

Right

Queer Presenting/Identity
(Out) Trans Women White Non-Binary Masculine

Area of Contest

Gender Fluid/Genderqueer Socio-Economic Status
Butch Lesbians Legacy
Agender Body Size
Gender non-conforming Racial Complexion

Wrong

Trans Men Non-Binary Femme (Cis-passing)
Non-Binary Masculine of Color (Cis-passing)

Top Surgery/Binding
Pronouns/Name Change
Figure E. Bridges Instead of Gates

Photo Source: Megan Nanney

Text reads:
(Purple paper)
Accessibility —> Inclusion
Gate —> Bridge
A gate can be opened to provide access but we envision beyond this to full inclusion —> multiple paths through campus

(Green paper)
Inclusion vs. accessibility
- Our symbol of a closed gate is not one of inclusion
- Even an open gate is not accessible for everyone
- Using a bridge and paths allows everyone to show their different paths of life
- Shows that we are open & welcoming community
Figure F. Athena Student Demands

Opening Statement

Trans people have always existed.
Trans people have always existed at Athena.

We as trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students at Athena College want to begin our demands by affirming that first and foremost Athena College should be a space that includes, not just admits, trans* women. While we are happy to see that the admission statement was changed to include trans* women, we believe this is not enough. The current policy does not lay out meaningful pipelines for trans* women to access Athena, particularly high-school aged trans* girls, and therefore is disingenuous. We center these women and girls.

We center the belief that Athena College should be open to all trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming (GNC) students, including trans* men. As a historically women’s college, Athena was founded on the conviction that gender identity should not be a factor in a person’s ability to receive a quality education, and to be safe on their campus. Trans students actively meet this tenent of the founding Athena mission. We are disproportionately at risk of violence, discrimination, homelessness, job loss, and structural disenfranchisement as a result of our gender identities. Athena is a safe haven, and has always been. There is record of trans* students at Athena dating back to the early 20th century.

Additionally, we believe that the fear that admitting trans* students explicitly to the college will fundamentally change or erase the school commitment to the education of women, is unfounded. In response to the question of whether genderqueer or gender non-binary students may apply, one of the Athena website’s reasons why they cannot is that the college seeks applicants, “who seek entrance into a community dedicated to women’s education.” We believe that trans* students currently at Athena, and those who would desire a place on this campus, live up to this ideal. If Athena College is a feminist institution, invested in the liberation and education of women, then it should also be invested in the liberation and education of other groups marginalized under patriarchy, who are invested in receiving an education built on a feminist and anti-patriarchal ethos and ideology.

Other historically women’s colleges have extended their admission policies. This extension has not fundamentally changed the makeup of their campuses. Their populations are still made up of primarily cisgender women. The importance and legacy of the women whose leadership has been a part of making their institutions what they are today, has stayed intact. The same would be true at Athena.

For far too long, Athena’s administration has perpetuated an image of womanhood at Athena that has erased and marginalized trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming (GNC) students, faculty, and staff. This image has disproportionately impacted trans* women of color, whose access to Athena has been historically non-existent, and only recently has become possible. The image of womanhood perpetuated at this college is deeply connected to racist and classist understandings of gender and is intricately connected to the oppression faced by cisgender students of color and poor students. In solidarity with the movements of students of color organizing against racism; poor students organizing against classism; undocumented students
organizing against state violence; trans, non-binary, and GNC students are voicing the needs of our communities. We demand that these needs be met.

Demands

1. **We demand Athena implement an admission recruitment program explicitly for trans* women.**
   a. A recruitment officer dedicated to recruiting trans* women by the end of Fall 2019.
   b. While Athena began to formally accept trans* women in 2015, there is no infrastructure to recruit or support them once they get to Smith.

2. **We demand Athena change its admission policy to include official recognition of trans* men and non-binary students by the next admission cycle.**
   a. Athena’s current admission policy erases trans* men and non-binary students. Peer institutions have already changed their admission to include trans* students.
   b. Change Athena’s publicity to stop calling itself a “women’s college”. Instead, use “Historically Women’s College” or “Gender Minority” college.

3. **We demand Athena actively recruit and hire trans* faculty and staff across all departments, especially faculty and staff of color.**
   a. Publicly present a comprehensive timeline for hiring by the conclusion of Spring 2019. Publish bi-weekly public updates on actions being taken to meet the timeline.
   b. Include two trans* studies courses in the humanities and social sciences each semester, starting in Spring 2020.

