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“I DON’T WANT TO UPSET ANYONE – I JUST WANT TO EXIST”: NONBINARY COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT A PUBLIC MID-SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

By

Cat Renee Alexander
B.A., Morehead State University 2020

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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“I DON’T WANT TO UPSET ANYONE – I JUST WANT TO EXIST”: NONBINARY COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT A PUBLIC MID-SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

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A Thesis Approved on

June 6th, 2022

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my partners Jess, Shy, and B who have encouraged and comforted me through the stress of this process. I would not have made it this far without their support.
ABSTRACT

“I DON’T WANT TO UPSET ANYONE – I JUST WANT TO EXIST”: NONBINARY COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT A PUBLIC MID-SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Cat Renee Alexander
June 6th, 2022

This study analyzed the experiences of twenty-four nonbinary students at Sunnydale University,¹ using a grounded theoretical approach with a standpoint perspective. Snowball sampling, e-mail advertising, and poster advertising were utilized. Themes and findings came from two areas, those of contrasting experiences and those of consensus opinions. Participants had contrasting experiences based on gender, pronouns, race/ethnicity, student classification, and major. Consensus opinions include suggested changes for campus inclusiveness that many participants discussed. A pre-interview survey was used to filter participants and collect demographic information and then interviews were collected from August 2021 – December 2021. This study found that although Sunnydale University is often considered an LGBTQIA+ friendly campus, most nonbinary participants did not feel that sense of inclusiveness. This can create isolating experiences that are not conductive to learning.

¹ Sunnydale University and all names used in this paper are pseudonyms.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION........................................................................................................iv
ABSTRACT........................................................................................................v

INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................1
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE............................................................................6
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.............................................................................17
METHODOLOGY.................................................................................................18

FINDINGS.............................................................................................................25
  Contrasting Trends.........................................................................................25
  Consensus Trends..........................................................................................42

DISCUSSION.......................................................................................................50
  Limitations......................................................................................................55

REFERENCES.................................................................................................57

APPENDICES......................................................................................................67
  Pre-Interview Survey......................................................................................67
  Unsigned Consent Statement.......................................................................71
  Interview Guide.............................................................................................74
  Recruitment Materials....................................................................................80

CURRICULUM VITAE.........................................................................................85
INTRODUCTION

Research on transgender people in recent decades has tended to focus on individuals who adhere to the gender binary (identifying as male/man or female/woman only) by transitioning from one gender to the other (Devor 2016; Seelman 2016; Hausman 1995). Less research has focused on a growing population of individuals who identify as nonbinary or genderqueer, among other identities, and who resist binary conceptualizations of sex and gender (see Darwin 2020; Davidson 2016; and Beemyn 2015 for examples of exploratory research on gender non-conformity). Even less research exists on how these nonbinary individuals experience college campuses, and what does exist tends to rely on extremely small samples (Ashton 2019; Flint, Kilgo, and Bennett 2019; Goldberg and Kuvalanka 2018; and Nicolazzo 2016). The aim of this research is to assess the overall college experience of nonbinary students at a mid-southern college campus. The purpose of this research is to gain a standpoint perspective (Smith 1987) on nonbinary students’ college experiences and provide suggestions for programs and policies to become more inclusive to fit the needs of nonbinary students on campus. Specifically, I propose to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of nonbinary college students.

Both recent and past research surrounding transgender identities has proven that non-conformity and resistance to the gender binary has existed cross culturally throughout history (Matsuno and Budge 2017; Bilodeau 2009; and Herdt 1993). The
gender binary is an institutionalized idea prevalent in Western societies that dictates gender identity to only two genders: man or woman and no other options. This notion invalidates anyone identifying outside of those two identities, which in turn systemically erases intersex individuals as well as gender non-conforming individuals from society (Rajunov and Duane 2019; Davis 2015; Reis 2009; and Gagné, Tewksbury, and McGaughey 1997). However, these non-conforming identities have existed for just as long as binary gender identities have existed (Matsuno and Budge 2017; Herdt 1993).

In the mid-20th century, U.S. society was beginning to understand the idea of being transgender; however, transgender issues were highly medicalized during this time period (Meyerowitz 2002). Even those who fought for the rights of people who wanted sex-changes still considered gender variance pathologically, as something to cure one way or another. People identifying as transgender were often expected to go through medical surgeries in order to ‘fix’ themselves into a binary sex/gender category (Meyerowitz 2002). Many came to think of “sex reassignment surgery,” hormone treatments, and other surgical interventions as the “cure” to their condition. Their “ailment” was considered one of “homosexual tendencies” and doctors believed the way to cure this was with a sex-change (Meyerowitz 2002).

As time went on, more and more individuals, especially those in the media, started to come out as transgender. In 2014, Ruby Rose paved the way for many gender non-conforming stars to come out when they released their transformation video “Break Free,” that depicts Rose’s routine in switching from a ‘feminine’ gender performance to a ‘masculine’ gender performance (Ruby Rose 2014). The video shows Rose changing her outfit, cutting her hair, and uncovering their tattoos as well as showing a switch in
behavior and posture. In the years following Rose’s video, many other transgender and
gender/non-conforming actors began to come out to the public, including Janelle Monáe
in 2020, Sam Smith in 2019, and Brigette Lundy-Paine also in 2019, among many others.
As Berger and Luckmann (1966) point out, social constructions are unable to change
until individuals are made aware that an idea is a social construction and not an
unchangeable reality of life. The visibility of transitioning and/or living as a different
gender created a slightly safer, or at least a less lonely space for transgender and gender
non-conforming individuals to come out.

