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Antonio Duran Z Nicolazzo

The number of studies on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students has grown over the past years. Nevertheless, a small amount of research exists examining the lives of our trans collegians. This article adds to this scholarship by exploring the nature of trans* students' relationships within collegiate environments. Specifically, this study elucidates the different discourses on gender identity that influence students forming academic, romantic, and social partnerships on campuses. Findings reveal how participants resist societal expectations of educating others on their gender identity. Implications of this research illuminate how student affairs professionals assist trans* students in creating relationships, as well as highlighting the responsibility of staff/faculty in higher education.*

The current emphasis on the trans* experience in scholarly research calls into question how student affairs educators work to understand and assist trans* collegians (B. Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Rankin & Garvey, 2015; Renn, 2010).[†] Particularly, practitioners and scholars must move past notions of mere visibility to truly comprehend how best to support this population of students. Although the number of trans*-related studies has grown in the past two decades (e.g., B. Beemyn, 2003; Carter, 2000; Catalano, 2015; Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Howard & Stevens, 2000; Lees, 1998; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016b, 2017; Pryor, 2015), researchers have yet to address a myriad of experiences and trepidations for trans* students. Moreover, the available body of research on trans* collegians is largely nonempirical or deficit-based or comes from broader LGBTQ populations rather than trans*-specific studies (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). In examining current studies on trans* students, one area of research that lacks attention concerns how trans* individuals negotiate forming and maintaining academic, romantic, and social relationships.

Even though higher education researchers have continuously underscored the importance of peer, staff, and faculty relationships for students (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), few studies exist that bring light to the process of producing emotional and intimate relationships for trans* collegians. Of the research that does exist, most studies focus on how trans* students are academically and socially disadvantaged as a result of an inability to create important relationships. Garvey and Rankin (2015) discovered when

[†] As Tompkins (2014a) noted, "The asterisk is used primarily . . . to open up *transgender* or *trans* to a greater range of meanings . . . includ[ing] not only such terms as transgender, transsexual, trans man, and trans woman that are prefixed by trans- but also identities such as genderqueer, neutrois, intersex, agender, two-spirit, cross-dresser, and genderfluid" (pp. 26–27). The use of the asterisk references how the symbol can be used in computer search functions to find words with any given prefix (e.g., trans-). Given the problematic collapsing of transgender to be understood as synonymous with transsexual (Nicolazzo, 2015), our use of this term highlights the wide variance within the identity category itself.

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trans* students fail to construct meaningful relationships during their time in higher education, these collegians are less likely to succeed and engage in campus life. In addition, Rankin, Weber, and Garvey (2014) found that trans* students often experience feelings of loneliness and isolation, hindering their ability to prosper academically. Moreover, since trans* collegians repeatedly encounter discrimination on an individual (and institutional) level, these individuals are more likely to report lower sentiments of personal safety and more disengagement with campus life as a result (B. Beemyn, 2003). These studies underscore a harrowing gap in higher education literature: although educators recognize the need for trans* students to have healthy relationships, individuals lack an asset-based perspective on how trans* collegians shape successful platonic and romantic relationships while in college.

Furthermore, there is even a smaller amount of research exploring the experience of trans* students in the college classroom. Pryor's (2015) article on White trans* students' academic experiences began this discourse, explaining the need for both peer and faculty support in the classroom. Similarly, Linley et al. (2016) found that strong connections with faculty can lead to beneficial formal and informal support (in and out of the classroom, respectively) for trans* and queer students. In their article, they expanded on Woodford and Kulick's (2015) argument that positive relationships with faculty members impact academic outcomes, as well as social integration in the classroom. Still, much more is needed in examining how trans* students make meaning of their engagement in academic spaces, particularly for trans* students of color and those with other marginalized social identities.

Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to critically examine how trans* college students develop relationships academically, socially, and romantically. Specifically, we as researchers sought to understand how trans* students made decisions on who to form relationships with, together with their choice to disclose/not disclose their trans* identity. The two guiding questions for this research study were the following:

1. What are the experiences of trans* students as they create relationships in collegiate environments: social, romantic, and within the classroom?
2. When formulating relationships, how do trans* collegians decide whether or not to inform and educate others on their gender identity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *trans** describes "people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain their gender" (Stryker, 2008, p. 1). A wide amount of variance exists in how trans* people define their gender identity, including agender, transsexual, transvestite, cross-dresser, drag queen, drag queer, drag kings, female or male impersonator, genderqueer, intersexual, hermaphrodite, fem queen, and genderfuck, among others (Feinberg, 1996; Valentine, 2007; Wilchins, 1997). This list continues to grow as individuals find better terminology to describe their experiences. To understand the experience of these trans* individuals, we examined how scholars have described notions of community and relationships, education of identities by the marginalized within and outside of the classroom, and trans* relationships.

Notions of Community and Relationships

The notion of community has been utilized by student affairs to represent a central goal of the profession. Still, multiple and varying definitions

of community exist (Brazzell, 2001; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993; Strange & Banning, 2001; Wiley, 2002). One commonly used explanation of community comes from Boyer's (1990) work, in which he wrote that every college should strive toward becoming "educationally purposeful," "open," "just," "disciplined," "caring," and "celebrative" (pp. 7–8). Nonetheless, researchers have suggested colleges largely fail to achieve and espouse these six components of community, particularly in relation to members of the LGBTQ community (B. Beemyn et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005; Evans & Broido, 1999; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010).