4. **We demand Athena create a physical space for trans* community.** This new space should employ a full time, paid staff member to be a resource to trans* students specifically and the Athena community at large. We demand to see blueprints of said space by the end of Fall 2019.
   a. According to an institutional survey, 5% identify as on the trans* spectrum. We know these numbers are low because the survey forces students to out themselves. With a majority trans/queer student body, it is absurd we do not have a single paid staff member to support LGBTQ students, as nearly all our peer institutions have.
   b. We demand funds to update the resource center lending library, including but not limited to books, films, clothing, and gender affirming resources, by Fall 2019.

5. **We demand that 2 or more trans* students are included as search committee members with voting power diversity office hires.**
   a. We demand Athena hire a full-time trans* resource officer under the office of diversity by Spring 2020. We demand to see a full timeline for said hire by the end of Spring 2019.
   b. A support group and monthly events for trans* women run by the trans* resource officer.

6. **We demand Athena provide a comprehensive and accessible list of resources and services for trans* students on campus and in Telford that is easily accessible online by Fall 2019.**

7. **We demand Athena implement mandatory in-person training for all staff, faculty, and members of administration on gender and sexuality. Athena must compensate the workshop leader and pay faculty and staff for attending.**
   a. Reoccurring trainings offered every semester and faculty and staff must attend one each year, starting Fall 2020.
b. Mandatory training on gender and sexuality for all students during orientation starting Fall 2019.
c. Require faculty to put pronouns in email signatures as part of trainings.
d. Additional training for the career center staff around supporting trans* students in applying for internships and job opportunities by Spring 2020 and the implementation of two workshops for trans* students each year hosted by Spring 2021.
e. Training and resources with Study Abroad Office around how to support trans* students studying abroad by Spring 2020.

8. Establishment of an official trans-specific alum network and resources to help navigate regular Athena alum network for seniors and recent graduates.
   a. Option to self-identify as resource for trans* students on Alum Database by Fall 2019.
   b. Event hosted by Alumni House for trans* students and alums each year by Spring 2020.

9. We demand immediately accessible trans-competent and trans-affirming health care and counseling for all trans* students
   a. Provide shuttles to referrals by Fall 2019.
   b. Provide Hormone Replacement Therapy at the health center by Fall 2021.
   c. Provide a fund for co-pays by Spring 2020.
   e. Resources about and access to safe binding by Spring 2020.

10. We demand Athena stop requiring legal name changes to change your name in the student record system or get a new ID card, and establish a mechanism for students to submit pronouns to professors by the end of Spring 2019.

11. We demand Athena recognize the presence of trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming students in the student body by using gender neutral language on campus.
    a. Gender neutral language in standard emails by the end of Spring 2019.
    b. Gender neutral language on the website on pages providing support and resources to enrolled students by Fall 2019.
    c. Language that specifically affirms the presence of trans* women at Athena in all promotional materials and on the website by Fall 2019.
    d. Trans students are already at Athena, and while the public face of the college excludes us, the internal one should not.

12. We demand Athena explicitly allow trans* students to host overnights for major recruitment weekends.
    a. Publish a policy which states you cannot bar trans* or non-binary students from hosting prospective students by Fall 2019.

13. We demand that Athena allow trans* and non-binary alums, including trans* men, to serve as admission interviewers for prospective students.

14. We demand Athena be actively dedicated to building a trans* archive.
    a. Hire a trans* student worker to do outreach with trans* alumni and current trans* students by Fall 2019.
    b. Solicit five collections of trans* subjects for the archives, beginning in Fall 2019, with reports every semester on progress.
15. We demand Athena establish safe, private, accessible bathrooms for showering for trans* folks, particularly trans* women.
   a. Any future residential house renovations must ensure the provision of accessible, single stall bathrooms (including showers).
   b. There must be resources available (in the form of a map) that show which houses have single stall, accessible showers (see demand #5). This resource should be available by Fall 2019.

16. We demand Athena implement gender inclusive bathrooms in all buildings, and remove gendered bathroom signs.
   a. These bathroom signs should be implemented throughout campus by the end of Fall 2019.
   b. Specific signage decisions should be made in consultation with current trans* students’ so that it meets their needs.

17. We demand that the administration works with (and not FOR) trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming students to achieve these demands and to engage in further work to build a safer, more inclusive campus.