In current times, push back against transgender rights is still prevalent in many
institutions in society, and specifically in the legal system as shown by the ‘Don’t Say
Gay’ bill that was recently passed in Florida. This bill prohibits kindergarten - third grade
teachers from teaching or discussing LGBTQIA+ related topics and allows parents to sue
teachers if topics are deemed not age-appropriate (Alfonseca 2022). Similar bills have
been brought up in Tennessee, Oklahoma, Indiana, and Kansas. However, acceptance of
transgender rights and transgender individuals’ autonomy in transition decisions has also
been growing in some groups, especially academia as shown by the emergent research on
transgender students in educational settings (Goldberg, Smith, and Beemyn 2020;
Goldberg 2019; and Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet 2012). This has led to an emerging
recognition that gender is fluid and does not always coincide with an individual’s sex
assigned at birth. For research, this means that transgender populations are now studied in
relation to a slew of topics, rather than only existing in medical/transition related
research. Specifically, transgender research in higher education settings has produced
important findings about transgender college students identifying within the binary (Goldberg et al. 2019; Dugan et al. 2012; and Beemyn et al. 2005).

What is scarce in research are findings related to individuals who resist the binary and choose to exist outside of binary gender classifications (see Goldberg & Kuvalanka 2018; Matsuno & Budge 2017; and Nicolazzo 2016 for examples of exploratory research that does study those who resist). These individuals use many terms to describe themselves, such as nonbinary, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, and many others. These individuals are often oppressed by institutionalized systems of binary thought within higher education settings, such as not being able to pick gender-neutral pronouns for online systems (Shultz 2019; Linley and Kilgo 2018), not being able to use bathrooms that align with their gender-neutral status (Seelman 2019; Sutton 2016), and having professors ignore, refuse to use, or constantly misuse their correct pronouns (Buch 2019; Johnson 2019). Many of these oppressions can be categorized as microaggressions. Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative… slights and insults to the target person or group.” McLemore (2015) found that these instances of microaggressions, among others, “…raise the possibility that misgendering is a manifestation of minority stress.” For example: reading an email that says “ladies and gentlemen;” hearing a professor say or read in their PowerPoints, “when he or she did this;” or going in the university bookstore to find the clothes sectioned out as ‘male’ clothing or ‘female’ clothing only (Bilodeau 2009). All of these instances of invalidating aspects of society can cause mental health concerns in nonbinary individuals just as it
does when binary transgender individuals are misgendered (Goldberg et al. 2019; Shultz 2019; Hatchel, Espelage, and Huang 2018; Dugan et al. 2012; Beemyn et al. 2005).

A response to this oppression in colleges and universities has been to create ‘safe spaces’ for marginalized individuals. Some of these spaces include Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Offices; LGBTQIA+ Centers; and LGBTQIA+ student groups (Bosch and Pursley 2019). However, because of the unique identity of those who identify as gender non-conforming, they often do not ‘fit in’ or feel safe in these groups due to the overwhelming legitimation of genderism, or the preferential treatment of those who conform to binary systems of gender, which exists throughout almost all aspects of society (Bilodeau 2009). Current research on gender non-conforming students has broken important ground in fostering understandings of some of the issues this population confronts. However, sample sizes tend to be very small (Flint et al. 2019; Nicolazzo 2016) or are based on limited survey, interview, or observational data (Budge, Dominguez, and Goldberg 2020; Cochran 2019; Goldberg et al. 2019; Humistston 2017).

Understanding the lived experiences of nonbinary students is crucial to supporting them in their college careers and ensuring their academic success. My hope is that by increasing the sample size and studying a campus with many aspects of this LGBTQIA+ inclusion, we might come to greater transferability regarding the experiences of these students and come to a better understanding of how to support them in their academic careers.
Tritiya-prakrti, Hijras, Kathoeys, Quariwarmi, Lhamana, Nadleehi, Niizh Manidoowag, Bote/Bate/Bade, Chuckchi, Bakla, Two-spirit, Nonbinary, Agender. While these unfamiliar words contrast in definition between cultures of origin, they all have a relatively similar meaning. They are all identities that do not subscribe to institutionalized binary gender norms. They fall outside the identities of ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ There is some variation on the exact definitions of these words; for instance, the Tritiya-Prakrti, from Indian culture, is a ‘third-nature’ gender identity as opposed to the female-nature (stri-prakrti) and the male-nature (pums-prakrti) identities. A wide range of people can fit in this definition including those who are intersex, trans, or just identify as gender non-conforming in some way (Sharma 2012). On the other hand, the Hijras of Hindu culture are specifically referred to as ‘men-minus-man’ (Bakshi 2004), therefore restricting this identity to people assigned male at birth who express femininity through appearance and behavior. Regardless of the distinctions between each of these identities, they all prove that gender non-conformity is not new. Records of indigenous individuals identifying as two-spirit date back to the 1800’s, possibly further (Beauchemin, Levy, and Vogal 1992). Matsuno and Budge (2017) state that, “Worldwide, an abundant amount of evidence exists to indicate that human beings have embraced more than two gender identities for as long as oral history and written records have existed,” suggesting that gender non-conformity exists cross-culturally and has existed just as long as binary identities.
In the United States, nonbinary is a relatively recent term describing individuals resisting binary transgender expectations of fully switching to an ‘opposite’ gender. Transgender individuals first appeared in U.S. media in the 1940-1950’s, following their appearance in many parts of Europe (Meyerowitz 2002). During that time, a popular actor who identified as a woman, Christine Jorgensen, underwent sex reassignment surgery in Europe when she transitioned from male to female (Meyerowitz 2002). Under the care of Harry Benjamin, Jorgenson had already been taking hormones and living as close to a woman’s life as she could without gender realignment surgery. Benjamin was one of the only sympathetic doctors in the U.S. who really attempted to help those who wanted to undergo sex reassignment surgery (Ekins 2005). Benjamin believed in the theory of universal bisexuality, which at the time meant that everyone was both a little female and a little male but with interference could change so that they existed closer to one of the two categories (Meyerowitz 2002). Even though this theory was radical in the improvement of supporting transgender individuals, it also legitimated the ideas of needing to reach a binary sex/gender identity and left behind those who did not “pass” one way or the other. This medicalization of gender is problematic to both people who want to live as a different gender (including nonbinary people) but do not want to get surgery and those that do want to pursue surgical transitions.