The concept of community becomes increasingly isolating for those who must confront dominant social discourses. Scholars have documented that trans* students have an especially difficult time to find a community that not only respects them, but celebrates their individuality. In fact, trans* individuals often fail to be advocated for by cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Furthermore, Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) commented on how this lack of emphasis on the trans* narrative transpires on college campuses, especially within LGBTQ centers. Even in traditionally queer spaces, trans* collegians must advocate for their needs and to be accepted holistically.

Researchers such as Pryor (2015) and Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) highlight the multiple microcommunities trans* students navigate on a daily basis. Trans* collegians exist in academic, social, and romantic spaces during their time at a college or university; consequently, these individuals encounter the possibility of forming relationships—partnerships where people feel comfortable being their whole selves—in these different microcommunities. Scholars have consistently underscored the importance of these relationships, sometimes referred to as partnerships, for college students. In particular, higher education researchers have stressed that peer groups have a strong impact on the academic and social achievement of collegians (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Moreover, Linley and Nguyen (2015) also found that relationships with faculty members, often varying by academic discipline, have a positive impact on LGBTQ students. This need for beneficial partnerships with peers, faculty, and staff reveals a central tension for trans* students; trans* people must choose whether to disclose their gender identity to communities and people who ultimately may decide to reject them. Consequently, trans* students may have a more difficult time creating relationships with people who love them for who they are, including, but not limited to, their trans* identity.

Education of Identities by the Marginalized—In and Outside the Classroom

In forming communities, trans* students must often negotiate informing and educating others on their gender identity. However, researchers have suggested that engaging in this sort of identity-based education takes a toll on people with marginalized identities (e.g., trans* students; Nicolazzo, 2016b, 2017). This phenomenon mirrors the exhaustion various marginalized populations experience when dominant populations call on them to serve as their educational tool (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sue, 2010). Furthermore, scholars (e.g., hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2000) have discussed this reality as being formed by a White, heterosexual, male hegemonic standpoint, which we also postulate to include a cisgender lens. As Kumashiro (2000) wrote, "Those who are traditionally marginalized remain outsiders, called upon as 'experts' to speak with their own voices and educate the norm" (p. 39). This continual dismissal of the marginalized

perspective leads individuals to feel used by dominant groups and to question the purpose of engaging people on their identities.

Nevertheless, great power and stress exist in sharing one's story and identities. In her analysis of the classroom environment, hooks (1994) illuminated this point. In discussing the experience of marginalized students, hooks referenced the concept of "authority of experience" versus what she saw as preferable, the "passion of experience" (p. 90). Both of these phrases bring to light the "specialness of those ways of knowing rooted in experience" (p. 90). Those with oppressed identities hold access to certain memories, stories, and experiences that can inform classroom discussion. The difference between the two concepts stems from who decides when the marginalized student shares.

In other words, in a hostile classroom environment, trans* collegians must decide whether or not to share their personal experiences as trans* people in fear of a negative outcome. Henderson (2014) discussed this phenomenon as "bringing up gender," and suggested that regardless of students' final decision to disclose their gender identity, the choice involved taxing affective work that students with dominant identities did not have to do. Conversely, when instructors create an atmosphere where students feel valued as holistic beings, students from historically marginalized communities are more likely to divulge pieces of their narrative based on their accord, mirroring hooks's notion of the "passion of experience." Linley et al. (2016) echoed this point by referring to the "formal interactions" in which faculty support queer and trans* collegians (p. 57). In their text, Linley et al. argued that faculty members have the ability to challenge trans*phobic thought both in classroom interactions and in their curriculum, better allowing for students to speak from passion and not authority. When faculty miss these important opportunities, trans* students are forced to advocate for themselves or remain silent.

Scholars have shown that the taxing effect of trying to educate others on their trans* identity is overwhelming. For example, G. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) discovered that, when confronted with gendered language, trans* participants expressed "that it required too much effort to convince others to rethink how they conceive of gender and to stop using gendered language" (p. 152). As a result, some trans* participants found it better to give up on educating others (i.e., to not "bring up gender") because of the impact—emotionally, physically, and/or otherwise—it may have on them if they were to do so. Trans* individuals encounter this experience frequently as they search to create academic, romantic, and social relationships (Nicolazzo, 2016b, 2017).

Trans* Relationships

The nature of trans* relationships and how these individuals face decisions of educating others on their gender identity is an area that has yet to be explored extensively in literature. The dearth in scholarship most likely stems from an inability to conceptualize and understand partnerships that exist outside of dominant cisgender and heteronormative narratives. This observation rings true with Barthes's (1972) discussion of the "Other" as seen in subcultural theory. Barthes argued that the Other is often transformed into a "pure object, a spectacle, a clown" by the majority (p. 152). Subsequently, within collegiate environments, the dominant culture others trans* students. Diamond (2011) highlighted this notion of transgender as the Other when he noted,

> If they aren't ignored and rendered invisible by mainstream narratives of romance, trans and gender-variant folks are consistently portrayed as deviants

> unsuitable to love. Prostitutes, impostors, freaks: these roles assigned to mainstream transgender characters help reinforce the normative gender binary that destroys any option for true gender fluidity in the world. (p. 7)

In this statement, Diamond argued that trans* individuals, particularly those who express their gender outside of society's binary of masculinity and femininity, struggle to find acceptance. Othering serves to disconnect individuals from others, thus severing the possibility to form healthy and beneficial relationships.