We support and affirm the demands of other groups who are expressing their needs at this time. The needs of marginalized students are intertwined and justice cannot happen for any of us until the demands are met for all of us.
## Table 1. Gender-Selective Admission Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Trans* Women</th>
<th>Trans* Men</th>
<th>Non-binary</th>
<th>Matriculation</th>
<th>Other Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agnes Scott</td>
<td>Decatur, GA</td>
<td>2010; Updated 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Assigned female at birth, as well as, those who were assigned male or female at birth, but who now identify as female, transgender, agender, gender fluid or non-binary.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alverno</td>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>2002, revised 2018</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unstated, unlikely</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Consistently live and identify as female”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnard</td>
<td>New York City, NY</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Must state F on documents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Consistently live and identify as women, regardless of the gender assigned to them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Path</td>
<td>Longmeadow, MA</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett</td>
<td>Greensboro, NC</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, AFAB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Self-identified women and people assigned female at birth who do not fit into the gender binary”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenau</td>
<td>Gainesville, GA</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryn Mawr</td>
<td>Bryn Mawr, PA</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, AFAB</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Individuals who have identified and continue to identify as women (including cisgender and trans* women), intersex individuals who do not identify as male, individuals assigned female at birth who have not taken medical or legal steps to identify as male, and individuals assigned female at birth who do not identify within the gender binary.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Crest</td>
<td>Allentown, PA</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unstated, unlikely</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Assigned female at birth and/or applicants who self-identify as women are eligible to apply for admission”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of St. Benedict</td>
<td>St. Joseph, MN</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, can change between schools too (St. Johns)</td>
<td>“Consistently live and identify as women”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>City, State</td>
<td>Legal Change</td>
<td>Identified as Female</td>
<td>Matriculation</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Saint Mary</td>
<td>Omaha, NE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Columbia, SC</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>*Going coeducational Fall 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converse</td>
<td>Spartanburg, SC</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes (legal or medical change)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Program for women”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cotey</td>
<td>Nevada, MO</td>
<td>Yes (legal)</td>
<td>Unstated (legal F)</td>
<td>Unstated (legal F)</td>
<td>“Legally-assigned sex of female on their application”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampden-Sydney</td>
<td>Hampden Sydney, VA</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobart and William Smith Colleges</td>
<td>Geneva, NY</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>“Matriculated into Hobart or William Smith College according to their gender identity.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollins</td>
<td>Hollins, VA</td>
<td>2006; Updated 2019</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Consistently live and identify as women, regardless of the gender assigned to them at birth”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judson</td>
<td>Marison, AL</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“We believe God created people male and female in the womb and that one’s birth sex determines the standard for Biblical behavior in lifestyle and and sexual conduct.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Baldwin</td>
<td>Staunton, VA</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>*Mary Baldwin admits cisgender men in its undergraduate programs but considers itself a college “primarily for women”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mills</td>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Yes (but no legal change)</td>
<td>Yes (AFAB)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Self-identified women and people assigned female at birth who do not fit into the gender binary”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morehouse</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Live and self-identify as men, regardless of the sex assigned to them at birth”</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore College of Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unstated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unstated</td>
<td>“Qualified students who live as women, and who consistently identify as women”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Female Admissions</td>
<td>Transgender Admissions</td>
<td>Nonbinary Admissions</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Holyoke</td>
<td>South Hadley, MA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“We welcome applications from female, transgender and nonbinary students.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Mary</td>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unstated</td>
<td>“Identify themselves as women”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount St. Mary’s</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (?)</td>
<td>Unstated</td>
<td>“Born female or identifies as female “</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notre Dame of Maryland</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Sage</td>
<td>Troy, NY</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No but can apply to Sage College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, can change to Sage College (co-ed)</td>
<td>“We honor a student’s expression of their gender identity and expression.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s</td>
<td>St. Joseph, MN</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, can change between schools too (St. Benedict)</td>
<td>“Consistently live and identify as men”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine/ St. Kate’s</td>
<td>St. Paul/ Minneapolis, MN</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Identify as women … regardless of gender assigned at birth, as well as non-binary and genderqueer students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary’s</td>
<td>Notre Dame, IN</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem College</td>
<td>Winston-Salem, NC</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes (legal)</td>
<td>Yes (with legal F)</td>
<td>Unstated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Admits only female students…does not restrict admission on the basis of sex or gender identity/expression.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripps</td>
<td>Claremont, CA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (legal F)</td>
<td>Probably (legal F)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Indicate their legal sex as female submitted through the Common Application, in addition to applicants who self-identify as women”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmons</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Probably (AFAB)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Assigned female at birth and/or applicants who self-identify as women are eligible to apply for admission”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Northampton, MA</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Smith’s policy is one of self-identification. The college considers for admission any applicant whose birth certificate reflects their gender as female, or who identifies as female.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>City, State</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Gender Identification</td>
<td>Gender Assignment at Birth</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelman</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Women students including students who consistently live and self-identify as women, regardless of their gender assignment at birth”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens</td>
<td>Columbia, MO</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (AFAB)</td>
<td>“Women and who live as women…students who were not born female, but who identify and live as women”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stern</td>
<td>New York City, NY</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Briar</td>
<td>Sweet Briar, VA</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Woman’s</td>
<td>Denton, TX</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>*Texas Women’s admits cisgender men in its undergraduate programs but considers itself a college “primarily for women”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Washington</td>
<td>Washington DC</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ursuline</td>
<td>Pepper Pike, OH</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>*Ursuline admits cisgender men in its undergraduate programs but considers itself a college “primarily for women”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wabash</td>
<td>Crawfordsville, IN</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellesley</td>
<td>Wellesley, MA</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (AFAB)</td>
<td>“Lives as a woman and consistently identifies as a woman…assigned female at birth, identify as non-binary, and who feel they belong in our community of women”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan</td>
<td>Macon, GA</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>“Consistently self-identify and live as women”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
Saint Benedict and Saint John’s; Morehouse and Spelman; Hobart and William Smith, and Stern and Yeshiva are Coordinate Colleges.