Lawrence Kohlberg published research explaining that gender is fixed once a child is able to understand that gender is permanent, usually happening around age 7 (Kohlberg 1966). This idea harmed the theory of gender being socially constructed and fluid. Where Benjamin thought of everyone having a little bit of both sex/genders and seeing possibility in changing that level for individuals, Kohlberg argued that everyone’s
gender is already formed by age 7 and there is no possibility of change (Kohlberg 1966). Many scientists since have debunked Kohlberg’s theory arguing that gender is something that is performed and perceived by others, is fluid and everchanging, and is an important aspect of individual gender identity (Byrne and Ade 2019; Gilligan 2016; Butler 1990; Gilligan and Atanucci 1988; and West and Zimmerman 1987). Sam Killermann, co-founder of The Safe Zone Project, explains gender as a multi-faceted idea (Killermann, 2011). He argues that gender is understood through three facets. The first facet is gender identity, which is one’s own interpretation of their gender in their own mind. This may or may not correspond with other aspects of the person like how they present themselves, which is the next of Killermann’s three facets. Gender expression encompasses the presentation of one’s gender. This can be how one acts, dresses, behaves, or interacts with others. These expressions may or may not be in accordance with society’s expectations of behavior for their sex assigned at birth, which is the final facet of gender according to Killermann (2011). Sex assigned at birth refers to how one’s sex is interpreted at birth based on physiological characteristics (chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, etc.). Sex assigned at birth may or may not align with one’s conception of their gender identity or one’s presentation of their gender. Although these facets may not align with each other, they help with creating an understanding of one’s gender.

Following these theoretical findings and the publicity around Jorgenson’s transition, many other transgender individuals followed suit in attempting to pass and fit in the societal expectations of their gender identity. This was sometimes dangerous as

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2 Safe zone is an organization that creates free resources for LGBTQIA+ awareness and ally training workshops.
Meyerowitz (2002) recounts the many transwomen who tried to castrate themselves. Sometimes these women succeeded but other times they died in the process. This craving for a fully “opposite” gender was fueled by the social pressure to either completely transition or live as assigned at birth. This then led to harmful ideas regarding ‘passing, realness, and trans*[sic]-normativity’ (Nicolazzo 2016). Refusing to choose or adapt to society’s definitions of feminine and masculine gender identities started around the late 1990’s and early 2000’s in U.S. history, but really hit mainstream media in the 2010’s. TV Media stars such as Asia Kate Dillon, Janelle Monáe, Ruby Rose, Sam Smith, Amandla Stenberg, Tom Phelan, Lachlan Watson and Jonathan Van Ness as well as Authors Jacob Tobia and Noelle Stevenson came out as gender non-conforming, some using they/them pronouns and others using all or some pronouns. While these famous media stars have dealt with both welcoming and hostile fans, they have still been comfortable enough to be able to come out, indicating a change from recent cultural ideas about gender.

Little is known about the lived experiences of nonbinary and gender non-conforming college students. Most literature is specific and only goes as far as explaining binary transgender students’ experiences on campuses. (e.g., Goldberg et al. 2020; Beemyn 2019; DeVita and Wesner 2019; Goldberg et al. 2019; Hatchel et al. 2018; Catalano 2017; Nanney and Brunsma 2017; Dugan et al. 2012; Beemyn et al. 2005). This research has found that transgender individuals often face microaggressions in the classroom and on campus, yet it does not go in depth about individuals identifying as nonbinary, even as some claim to be focused on the overarching transgender experience. However, there is some emergent research related to nonbinary individuals, though
researchers often use very small sample sizes. Nicolazzo (2016) found that Black nonbinary students struggle with their identities in environments that do “not understand how to frame their work through a lens of intersectionality” leading participants to feel “erased from multiple queer and/or black spaces” on campus. This was found through the perspectives of just two Black nonbinary individuals on one campus. Additionally, using Smith’s standpoint perspective (1987), Flint et al. (2019) gave voice to a small number of nonbinary individuals on one college campus. They found that nonbinary students often feel a lack of space in which they are allowed to exist. This was done through a study tying geographical location into feelings of welcome or unwelcomeness and the experiences and feelings of participants at different locations on campus about those locations. This study had a slightly larger sample than Nicolazzo’s research, but it still only had five participants. This lack of voices becomes problematic when we are only hearing one type of nonbinary experience. Oftentimes in research AFAB (a female at birth) individuals are more likely to be considered as participants than AMAB (a male at birth) individuals (Matsuno and Budge 2017) and White nonbinary students are often studied more than nonbinary students of color (Chaudhry 2020; Nicolazzo 2017). 

One theme prevalent in almost all research representing nonbinary college students is that of needed support (e.g., Budge et al. 2020; Cochran 2019; Flint et al. 2019; Nowicki 2019; Goldberg and Kuvalanka 2018; Humiston 2017; Nicolazzo 2016). LGBTQIA+ and Diversity and Inclusion support centers have failed nonbinary individuals repeatedly, yet no suggestion exists on how to make these support systems more inclusive (Flint et al. 2019). Trans individuals, especially those who identify as nonbinary, do not gain the same amount of support from these established support
services as those they were originally designed for (Humiston 2017). The University of Michigan was the first school to create an LGBTQIA+ center, yet they established it to only support gay and lesbian students initially, not including other identities until much later (Catalano and Jourian 2018).