Connected to the othering of trans* people is the notion of trans*-normativity, or the prevailing belief that there is only one way trans* people should practice their gender (Jourian, Simmons, & Devaney, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a). Oftentimes, trans*-normativity is expressed as a form of respectability politics in that it requires trans* people to capitulate to a prescribed, acceptable, and so-called normal notion of gender expression and presentation. If trans* people do not, cannot, or decide not to do so—the logic goes—then they face the prospect of being alone, as expressed by the Diamond quote. Put another way, although trans* people identify and express their genders in various ways across time and context, the hegemony of trans*-normativity furthers a social discourse around who among the trans* population is worthy of establishing and maintaining relationships, with worth being equated to one's ascription to "normal" gender presentation.

A select few researchers have started thinking critically about trans* relationships, primarily in the social and romantic sense. G. Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) study revealed that the majority of trans* people were less likely to be out to those who were not in their immediate families or close friends. The reasoning behind this stemmed from the fact that "transgender people often encounter bias when they transition or otherwise come out to or are recognized as transgender by others" (G. Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 76). The reality of bias and harassment impedes the ability for trans* people to construct meaningful connections. Yet, this experience does not mitigate the desire for trans* individuals to form partnerships that are romantic in nature.

In a quantitative study of 1,229 transgender individuals older than 18, Iantaffi and Bockting (2011) listed a number of findings regarding trans* romantic relationships. They discovered that a significant number of participants "who were otherwise confident could feel quite fearful of rejection" when forming romantic relationships with cisgender individuals (p. 361). This worry manifests due to the anticipation of a negative reaction to the disclosure of one's gender identity. Tompkins (2014b) contended that cisgender individuals attracted to trans*-identified people might also encounter worries in forming relationships, fearing the label of "tranny chaser." However, it is trans* individuals who must grapple with the question of when to reveal their gender identity in a relationship, whether it is a visible part of their identity or not. As Enke (2012) argued, "Dominant cultural institutions render nonvisibility—what some call 'passing'—tantamount to fraud" (p. 75); therefore, if trans* individuals choose not to reveal their identity, cisgender people perceive this as lying or being deceptive (e.g., Serano, 2007). Thus, transgender people are caught between revealing their identity and risking the relationship or being seen as a liar when formulating partnerships.

In addition, Iantaffi and Bockting (2011) also found that trans* people who are attracted to people of the same gender identity as their own receive considerably more ostracization than other trans* individuals. This conflict between sexual orientation and gender identity exposes the prevalence of societal heteronormativity.

In other words, although trans* individuals reject gender norms, they still feel compelled to follow certain scripts in terms of their sexuality. Iantaffi and Bockting called attention to this phenomenon, stating, "Heterosexuality as a more sexually legitimate script seems to dominate the choices available to transgender individuals if they are to be seen as non-pathological members of our societies" (p. 367). This finding reveals that broad, social discourses—or macro discourses—mediate trans* individuals' attempts to formulate partnerships; however, the current research available on trans* relationships lacks a focus on the collegiate experience. Counteracting this absence, the present study contributes to scholarship on trans* collegian relationship forming by placing participants' experiences within the larger macro discourses present on campus.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was rooted in a critical theoretical perspective utilizing transgender theory (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010), alongside Halberstam's (2005) notion of the *transgender gaze*. Guiding our study, transgender theory is a recently emerging orientation that has its roots in critical schools of thought (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) defined transgender theory by stating that it

> encompasses and transcends feminist and queer theory by explicitly incorporating ideas of the fluidly embodied, socially constructed, and self-constructed aspects of social identity, along with the dynamic interaction and integration of these aspects of identity within the narratives of lived experiences. (p. 432)

In other words, transgender theory, as a critical framework, challenges traditional views of identity as categorical in nature. Similarly, Roen (2001) contended that transgender theory allows scholars to comprehend gender beyond the socially constructed gender binary, echoing the work of feminist and queer scholars such as Judith Butler. Thus, transgender theory provided us as researchers an opportunity to understand participants' experiences without conforming to gender-based essentialism. Transgender theory also encouraged us as researchers to center participants' experiences, focusing on their self-identification while also addressing the ways their experiences have been influenced by societal notions of gender. To accomplish this, we employed Halberstam's (2005) concept of the *transgender gaze* as a nuanced articulation of transgender theory.

Aligning with tenets of transgender theory, the transgender gaze encourages researchers to use a "nonfetishistic mode of seeing the transgender body—*a mode that looks with, rather than at* [emphasis added], the transgender body and cultivates the multidimensionality of an indisputably transgender gaze" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 92). Halberstam's (2005) conceptualization of the transgender gaze originally stemmed from a paradox resulting from cinematic portrayals of trans* characters. Specifically, Halberstam wrote, "Whenever the transgender character is seen to be transgendered, then he/she [*sic*] is both failing to pass and threatening to expose a rupture between the distinct temporal registers of past, present, and future" (p. 77). This paradox isolates the individual for being transgender, rather than examining the complexities that make up this figure. The transgender gaze, then, asks viewers to determine whether trans* characters are being understood on their own terms (what Halberstam referred to as viewers *looking with* trans* characters), or if the overriding sentiment is that of trans* characters being deceptive and not who they claim to be, which Halberstam referred to as viewers *looking at* trans* characters.

In constructing this study, we became increasingly aware of how trans* collegians

utilize education as a vehicle to regain their authority and worth. In other words, participants often used education as a means by which to promote people *looking with*, rather than *at*, them. Furthermore, participants described strategies by which they determined how others were seeing them (i.e., at or with), and as a result, with whom they determined to be in a relationship. Thus, using the transgender gaze as a theoretical tool allowed us to examine the micro and macro discourses related to relationship building that transpired in a collegiate environment. Paralleling our use of the transgender theory, the transgender gaze allowed us as researchers to comprehend the many nuanced and complex understandings of how trans* students made sense of their relationships as both limiting and liberatory.