Barnard (Columbia), Notre Dame (Maryland University), Russell Sage (Sage), and Scripps (Claremont) are colleges within a larger co-educational university system or have close relationships with co-educational colleges.

Mary Baldwin, Ursuline & and Texas Woman’s are colleges that are predominantly for women but accept cis male undergraduates.

Hampden-Sydney, St. John, Morehouse, Wabash, Hobart, and Yeshiva are colleges for men.

Morehouse, Bennett, and Spelman are HBCUs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addy E.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addy M.</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alanna</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alder</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>Ze/Zir; They/Them Professional</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex A.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex D.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex P.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary; Gender Non-Conforming</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White and Hispanic</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfa Nich</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Gender Non-Conforming or Genderqueer</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No Label; Pansexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Cis Woman</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie Bartlett</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Mostly Straight, Attracted to All Genders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anny</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anya Schulman</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Femme or Non-Binary Woman</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabella</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arden</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Trans*; Non-Binary; Trans* Masculine</td>
<td>They/Them or He/Him</td>
<td>White and Latinx</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher B.</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Transgender; Agender; Non-Binary; Genderqueer; Femme</td>
<td>They/Them or She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Polyamorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher P.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avery H.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Female/ No Gender</td>
<td>She/Her or Neutral pronouns</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avery T.</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Cis Woman; Questioning</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; Pansexual</td>
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<td>Bec</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Status</td>
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<td>Woman; Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Queer; Gay; Lesbian</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Queer; Bisexual</td>
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<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Trans* Male</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
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<td>Chris S.</td>
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<td>Not Female</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
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<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
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<td>Cozi</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>They/Them or She/Her, Other's Preferences</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Minerva</td>
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<td>Trans* Man</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
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<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Agender</td>
<td>Ze/Zir; All Pronouns</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Too Hard to Define; Married to Someone Who is Mostly a Woman</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Woman of Color</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>Transracial (adoptive) Asian</td>
<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Queer; Lives Life as Gay Man</td>
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<td>They/Them or He/Him</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; All or None</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Queer; Basically Bisexual</td>
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<td>Athena</td>
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<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Status</td>
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<td>Pronouns</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>They/Them</td>
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<td>They/Them (preferred), will accept He/Him</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>Queer; &quot;Goes Back and Forth&quot;</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Straight</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Queer; Gay</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; Bisexual</td>
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<td>He/Him</td>
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<td>Queer; Maybe Lesbian</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Ambivalent; Would be born as man if could</td>
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<td>Questioning</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
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<td>She/Her</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
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<td>Most Often Trans* man; X</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Race</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
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<td>Gay; Lesbian; Queer</td>
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<td>She/Her</td>
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<td>Queer; Bisexual</td>
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<td>They/Them</td>
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<td>White and Latina</td>
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<td>They/Them or He/Him</td>
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<td>Pansexual</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; &quot;Labels are Stupid&quot;</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary; &quot;Question Mark&quot;</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>They/Them or She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Status</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Queer; Bisexual</td>
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<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Cis Woman</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>Korean and Black</td>
<td>Queer; Pansexual</td>
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<td>Sam D.</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Trans* Masculine</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>She/Her</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
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<td>Alumni</td>
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<td>She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Non-Binary; Genderqueer</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>She/Her</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Questioning; Fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>They/Them or He/Him</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squash</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Trans* Male</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>Queer; Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary; &quot;Labels are Stupid&quot;</td>
<td>All Pronouns Except She/Her</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whit</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Non-Binary; Genderfluid</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer; Pansexual; Any Label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will C.</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Genderfluid</td>
<td>He/Him</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will R.</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Non-Binary; Trans*; &quot;All the Things&quot;</td>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael</td>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>Femme</td>
<td>They/Them or She/Her</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Staff members are not included in this table for purposes of aggregation and anonymity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Athena</th>
<th>Minerva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Policy and Administrative Systems</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender neutral or inclusive language in student handbook</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender neutral or inclusive language in institutional documents</td>
<td>“In keeping with our tradition and identity as a college of and for women, Athena will continue to use gendered language, including female pronouns, in institutional communications.”</td>
<td>No institutional policy, depends on document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to list preferred name in administrative systems (i.e., directory, transcripts, diploma, email) without legal documentation</td>
<td>● New Fall 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to list preferred name and/or change photo on institutional ID without legal documentation(^1)</td>
<td>● New Fall 2019</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-inclusive bathrooms in all buildings</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replace restroom signage with gender-inclusive signage on restroom doors(^2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All single-occupancy restrooms on campus gender-inclusive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication of locations of gender-neutral bathrooms(^3)</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility and widespread knowledge of on-campus resources via publication online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to list preferred name on class roster</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to list pronouns on class roster</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coming Fall 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy or guidelines regarding pronouns in class</td>
<td>● New Spring 2020</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans* studies courses</td>
<td>Queer studies courses available on campus, nothing explicitly discussing trans* studies</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual training on transgender issues for RAs</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive language in housing assignment procedures</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Available</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated transgender affinity housing space</td>
<td></td>
<td>Official fall 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Care and Counseling Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender affirming healthcare covered by student insurance</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral system to on-campus resources</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral system to off-campus resources</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option for campus representative to accompany students to off-campus resources/ ride service to off-campus services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans*-competent providers (according to website)</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans* identified providers</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender counseling support group</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to identify preferred name, pronouns, and/or gender identity on intake forms</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated transgender health clinic or healthcare team to provide comprehensive care to students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability and assistance for administering hormones and intramuscular syringes on campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus Safety</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender inclusive hate crime/bias incident policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Affairs and Campus Life</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender training and workshop for incoming students during orientation</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of registered transgender student organization</td>
<td>● Chartered fall 2019</td>
<td>● Queer POC only, unregistered trans* organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated trans* inclusive/LGBTQ+ resource center</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated staff member for resource center</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated staff member for trans* students in diversity office</td>
<td>● New position fall 2020</td>
<td>● New position fall 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designation of committee/task force to address policy and practice</td>
<td>Created summer 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender awareness event on campus (open to public)</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender centered event on campus (trans* identified people only)</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender student issues mentioned in student newspaper</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics policy that permits transgender students to participate on varsity, club, and/or intramural teams</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible gender-affirming clothing donation/swap</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Employees