Nonbinary individuals also in most cases experience genderism which is the forceful process of privileging all that is within the gender binary and excluding those who do not fit (Bilodeau 2009). This happens when professors start classes with “ladies and gentlemen,” or “hey guys settle down,” or any other gendered welcoming (Bilodeau 2009); when there isn’t a box to check that includes their gender identity in online systems and forms (Goldberg et al. 2019; Goldberg and Kuvalanka 2018; Linley and Kilgo 2018); and when there is no representation in the staff/faculty that include nonbinary individuals (Harris and Nicolazzo 2020; Borck 2019). This hegemonic genderism and lack of representation takes away nonbinary individuals’ ability to speak for themselves as they are made invisible in everyday language. Most individuals in society follow genderism so closely that they do not realize the constructionistic aspects of gender. They are not conscious of the ways in which society oppresses others because of the hegemony of the gender binary. This leaves the advocacy to those who do acknowledge genderism, namely nonbinary individuals. When nonbinary individuals are expected to do all of the education and advocacy work needed, they can become fatigued and may not have enough energy for other aspects of life. This can also be related to the standpoint perspective (Smith 1987) of Anna in Flint et al.’s (2019) study on five nonbinary students.

it’s not that I feel uncomfortable,
but I’ve just known them for so
long and,
you know, been very involved since way
before I came out
they like pride themselves on like being
like a liberal and inclusive space.
and I do love them and feel comfortable
around them,
but I also know that [using my
pronouns],
it’s that one thing that they’re never
going to do
and, like, I would rather just like not
keep correcting them
so they don’t have to get disappointed.
I mean you just can only have like so
many battles.

This constant pronoun correction might make any transgender individual
exhausted. Since they/them pronouns are not often used in most areas of society yet, this
can make the process even more tiring for nonbinary individuals. Buch (2019) and
McLemore (2015) outline the importance of using correct pronouns with trans/nonbinary
individuals related to mental wellness and life success.

Another issue transgender and nonbinary people persevere through, prevalent in
the literature, is the issue of bullying and harassment. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey
revealed just how common bullying/harassment is for “transgender, trans, genderqueer,
and nonbinary individuals” (James et al. 2016). According to the survey, 54% of
transgender individuals were “verbally harassed because people thought they were
transgender,” and 24% were “physically attacked because people thought they were
transgender.” The report even shows that 6% of transgender individuals were expelled
from school for being transgender. This survey was a huge source of progress for
transgender individuals. It was the first large-scale report outlining experiences of
transgender individuals. That being said, the report combined all transgender identities
under the umbrella term “transgender.” This is not an incorrect way of studying trans and
nonbinary people, especially with the goal of having a larger sample size; however, this
strategy erases possible findings about nonbinary people specifically. That is why the
proposed research will focus mostly on nonbinary or gender non-conforming individuals.

Current literature on bullying and harassment has shown similar if not worse
results for nonbinary individuals than what the 2015 Transgender Survey showed (Flint et
al. 2019; Pitcher 2019; and Wentling 2019). Flint et al. (2019) document a nonbinary
individual being harassed publicly but being afraid to contact the police as an example:

I used to park here in the commuter lot,
but there are also a lot of frat houses
right there.
I’ve been heckled there many a time
So, I try to avoid it.
Definitely at night, I wouldn’t go
through here

... but I’ve had things like thrown in my
direction,
I’ve been called names, I’ve been just
kind of teased at

... I was walking and there were some
guys that pulled up in a truck
next to me.

... They were like throwing garbage at me
and just calling me names.
They were calling me like a
“transvestite” and “fag”
and things like that

... So, I didn’t, I didn’t call the cops,
because again, they didn’t hit me,
it didn’t get physical.

This quote powerfully shows the amount of violence nonbinary people can go through physically. Although Frances did not believe it was a “physical” attack, the perpetrators were throwing garbage at them and hitting them with it, which in the authors’ estimation makes this a physically violent act (Flint et al. 2019). Alongside the physical abuse, this also is an example of psychological abuse. Additional taunts were yelled including “You’re never going to get anybody like that. Nobody would ever want to sleep with you,” which invalidated the identity of the individual (Flint et al. 2019). This source of violence is more visible and aggressive than the previous discussed microaggressions that are faced by nonbinary individuals.

Living as a nonbinary individual has given me first-hand experience of what it is like to live in a world that does not recognize identities outside of the predetermined binary of woman vs. man. Even as this identity has persisted in a number of cultures, U.S. society still has not taken to legitimizing nonbinary existence (Nowicki 2019). I still recall my own path with coming out and how it happened on a college campus. My first meeting at the LGBTQIA+ student group, I will call SafeSpace, filled me with anxiety. I was not worried about the queer part of my identity; I had come to terms with that aspect of myself long ago. This was reaffirmed by the many members of SafeSpace who proudly introduced their sexualities as bisexual, pansexual, gay, queer, demisexual, asexual, polyamorous, and many others. However, when pronouns were announced, it was always the same two: she or he, often announced in a ‘why are you asking me this I’m obviously a girl/boy’ kind of way that discouraged others from answering differently. It was almost my turn to introduce myself. I was gathering all the courage I could while
my hands shook and became drenched in anxiety-produced sweat; there was no way I could announce anything other than she/her in this room and I knew that. However, the person who announced themself right before it was my turn finally said the words I had been listening for all night; they announced to the room that they went by they/them pronouns with an equally androgynous name. I was rendered speechless, so much so that my friend ended up introducing me to the room (as the she/her pronouns and deadname she thought I used). My generalized anxiety over the years had accustomed this friend to speaking for me on many occasions. My anxiety got the best of me, and I was not strong enough to go against a system that unjustly pushes individuals into a category they may or may not fit in or even to just go against a room full of queer people I thought would understand.