STUDY DESIGN

For this study, we engaged in a secondary analysis of qualitative data (Heaton, 2008) from an 18-month ethnographic study conducted by Nicolazzo (2016b, 2017). These data depicted the stories of 9 trans* students at City University (CU, a pseudonym) who represented a wide variety of social identities including race, ethnicity, faith traditions, socioeconomic classes, sexualities, disabilities, and gender identities. CU is a large public research institution and is located in Stockdale (a pseudonym), an urban city with a population of about 300,000 residents. Both Stockdale and CU have a problematic history of numerous different genderist, homophobic, heterosexist, racist, and classist events and incidents that have occurred in Stockdale and on CU's campus. Understanding this provides important insight into the macro forces that influence how trans* collegians make sense of their relationships.

For this secondary analysis, we focused on data collected through ethnographic interviews (Heyl, 2001) with participants, all of which ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and occurred once per semester with each participant throughout the course of the participant's involvement in the original study. The second author transcribed these interviews verbatim and engaged participants in member checking by sending them their transcripts to seek any clarification of the conversations as well as overall confirmation for the transcripts.

For this study, we used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze how larger systems of power and dominance influence the individual interactions that occur within this structure (Van Dijk, 2003). A reaction to the 1960s and 1970s notion of a "dominant formal" paradigm, CDA allows a researcher "to explore hidden power relations between a piece of discourse and wider social and cultural relations" (Corson, 2000, p. 95). Previous texts have underscored that CDA, as a methodology, has not been utilized extensively in research focused on higher education contexts (Patton, 2014). Nevertheless, CDA lends itself well to extrapolating the ways that dominant ideologies shape issues around social identities with an example being gender dynamics.

At its core, CDA allows researchers to scrutinize the bridge that is built between micro and macro discourses. Van Dijk (2003) defined CDA as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p. 352). CDA acknowledges that these macro forces of power and dominance impact micro discourses; consequently, Van Dijk contended that researchers must gain an awareness of hegemonic influences in a given research context. Groups maintain authority only "if they are able to (more or less) control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups" (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 355). CDA also acknowledges

that different forms of power exist, including those defined by violent force, social or cultural capital, and more.

In some cases, this power becomes solidified in more formal structures, such as laws, policies, and norms. As a result, this dominance becomes naturalized to generate a prevailing ideology, something that Hebdige (1979) stated "cannot be bracketed off from everyday life as a self-contained set of 'political opinions' or 'biased views'" (p. 12). As such, CDA allows scholars to assess how the majority ideology influences those subcultural groups (e.g., trans* students) who are a part of any given macroenvironment (e.g., college campuses).

While the macro discourses manifest in forms such as policies and laws, CDA is also concerned with the smaller moments of interactions that reflect these dominant ideologies. Van Dijk (2003) listed off of a number of micro interactions that can be inspected within CDA, including "language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to the micro level of the social order" (p. 354). Thus, CDA serves as a valuable tool to understand individual interactions and how they relate to a larger structural context. Specifically related to the present inquiry, we positioned genderism—or the oppressive belief that only two genders exist—as the structural context; this framework then allowed us to use CDA to understand how genderism operated on both the micro level (personal) and macro level (environmental) to influence trans* college students' development of relationships and the choice to educate others on their gender.

DATA ANALYSIS

In analyzing existing qualitative data, CDA provided us with a tool to critically examine the experiences of our participants as communicated through their interviews. Although CDA does not have a specific method of analysis (Van Dijk, 2003), we utilized Huckin's (1997) and Patton's (2014) recommendations on completing a CDA study. When analyzing our data, we followed Huckin's suggestion to first "play the role of a typical reader who is just trying to comprehend the text in an uncritical manner" (p. 81). We refrained from using a critical lens in our initial readings of the transcripts, withholding our preconceived assumptions about the macro discourses impacting participants. This first reading grounds our use of CDA as a methodology, as it reminds us to keep in mind the ordinary reader who may fail to see the nuances that exist between micro and macro discourses.

Following this first stage, Huckin (1997) and Patton (2014) suggest that researchers must then revisit the text from a critical perspective. To accomplish this, we sought to understand the participants' interviews as a whole, followed by analyzing the data sentence by sentence and later word by word. This sequence of steps allowed us to comprehend why these trans* collegians decided to foreground certain experiences and chose to omit others. Moreover, this method of data analysis permitted us as researchers to better uncover the moments in which our trans* participants were being *looked at* or *looked with* when creating relationships with others. These findings emerged by analyzing the participants' specific ordering of words and sentences, nuances that offered insight into how trans* collegians perceived their agency in educating others. In this second reading of the data, the researchers also made note about the ways that genderism, as a form of oppression, manifested in the micro interactions described by the participants. Thus, Huckin's and Patton's recommendations on conducting a CDA analysis generated study results that aligned with our methodology, as well as with our theoretical framework.