| Required training about transgender issues for faculty⁴       | ●                 |
| Required training about transgender issues for staff⁵       | ●                 |
| Optional continuing education on transgender issues for faculty and/or staff | ●          |
| Visible presence of trans* faculty and staff on campus       | ●                 |

### Recruitment and Retention

| Dedicated recruitment program for transgender students       |                 |
| Dedicated admission officer for transgender students         |                 |
| Ability for out transgender students to serve as admission tour guides | ●             |
| Ability for out transgender students to serve as admission overnight hosts | ●       |
| Funding assistance for students who have lost support of families after coming out | ● |

### Alumni

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to change legal name or list preferred name in institutional documents (transcripts, diplomas) after graduation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ or trans*-specific alumni group</td>
<td>Unofficial, Facebook only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ or trans*-specific programming at alumni reunions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource items compiled from Marine (2011); Beemyn et al. (2005); Campus Pride (2018); Athena and Minerva student demands; Athena and Minerva Websites

This list is not intended to be a “final checklist” to achieve trans* inclusion. As I argue, resources may exist, but their use may be limited in serving and supporting trans* students. Rather, this is just a starting point to note what can be available and environments can still be exclusionary to trans* students.

Notes:
1: Available without legal name change, but costs approximately $25 for replacement
2: Not universally adopted. Some signage remains gendered and includes additional “inclusive” signs either next to or on top of old signage. Many students have taken upon themselves over the years at both schools to create signage for inclusive restrooms.
3: Last updated 2017
4: Only available in counseling services at both institutions
5: In compliance with NCAA regulations, which stipulate that students either cannot be receiving testosterone therapy or must be on testosterone suppressants for a minimum of 1 year
6: Training part of online anti-discrimination and harassment module. Transgender issues are only briefly covered in training.
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(http://calliowong.tumblr.com/post/45074030481/thank-you)