In another instance years later when I was completely out as nonbinary and openly using they/them pronouns, this same situation happened again. I was studying abroad in Europe and during the first night everyone in the program (including us sociology people as well as some history students) convened for introductions. Again, we were asked to say our name, pronouns, and area of study. While I had plenty of practice coming out to a room full of strangers at that point, this felt bigger. I do not know if it was because of the international aspect of this environment or the events that led up to my introduction, but for some reason I was super uncomfortable with announcing they/them pronouns. A student who was a few years older than most of the students began his introduction by saying something along the lines of not “dealing with that pronoun crap,” and obviously being a man. This microaggression, regardless of if he realized it was a microaggression or not, completely deflated my ability to announce the
correct pronouns and instead, after years of ONLY going by they/them pronouns, I announced to the room that I went by she/her pronouns. I could see the faces of my professor and my friend on the trip administer immediate confusion. Again, my strength was tested and again I felt as if I had failed.

My personal relationship with being nonbinary in higher education settings along with the lack of existing research on nonbinary voices has led me to this study on nonbinary college students. Using a standpoint perspective, as defined by Dorothy Smith (1987), this research will give voice to a large sample of nonbinary students. I hope to not only provide a space that validates nonbinary students’ identities, but also a space to voice their lived experiences and suggest ways of improving the college environment to better fit their needs. This research will be led by the following research questions:

1) What are the lived experiences of gender non-conforming students at Sunnydale University?

2) What do gender non-conforming students need from their school’s administration, faculty, and staff in order to have more positive experiences on campus?

3) How do gender non-conforming students discuss the need for more inclusive policies/programs on campus?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was conducted using qualitative methods to address the research questions stated above. This was done using an analytic inductive approach to the data analysis with the goal of having theory emerge from the data. As explained more fully above, my research is informed by theories that argue that 1) gender is an interactional performance and accomplishment, or something one does (West and Zimmerman 1987); 2) gender is fluid and not permanent by a certain age (Gilligan 2016; Gilligan & Attanucci 1988; but see Kohlberg 1966); and 3) the gender binary, or genderism, as a created institution is ubiquitous in U.S. society and is, itself, an institution embedded in every major social institution, including education (Lorber 1994). My work allows for a grounded theoretical understanding of the standpoints and lived experiences of nonbinary/gender non-conforming students.
METHODS

In this research I used in-depth semi-structured interviews (Hesse-Biber 2013) to gather data on the lived experiences of college students who identify as nonbinary and attend Sunnydale University – a mid-southern university that has many LGBTQIA+ inclusive programs. Recruitment e-mails/flyers and snowball sampling were used to recruit volunteers. Recruitment e-mails were sent to students, faculty, and staff that had publicly known connections to LGBTQIA+ support services or taught in a department that discussed LGBTQIA+ issues in class to relay to students of their organization/class. This method helped get the word out to a part of campus that was most likely to have nonbinary students. However, not all nonbinary students are part of these clubs/majors, so I also recruited via flyer. The flyer (shown in Appendix IV) was posted in all academic buildings on campus. This aided in getting a wide variety of majors represented in the study. Last, I used snowball sampling in which students were asked if they would tell friends about the study in order to increase sample size. Students’ identities are protected to the extent required by law by using participant-picked pseudonyms. I also tweaked or left out small details that may risk the identification of an interviewee in order to protect confidentiality.

Certain questions that I asked during my interviews could potentially bring up traumatic or negative experiences for some participants. In order to protect the safety of my participants, I gathered information on counseling services at Sunnydale University and ensured each participant had access to that information. Many students brought up
already using counseling services on campus during the interview. Additionally, I believe my identity as a nonbinary queer person helped participants feel supported and not alone. I introduced myself as a gender non-conforming person and supplied my pronouns in order to make the interviewee feel comfortable with confiding in me.

While my sexuality and gender identity may have made participants more comfortable discussing gender and sexuality related experiences, it could also cause blind spots for me during interviews. A cisgender person could potentially ask more targeted questions related to the topic of gender non-conformity because they have not lived the experiences of being gender non-conforming and do not have ideas of common-sense happenings like I might. In order to combat this, I have three cisgender professors on my thesis committee who provided suggestions to my interview guide. Also, my social location and privilege associated with other identities could cause bias and potentially steer diverse gender non-conforming students away. I am White and I am a graduate student, both identities that may cause personal biases or even tension with interviewees. I used an intersectional feminist approach (Collins 2019) in order to be aware of and avoid these biases. Interview questions were situated within the social locations of participants so that these other identities could be discussed in relation to gender non-conformity. I attempted to make the interview environment a safe space for all participants, regardless of their social identities.

Despite my efforts, racial diversity was not achieved in this study. Recruitment flyers and emails went to many locations nonbinary students of color may frequent including the diversity and inclusion center, a student led group for LGBTQIA+ people of color, and in the academic building that holds classes for the Pan-African studies
department. This garnered two respondents of color in a sample of twenty-four nonbinary students, not nearly enough to count as representative of the school. Future research should focus on nonbinary students of color which is largely missing from the literature. Nicolazzo carried out a study with only nonbinary students of color, however there were only two participants in the study. Future research could expand on that and include a robust sample of nonbinary students of color to fill that gap in my research as well as the current existing literature.

When collecting lived experiences, Smith (1987) suggests that researchers take a standpoint perspective meaning they do not try to explain the situations of their subjects. Instead, they should explain, “the social relations of the society of which we are part” (Smith 1987). The only way to collect lived experiences is to treat the participants as experts in their own lives. This can be done through qualitative methods using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Interviews that are semi-structured allow the participant to take the wheel in terms of what they want to share with the researcher guiding the conversation based on the participants’ responses (Hesse-Biber 2013). In an effort to make participants as comfortable as possible in the midst of a global pandemic, I allowed them to choose how the interview would take place whether it be on Zoom, Microsoft Teams, over the phone, or in-person when safe to do so. In-person interviews were conducted in a location mutually agreed upon with the participant.