TABLE 1.
Overview of Findings

	Academic	Romantic	Social
Looking At	Forced to enact the "authority of experience" or stay invisible	A need to disclose identity and conform to traditional gender roles	One's identity being conflated with sexual orientation / not recognized at all
Looking With	Able to share from the "passion of experience"	Living one's authentic self in romantic relationships	Individuality recognized, rather than being seen as a learning experience

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Both authors approached this research based on their experiences in working with students identifying along the gender spectrum. The first author Antonio Duran, identifies as a queer, Latino, cisgender man who first started exploring his connection to a larger LGBTQ community during his time at his undergraduate institution. As a first-generation student, he found comfort in the LGBTQ center on his campus, eventually embarking on a service trip to the Dominican Republic through the office. This service trip allowed him to work alongside the trans* community in the Dominican Republic, illuminating the ways that trans* individuals fall in the margins even within the larger LGBTQ population. Thus, Duran brings these narratives and perspectives to his work, attempting to utilize research as a means to allow these voices to gain access to spaces previously reserved for individuals with power.

The second author, Z Nicolazzo, identifies as a White, queer, gender-nonconforming trans* person. Nicolazzo came out as trans* after working professionally in student affairs for 4 years, which led Nicolazzo to wonder about the experiences of trans* undergraduate students. Nicolazzo also developed a particular interest in understanding the various types of relationships trans* people make and maintain during hir dissertation study, which produced the data set from which this secondary analysis was completed. Specifically, ze became interested by how participants discussed seeking, developing, and maintaining all forms of relationships. Many participants' narratives resonated with hir own experiences in building relationships, and as a result, Nicolazzo has continued to think about how trans* relationships and college contexts influence each other, as well as how participants' multiple identities may mediate the relationships they create and maintain.

FINDINGS

Results from this study revealed clear connections between macro discourses of genderism that exist at higher education institutions and the micro interactions trans* collegians face daily. In keeping with our theoretical framework, we chose to represent our findings by drawing distinctions between how relationships are (not) formed with trans* students depending on the presence of the transgender gaze. Consequently, our findings are split between moments where individuals *look at* and *look with* transgender collegians (see Table 1), causing them to educate or not educate others on their gender

identity. In addition, when participants are introduced through the findings, we add the pronouns they used, shown after their pseudonyms in parentheses.

Academic Relationships in the Classroom

Looking At. The first set of findings concerned the way trans* collegians manage relationships in classroom environments (i.e., student to student and student to faculty). Trans* students shared needing faculty members to create an atmosphere in which they could express themselves. Yet, these collegians remarked on how faculty members either failed to draw attention to problematic statements asserted by their students or made such statements themselves, forcing participants to advocate for themselves and educate others at their own risk. These instances required students to assert what hooks (1994) described as the "authority of experience," in which they were only able to navigate the classroom by using their identity to gain access to the conversation at hand (p. 90).

Adem (they/them/their), who identified their gender identity as being in a "gray space," drew attention to this dynamic by speaking about an experience they had in a queer studies class.[‡] When the topic of conversation switched to differentiating the term *transgender* from *transsexual* or *transvestite*, Adem acknowledged feelings of discomfort in attempting to educate people on this subject matter:

> I was like, this is an intro class. Like, oh my God, this is an intro class; what am I doing here? I live this every single day. I just felt so . . . out of place . . . because I knew too much, not because I didn't belong in a queer studies class—because obviously I do—but I think I belong up there more as the assignment than as a student.

This statement exemplifies the difficulty for trans* collegians in the classroom whose classmates *look at* them and exploit their experiences, rather than seeking understanding *with* the trans* individual. In Adem's story, the micro discourse between them and their classmates revealed the macro discourse of genderism present in the classroom. For Adem, the only choice to try to resist this reliance on the binary was to make themselves visible and heard.

Kade (he/him/his), a trans* man, saw a similar environment in his classroom when a student started to make derogatory remarks about individuals who identified as intersex. Kade went one step further to acknowledge the lack of response from the instructor teaching the class, an experience that he saw as common. As Kade explained, "Instead of calmly correcting the student, like, 'Well no, that's not how it is for them,' he just laughed and continued with the lecture." Both Kade's story and Adem's highlight the inherent tension that trans* collegians face in classroom environments. When trans* people are treated more as subjects than actual students, these participants find two possible solutions: stay silent and remain invisible; or assert dominance by using their identity as the only way to have their voice heard. Micah (all pronouns), a Black student who identified her gender as "comfortable," spoke about navigating the classroom environment

[‡] Adem currently uses different pronouns (he/him/his) and identifies his gender differently (trans* man) than he did during his time as a participant in the original study from which these data were drawn. Despite this change in pronoun usage and gender identity, we use the pronouns and gender identity Adem used at the time of the study to reflect how he was making sense of his gender and his experiences as a trans* person at that moment. We find it important to share his change in pronoun usage and gender identity to further reify the way gender continues to form throughout one's life.

by remaining stealth and invisible:

> I would say that the classroom dynamic is not an unsafe place, because there's so many students, nobody is focusing on each other. It's kinda like you're doing your own thing. There's one or two people that's like, "Eh, I don't talk to you, you don't [talk] to me—we're okay with that."

In her description of the classroom, Micah called attention to a macro issue in which he does not exist holistically in academic spaces.[§] They minimized interactions with faculty members and students in order to avoid conversations about their identities as an individual who is both Black *and* trans*. This intersection between race and gender pushed Micah to avoid conversations on both her identities within the classroom. Still, alongside the experiences of being *looked at* in classroom environments, participants also talked about instances in which faculty members created an atmosphere that celebrated their identities and where trans* students were able to decide whether or not to educate others.

Looking With. The next finding elucidates the experience that trans* students have in forming relationships within the classroom when the focus moves from *looking at* them to *looking with* them. Rather than seeing them as the subject of a discussion or assignment (as Adem discussed), faculty members and students who saw trans* collegians as partners in learning mitigated trans* oppression. For example, including a clause making explicit respect for all identities on syllabi or asking students for their pronouns and proper name provided participants with a feeling of comfort. In response to the question of what she would like to see change at CU, Megan (she/her/hers), a trans* woman, stated,

> I would think if [faculty members] were unsure of someone's gender, they could ask for their proper pronouns and what name they want to be [used] . . . and, I mean, that's about it, really. I mean, if you treat [trans* students] as the gender they want to be treated as, then they'll be just fine with you.

Megan's comment, albeit appealingly simple, represents the power that is shared when this micro interaction of asking someone for their gender pronouns occurs. In these instances, faculty members resist the oppressive macro discourse of genderism in higher education, and trans* students are more likely to feel willing to share from their experiences on their own accord, a move hooks (1994) defined as shifting from using the "authority of experience" to the "passion of experience" (p. 90).

In addition, trans* collegians also spoke about specific disciplines and ways to integrate transgender issues into curriculum as a way to *look with*, not *look at*, their experiences. For example, participants like Adem, Jackson (they/them/their), and Kade argued that they often saw Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies classrooms, in addition to those in the Education Department, as being more inclusive than most. Moreover, Silvia (she/her/hers), a Black, queer, agender participant, described the College of Art in a similar way by observing, "I feel like it's okay to be a little weird because there is someone else in the College of Art who is weirder than you." By this statement, Silvia acknowledged how she felt at home in her department, being able to act in accordance with her uniqueness. Connected to this experience of embracing one's individuality, professors in these disciplines were more likely to use individuals' pronouns

[§] We reflect Micah's choice to utilize all pronouns throughout the text by using pronouns interchangeably, oftentimes within the same sentences. We do this both to honor Micah's using all pronouns hirself and as a way to disrupt notions of stable and consistent gender via the text of our article.

and names. Furthermore, Jackson also stated that it was important to include transgender experiences in courses that touched on the experiences of the marginalized. When asked what their recommendations were for faculty members, Jackson said:

> I think that it's important to bring it up in curriculum. You know, if you bring up different kinds of social issues [it's important that] you don't ignore the trans* issues, because I feel like that's something that happens a lot, even within the gay community, you know?

In their statement, Jackson calls attention to how faculty members render trans* issues—and as a result, trans* people—invisible by overlooking them in the curriculum.

By shedding light on the experiences of transgender individuals, faculty members have the agency to show the value of these narratives. Although these are subtle changes that can be taken in terms of addressing the micro discourses of gender, they also provide an example of how shifts in micro discourses can influence macro discourses and vice versa. In other words, by talking about trans* issues on an individual level, people's perceptions of trans* individuals may shift in positive ways. Conversely, if faculty create climates of support regarding trans* people, then individual interactions between students of all genders reflect that same respect.

Romantic Relationships

Looking At. The second set of findings uncovered how trans* students created and navigated romantic relationships when the focus was placed on how others view their trans* bodies. Dating for participants was increasingly complicated due to the gender roles that potential or existing partners placed them in unknowingly or knowingly. Specifically, participants who were in relationships spoke about the tension that came with partners *looking at* or *with them*. For example, Jackson, who identified as agender, discussed how a previous partner would use feminine adjectives to describe them (e.g., "beautiful"), despite their expressing a desire to feel "handsome." Though others may see this as a benign change in wording, this language use points to larger systemic issues. Jackson, as well as the other participants in this study, often noticed others' discomfort with their expression of their gender identity. Silvia discussed a similar thought when she stated, "We have this script or something and I'm not following—like, I'm doing a different script and they're like, 'You're not giving me my cues,' and so, like, they don't know what to do." In this analogy of a script, Silvia references macro expectations of how gender is to be performed and her inability to conform to these boundaries. These trans* collegians discussed eventually losing the will to educate their partners and breaking off the relationship altogether, as was the case for Jackson.

Furthermore, participants faced the dilemma of when to disclose their gender identity when dating. Whereas some participants wanted their gender to remain ambiguous or fluid, potential partners expressed a need to know their gender identity. Kade explained this dynamic when he stated the following:

> The reaction that I've gotten from any of the [cisgender] gay guys on campus that I've dated is that they've been very angry that I didn't tell them on the first date. Like, they expect me to be, like, "Hi, my name is Kade, and I'm trans*."

By sharing this experience, Kade expressed how the men he was dating were objectifying his trans* identity; rather than getting to know Kade as a person, the men he dated reduced him to his trans* identity, and, as a result, *looked at* rather than *with* him.

Participants choosing not to share their gender identity meant some partners felt irrationally betrayed. Thus, participants had to negotiate being *looked at* when trying to find partners who would instead *look with* them. These moments underscore the nature of power that is taken away from trans* collegians attempting to form romantic relationships. These trans* individuals are expected to educate others on their gender identity from the onset without being allowed time to be comfortable with these potential partners.

Looking With. Participants also remarked on what they wished would occur when trying to form romantic relationships. In particular, participants spoke about wanting to be with partners who would embrace their gender identity. This finding underscores that participants did not want to have to educate potential partners, but simply wanted to be their authentic self. Jackson articulated this thought:

> If I was going to date somebody, I would probably want to date a straight woman. . . . And that's like a big thing that I've noticed. Um, but in, in terms of, I mean . . . [pause] . . . in terms of explaining myself, you know, I just don't [laughs].