In order to select participants, I used a pre-interview survey, via surveymonkey.com, requesting basic demographic information along with contact information for interested students. This survey also acted as a filter by allowing me to only contact those who identified as gender non-conforming in some way. To make this
research as inclusive as possible, any person who considered themselves gender non-conforming was included. Though most participants had nonbinary identities, some participants chose transgender binary aligning identities (trans-man, trans-woman) but explained that they considered themselves gender non-conforming due to the way they understand their own gender. They did not always define themselves as nonbinary or even accept gender non-conforming as an identity, but often ‘felt’ gender non-conforming in the way they acted, thought, or presented themselves. As stated earlier, Berger and Luckman (1966) discussed how people are born into socially constructed realities and they have some agency to change those realities. Using that theory in this research means that if a participant constructs their reality as being gender non-conforming, regardless of if others see them that way or not, then they are gender non-conforming which affects their interactions in society. Butler (1990) says that gender is performative. While there are institutionalized and/or cultural pressures to adhere to expectations, people have some degree of freedom to rebel. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) this is where social change can occur—when those who do not benefit from established realities rebel against them. Rebellion is then a source for social change and the construction of new realities.

In order to place the context of participants’ lived experiences within their social reality, I collected some demographic information. I collected data on gender identities, pronouns, sexual and/or romantic orientations, racial and/or ethnic identities, age, major/program, and year in school. Additionally, I asked for preferred pseudonyms in this survey in order to get that out of the way before the interview. I find it sometimes awkward to ask verbally what someone wants their pseudonym to be because they often
are not sure in the moment. If asked in their own time, they can think about their answer and provide a pseudonym that makes them comfortable. I did not want to assign pseudonyms myself, unless volunteers specifically asked me to, in order to avoid accidental dead-naming (i.e., a name assigned at birth) or providing pseudonyms that promote gender dysphoria in the participant.

I used opportunity and snowball sampling initially by sending emails to faculty, staff, and students who are listed as leaders or allies of the LGBTQIA+ community at Sunnydale University. These individuals include directors or staff affiliated with the LGBTQIA+ center, directors or staff affiliated with the Diversity/Inclusion office, and/or student members or faculty advisors of LGBTQIA+ student groups. I asked leaders of these groups to post my recruitment flyer, upon IRB approval, on their social media pages (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Snapchat, TikTok, and department websites could all be used) and/or recommend specific students to the study. Sadler et al. (2010) maintain that opportunity and snowball sampling are appropriate methods in researching stigmatized and poorly understood populations. Sunnydale University is a school that utilizes many LGBTQIA+ support programs. These organizations functioned as gatekeepers to nonbinary participants as they were likely to have encountered a nonbinary student as some point. In my efforts to build a representative snowball sample, I asked student members of these groups to refer non-members to me. Additionally, I posted my recruitment flyer to buildings on campus and on my own personal social media, as well as allowing others to share on their social media, including Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook. I sampled until reaching the point of
theoretical saturation and when new themes and concepts stopped emerging from the data (Charmaz 2006).

Another rationale for choosing a mid-southern university is the lack of research dedicated to studying nonbinary people (and LGBTQIA+ people in general) in the Bible belt. The compulsory Christianity that fills Bible belt communities often leads LGBTQIA+ people to feel highly stigmatized and forced into the “toxic closet” (Barton 2012). It is important to add nonbinary voices to the expanding literature on LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Bible belt. Since the population I am studying is one considered highly stigmatized, especially being in the Bible belt, I used verbal consent via a preamble at the beginning of the recorded interview in order to protect the identity of respondents. A physical consent form could deter respondents who are worried about confidentiality and would make their responses/participation in the study less secure. Consent forms would be the only potential way that participants could be identified.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All transcriptions and survey results are kept on a password protected encrypted computer on The University of Louisville’s campus and any physical materials collected are kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office on campus. I used an analytic inductive approach to identify patterns, themes, and emergent concepts and theories while using the Atlas.ti software package to aid in organization (Charmaz 2006). Atlas.ti is the best software package when prioritizing memos & theory building, which is what I used to code the data. Line-by-line coding was initially conducted with more focused coding completed after, as Charmaz (2006) recommends. This produced many memos and in-vivo codes to use for theory building. Using in-vivo coding for this project was important to retain as much of the
participants thoughts and feelings as possible without interjecting my own thoughts and biases on the participants experiences.
FINDINGS

The findings of this study show five important trends related to experiences and suggestions participants had. This section is split into two headings, consensus trends and contrasting trends. Consensus trends are ideas that all or most participants agreed on, which include many of the suggestions for change brought up during interviews. The majority of this section will focus on those recommendations. Trends also revealed themselves in the contrasting experiences of participants with different demographics. Participants with different gender identities, pronouns, racial/ethnic identities, student classifications and majors had slightly different experiences from each other. Some of these differences were shocking, like that of student classification. However, others were hypothesized previous to the research, like that of different majors.