By this statement, Jackson highlights the peace that comes with not having to continuously educate their partners on their experiences. In fact, some participants even referenced positive relationships with others in which their partners encouraged them to live more authentically.

Raegan Darling (they/them/their), a White transmasculine participant, discussed their journey toward acceptance with their partner, Ginnie (she/her/hers), serving as a huge support. When describing their relationship with Ginnie, Raegan shared, "When I started dating Ginnie, she was the only person I ever dated that was like, 'How 'bout you put on a pair of basketball shorts? That's okay—you can wear men's clothing.'" Ginnie not only accepted Raegan's nonbinary gender expression, but went so far as to encourage Raegan to embrace their masculinity more. In these interactions, Ginnie *looked with* Raegan by motivating them to express their gender in a genuine fashion. These trans* collegians do not have to worry about being the educator in such a relationship, but can focus on representing themselves holistically.

Social Relationships

Looking At. The third set of findings relates to how participants created social relationships on campus. Participants who met people whom they found unwilling to understand nontraditional notions of gender typically did not pursue a friendship, or they relied on more commonly known identities, such as sexuality. This reliance on sexuality-based stereotypes to make sense of one's gender is an enactment of *compulsory heterogenderism*, or how participants' trans* identities become invisible due to how others conflate sexuality and gender identity (Nicolazzo, 2015; Nicolazzo, In press). In referencing how they would identify to others, Jackson described how people often confused their sexuality and gender. Jackson noted this by stating, "For a while it was easier for me to just identify as a lesbian, because people understood it, you know? But I always knew it was something else." Here, Jackson's friends tolerated their perceived sexuality, but not their gender transgressions. In other words, Jackson's trans* identity was erased, and instead was understood as a sexuality. These micro interactions served only to reinforce the marginality felt by participants as they attempted to create and maintain social relationships.

Participants spoke about how queer communities both contributed to and detracted from their comfort on campus. The tensions experienced by participants often stemmed

from microaggressions such as being misgendered, which they encountered within larger LGBTQ communities. For example, BC (she/her/hers), a trans* woman, noted this tension: "It would be nicer if I could go to an all-queer campus," suggesting that all-queer spaces were more affirming for trans* people. However, in the same interview, BC admitted she also experienced microaggressions by cisgender queer students: "There are safe spaces more in the queer spheres. But even at CU Pride and with certain LGBT people on campus they'll say stupid shit about trans* stuff." Thus, participants experienced a feeling of being in between in queer spaces. That is, they felt acceptance (a manifestation of others *looking with* them), but also expressed moments in which they were *looked at* and marginalized due to enactment of micro and macro discourses that reified trans* oppression. As a result of their experiences of being looked at, BC and other participants often described feeling invisible within the larger LGBTQ community.

Looking With. As previously discussed, this study underscored the exhaustion and frustration participants felt in having to constantly educate those around them without doing previous research beforehand. However, when people displayed effort to learn more about transgender issues, it was easier for these trans* collegians to form social relationships. Micah, who described their gender as "comfortable," emphasizes this point:

> If you're just like, "Oh, well how does that work?" Or, "How is this?" And I'm like, "Well, that's very basic." It's like if you go to a science class, they aren't gonna lecture basics anymore. You should know those things, so you should go and do it yourself.

Here, Micah expressed that she wasn't interested in covering basic information with people; however, Micah explained further:

> I'm not interested in starting your foundation. You should want to do that yourself, so when you come to me, when you have the foundation, I'll be more willing to open up and give you more of a broader view of certain things.

Micah was expressing that to have to constantly provide basic education was exhausting and not something in which he was willing to participate; however, if that work was done by people on their own, Micah would have more energy to share experiences and perspectives on being trans*. If this were to be the case, Micah and other participants' life stories (micro discourses) ceased to be representative of the entire trans* narrative (macro discourse), and as a result, they were able to live more authentically.

DISCUSSION

By utilizing Halberstam's (2005) notion of the transgender gaze, together with our use of CDA (Van Dijk, 2003) to understand the micro and macro discourses that impact trans* collegians, three areas of discussion emerge in order to advance research on trans* experiences. First, this study draws attention to trans* experiences within classroom spaces, which oftentimes represented extremes. Participants simultaneously defined the classroom as a physical location that is bearable only if they remained invisible and as a place where they feel forced to share their experiences in order to gain access to conversations. This study also elaborates on Pryor's (2015) study of trans* collegians by including voices of trans* students of color. For example, Micah and Silvia, as Black trans* students, discussed their experiences interacting with faculty members and fellow students in the classroom. These experiences, alongside those of the other participants, depict the importance of inviting students into academia holistically, especially for those who hold multiple marginalized

identities. Students like Micah and Silvia did not cease to be Black or trans* when they entered their classrooms, and for this reason the participants argued for an increased focus on celebrating individuals' identities in curriculums and through pedagogical strategies.

Next, the findings revealed that trans* collegians continue to struggle with trans*-normativity in relationships; in other words, trans* individuals feel pressures from society on how to perform gender, extending Diamond's (2011) argument that nonbinary trans* people are often portrayed as "deviants unsuitable to love" (p. 7). In the participants' eyes, gender fluidity is not yet acceptable by the macro discourses that exist on campuses. Participants often described feelings of needing to fit within gendered scripts set by partners, pressures that would ultimately compromise their individuality. Micah underscored this fact:

> I am not gonna change who I am for anybody. I can't be that hypermasculine person that [other people] want to be, or I can't be that hyperfeminine person that [other people] want to be, because then I wouldn't be myself, you know?

Micah, as well as other participants, revealed their journey in attempting to find someone who would love them for who they were and how they chose to express their gender; thus, this study highlights a societal need to resist notions of trans*-normativity, specifically as it relates to the views people have on romantic relationships with trans* individuals.

Finally, the participants in this study revealed the emotional exhaustion that comes with educating others on their gender identity. Their voices reflected Henderson's (2014) and Kumashiro's (2000) discussions of the taxing nature marginalized people must often face on a daily basis. Silvia highlighted this pressure succinctly:

> This is the world that I live in, and I have to educate [cisgender people], and like, I'm upset, and it's unfair, and this is unjust, and I wanna, like, burn a building. I just get upset, and probably overly emotional, so I feel like I really can't educate others by being in that head space.

In this moment of intense vulnerability, Silvia brings light to feelings experienced constantly by marginalized communities. The trans* participants in this study expressed a simultaneous need to educate others, while also desiring to engage in emotional self-preservation. For this reason, the findings elucidate the need to allow trans* individuals to make the decision of whether they want to educate others on their gender identity or not. By doing so, trans* individuals can better assert their agency and voice in a manner that is authentic to their experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study yielded multiple implications for practice and future research related to trans* college students. First, the findings show the need to begin relationships with a general willingness to respect a trans* student's individuality. Steps such as educators asking for proper gender pronouns and names at the beginning of a class or other interaction are ways to accomplish this goal within microclimates. This recommendation reflects Megan's earlier statement when she shared, "If [educators] treat [trans* students] as the gender they want to be treated as, then they'll be just fine with you." Although this implication is seemingly simple—encouraging educators to respect and affirm trans* students' agency seems axiomatic—Megan's words suggest that this is largely not being done. Megan's comment also provides a sense of critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), in that if micro discourses shifted to be more positive for trans* students,

then they may feel more welcome and, thus, more likely to continue their education.

Second, the findings also stress the importance of cisgender students, faculty, and staff doing their own learning regarding trans* issues, concerns, and lived realities. Cisgender educators should utilize the growing number of resources on their campuses (e.g., the rising number of trainings on serving as an ally for trans* students), in addition to using current literature and research to assist their work in their classrooms and departments. Adem, Jackson, and Kade's experiences in their academic programs also add to the current literature that exists arguing that certain disciplines appear to be more inclusive of trans* experiences (e.g., Linley & Nguyen, 2015). More research must therefore be done to explore how academic disciplines produce healthy environments for trans* collegians. Related to this, it would also behoove educators to take the time to learn about gender as an identity that is not limited to antiquated binary understandings.

Third, the stories of these collegians show the lack of spaces within the larger LGBTQ communities on campus that cater to trans* students, an experience that Spade (2004) described as being indicative of the "LGBfakeT movement" (p. 53). BC, Micah, Silvia, and Derek all described this sentiment when reflecting on their experiences in CU's LGBTQ Center, perceiving this space as unfriendly to trans* people. Whereas one may want to assume people with diverse sexualities and genders have common points of connection, several scholars have pointed to the tensions inherent in this belief (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2015; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Tillapaugh & Nicolazzo, 2015). Consequently, student affairs staff should pay special attention to their organizations and spaces on campus designated for students who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, ensuring that trans* experiences are brought to light. Educators would also do well to pay particular attention to how various intersecting identities mediate trans* students' experiences in various spaces on campus. Micah and Silvia, trans* students of color, often described CU's LGBTQ Center as being rooted in Whiteness, feeling othered by their gender identity *and* race. Student affairs practitioners must also ensure that they do not flatten the lives of trans* students to only their gender, as several participants expressed happening.

CONCLUSION

This study adds to scholarship by focusing on how trans* collegians formulate relationships across different areas of campus. In his model of trans* identity development, Bilodeau (2005) discussed the importance of emotional and intimate relationships for trans* collegians, but this was not the focus of his research. In addition, Tompkins (2014b) elucidated various tensions present for trans* people attempting to date and establish romantic relationships, but this research was not college-specific. As such, there has yet to be a study that expressly focuses on how trans* college students create, develop, and maintain relationships in various curricular and cocurricular spaces on campus. Finally, we also looked at trans* students' academic relationships and experiences within the physical classroom, an area of literature that has been drastically understudied.

College educators can utilize these findings to better understand the experiences of transgender collegians attempting to form close relationships during their time in higher education. The results from this study simultaneously elucidate the systems of oppression that exist on college campuses that make it difficult for trans* students to share their holistic self, as well as the processes by which trans* collegians subvert

these oppressive micro and macro discourses. Rather than having these students inform and educate others on their gender identity based on necessity, higher education staff and faculty should utilize these findings to create spaces where trans* collegians make the decision to do so on their own. Furthermore, this study asks individuals to critically examine how they view relationships with trans* students. Specifically, the study asks readers if they are *looking with* or *looking at* trans* collegians. In underscoring this reality, we reflect on Micah's reasoning for using all pronouns:

> As long as you acknowledge me as a person, I don't care if you use they, them, and theirs; he, him, his; she, her, hers; ze, zir—I don't care. You're acknowledging me as a person, and that's all that matters to me.

Whether it is correctly using proper gender pronouns or respecting trans* individuals' desire not to educate others on their identity, student affairs educators need to move toward affirmation-based ways of knowing and working with trans* collegians. Rather than *looking at* trans* individuals as a tool for education, we must *look with* them in order to acknowledge them as human and as people capable of loving and being loved.

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