Contrasting Trends:

Gender Identity & Pronouns

A glossary of gender terminology is presented below in Table 1 for clarification for the reader. Additionally, gender identities represented in the study are shown in Table 2. Notice that many students put more than one identity. Using multiple identities to describe oneself is not uncommon. A student may consider themselves nonbinary broadly, but also identify more specifically as a demiboy/genderfluid as in the case of the first participant, Aether. Some participants identified with binary aligning identities. These participants either chose many identities, some being binary others nonbinary, or
they communicated to the researcher that even though they considered themselves binary trans, they still felt gender non-conforming in certain ways. As stated earlier and to make this research as inclusive as possible, any person who considered themselves gender non-conforming was included regardless of gender identity or pronouns.
Table 1. Glossary of Gender Identity Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agender</td>
<td>A person who does not identify with or experience any gender. Different from nonbinary because many nonbinary people do experience gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androgyn</td>
<td>A person whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female and who may or may not also be intersex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demiboy/Demigirl</td>
<td>A person whose gender identity is only partly male/female, regardless of their assigned sex at birth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Non-Conforming</td>
<td>A term for those who do not follow gender stereotypes. Umbrella for nonbinary genders. Also referred to as Gender Expansive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderfluid</td>
<td>A person who does not consistently adhere to one fixed gender and who may move among genders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Individuals who blur boundaries of gender in relation to the gender binary; they can also reject traditional ideas of static gender identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbinary</td>
<td>People who do not subscribe to the gender binary. They might exist between or beyond the man-woman binary. Some use the term exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like genderqueer, genderfluid, gender non-conforming, gender diverse, or gender expansive. It can also be combined with other descriptors e.g., nonbinary woman or transmasc nonbinary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>Often shortened to trans, from the Latin prefix for “on a different side as.” A term describing a person’s gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. An umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression—such groups include, but are not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-masculine</td>
<td>An AFAB person who is closer to masculinity than femininity but is not always a binary man. Often abbreviated to transmasc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-feminine</td>
<td>An AMAB person who is closer to femininity than masculinity but is not always a binary woman. Often abbreviated to transfem or transfemme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Spirit</td>
<td>A term used within some Indigenous communities to refer to a person who identifies as having both a male and a female essence or spirit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PFLAG, 2021; Jones, 2003
Table 2. Gender Identities Represented in Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender Identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aether</td>
<td>Demiboy; Gender non-conforming; Genderfluid; Genderqueer; Nonbinary; Transgender; Transmasculine (he/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>Genderfluid; Genderqueer; Nonbinary; Transgender (he/she/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck</td>
<td>Nonbinary (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briar</td>
<td>Gender non-conforming; Genderfluid; Nonbinary (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>Genderfluid (she/her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>Nonbinary (any pronouns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJ</td>
<td>Genderqueer; Nonbinary; Transgender; Transmasculine (he/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faelyn</td>
<td>Nonbinary (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finn</td>
<td>Gender non-conforming; Nonbinary (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freddie</td>
<td>Gender non-conforming; Genderqueer; Nonbinary; Transmasculine (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freya</td>
<td>Transgender (she/her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janessa</td>
<td>Transfeminine; Transgender; Woman (she/her)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Paul</td>
<td>Androgyne; Gender non-conforming; Man; Nonbinary; Two-spirit (he/she/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet</td>
<td>Agender (he/she/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Transgender (he/him)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lux</td>
<td>Nonbinary; Transmasculine (he/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Gender non-conforming; Nonbinary (she/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>Gender non-conforming; Nonbinary (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onyx</td>
<td>Genderqueer (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>Genderfluid; Nonbinary (she/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Nonbinary (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River</td>
<td>Genderfluid; Nonbinary (she/they)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Genderfluid (they/them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tayler</td>
<td>Nonbinary; Transmasculine (Fae/they)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is important to include all gender non-conforming people in this research, it is also important to point out the difference in experiences by different identities, specifically between those who identified with some or only binary identities and those who do not identify with any binary identities. As stated earlier, those who identified with only binary aligning identities still considered themselves gender non-conforming and therefore, were included in the study. They are not nonbinary but feel a sense of gender non-conformity in ways defined by them. It is important to point out the differences in
these participants experiences from other participants who did identify with one or more nonbinary genders.

**Misgendering**

Those who identified with some binary identities (Freya, Janessa, Luke, and Jean-Paul) had a lot of experiences similar to those without binary identities including the issue of misgendering and deadnaming. Misgendering happens when someone uses a set of pronouns that does not align with the pronouns of the person they are talking to/about. Deadnaming is similar in that it is when someone uses a previous, no longer used, name for a trans-person, possibly revealing their status as trans. For example, Freya and Ashton (along with others) have experiences being deadnamed on campus. Freya said, “It’s not the coolest that the library still has me as [deadname].” Freya also mentioned later on that many of the online campus systems still included her deadname. Ashton shared that,

I was just like, okay, I'm tired of her yelling out my name during attendance and being misgendered in front of everyone. So, I went up to her and I'm like, ‘okay, um, I use a different name’ and she's like, ‘oh, I don't use nicknames. So, I'm just going to call you the name on the roster.’ I’m like, ‘no, but that's not my name.’ And she's like, ‘so it's not your name and not your nickname?’ And I'm like, ‘yeah, it's like, I use a different name.’ And she's like, ‘why?’ And so, I have to say, ‘because I'm trans.’

Using a deadname would out a person as trans when that person may be uncomfortable having a class full of strangers/peers know their personal information. Even though it is likely not intended as such, it is a microaggression that has the potential to turn a neutral learning environment into one that is perceived by the student as hostile. It also places the burden of educating professors on the student, which can lead to minority stress as defined in the literature review. This professor is not garnering trust, and therefore making students uncomfortable leading to a hostile learning environment.
Although there are some similar experiences, there are many other instances of diverse experiences. For example, the few students who used some binary aligning pronouns had their correct pronouns used more often than those who only used they/them or neopronouns. Nova, who strictly uses they/them pronouns, has had trouble with many parts of campus misgendering them. This has been difficult for Nova and impacted how much they feel like they can say in classes. They said, “I really just try not to talk or interact with them ‘cause I know I'm going to get misgendered.” Classroom interaction is important in promoting active learning in the classroom and Nova feels denied that right due to a fear of being misgendered (Barr and Tagg 1995). Not only does this happen in the classroom, but it also happens at Nova’s work.

They're going to misgender me. I just started working for a different part of campus recently and, you know, it's so hard to correct people because I feel like I know that's literally discrimination, but it's also something that's very new.

On the other hand, when asked if professors usually used River’s (she/they) pronouns they exclaimed, “Absolutely!” River revealed a lot of positive experiences on campus. She is pursuing a Studio Design and Graphic Art degree (connections to majors and experiences will be discussed in a section below).

The use of dead names and incorrect pronouns has the potential to “out” or silence students. As nonbinary students experience misgendering, their learning environment may be perceived as hostile and they may be less likely to participate in class and/or more likely to skip classes due to a fear of being misgendered or deadnamed, like Nova suggested above. This silences nonbinary students in classes where their participation could add to the conversation and help them understand the material better (Derek Bok Center 2010).
While White students experienced issues of being outed and silenced, those experiencing the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender non-conformity discussed additional issues.

Race/Ethnicity

Racial/ethnic diversity was not achieved in this study. Efforts were made to diversify the participants, such as sending e-mails to the diversity and inclusion center and an organization on campus that is a support center for LGBTQIA+ students of color. Future studies should include a more diverse sample. In the current study, there are two participants who are not exclusively White. Quinn who is White/Hispanic and Robin who is Filipino/German English.

Although the sample was not as diverse as intended, there were still some major differences based on race/ethnicity. The Hispanic/Filipino participants in this study explained that their ‘outness’ was limited in a way not discussed by White participants. Quinn is not out to her parents or professors, but they are out to some of their close friends. They explained that there was never a good opportunity to come out to her³ professors due to them never asking for pronouns at the beginning of the semester. They also explained that COVID-19 may have impacted their ability to come out to professors.

Robin who is Filipino and German English, was a little more out than Quinn, but still closeted to their family. “I know that I'm not going to be able to talk to them as genderfluid because they are not going to understand. And I'm okay with that.” Due to a lack of support from parents, Robin plans on never coming out to them. Where many White participants experienced positive support from their parents, Robin and Quinn did

³ Quinn and several other students use a mix of pronouns (she/they, she/he/they, he/they, etc.). The use of this language is a strategy to disrupt gender norms that will be discussed more fully below.
not have that external support that might make college easier. Instead, they had to find all
of their support through friends.

As for support from professors, neither participant had professors who understood
or listened to their experiences and pronoun requests. For Quinn, this was due to not
being out at all to her professors. However, Robin was technically out to some of their
professors but still did not receive much support.

Um, anyone that… honestly, if anyone asks, especially if anyone asks on campus,
I wouldn't be afraid to. I did tell, I told my ASL professor about my pronouns. I
don't know if he, I don't know if he understood that I was telling him that, he's
like, you know, could be a little bit of a language barrier because ASL is not my
first language. I, whenever I send emails, I have the little signature at the bottom,
and it has my pronouns. So, technically it's there, but it's not like everyone's
looking at it. So yes, I'm out, but it's not like something that I've like sat someone
down with and been like, ‘hey, just so you know.’ But it's nothing that I'm afraid
to tell anyone.

White participants were often out to and positively seen by family members.
Tayler had a very positive response from their mother. Fae’s mother told them that,
“Your birth name was never really your name. It was just one to borrow until you found
yourself.” This is vastly different than the experiences Quinn and Robin had.

Additionally, Briar talks about a similar accepting experience with their family.

And so, after a couple months of doing that, I kind of just settled into it. And I
was like, ‘oh, hey, maybe I am nonbinary.’ And so, I told my parents, and they
were not surprised. And then they… my brother is in rehab, so they told my
brother, my brother is trans. And he was like, ‘yeah, obviously DUH.’

There are exceptions to this trend. Many White participants were not out to those around
them for safety reasons as well, but all participants who did not identify as White were not
fully out to society.
Professors also seemed to ignore or disregard Quinn and Robin’s thoughts on gender. White students in this study were more likely to be listened to when explaining gender to a professor than Hispanic/Latino students. Robin tells a story of being ignored by a professor about their pronouns.

I had a friend that I was very close to and everything, and we were very outspoken. You know if you've ever had a Spanish class, you know, they have the gendered pronouns. And then, so then some people were like, ‘well, what if this is a nonbinary person and everything?’ And my teacher was just kind of like, ‘well, they don't really, you know,’ they were like, ‘well, we don't really have like a nonbinary community or whatever.’

As the literature review states, nonbinary people are everywhere and have existed for just as long as binary people have (Matsuno and Budge 2017). Muxe is an identity in southern Mexico that has always meant third gender. “This third classification has been acknowledged and celebrated since pre-Hispanic times, and it’s hard to imagine life without Muxes here.” (Synowiec 2018). Robin attempted to educate their professors about the existence of gender non-conforming people around the world, but their professor dismissed them. Robin also felt ageism in play with the responses from the professor, “I feel like she also was just kind of like ‘you're 18, I'm, you know, 20 whatever, I have a bachelor's, you know,’ all this kind of stuff.” This dismissal furthered the idea that Robin might not be safe to come out to professors.

Although the sample size is small and one should exercise caution in generalizing from the experiences of these two students, their experiences suggest that further research is needed to examine the lived experiences and standpoint perspectives of gender non-conforming students from a wider array of ethnic groups, and ideally, in a variety of educational settings.
Student Rank

When planning this study, I did not expect there to be differences based on student classification. However, early on in coding the interviews I noticed that first years and sophomores had fewer negative experiences than juniors and seniors. This is most likely due to time spent on campus. First years and sophomores have only been on campus for a little while (and during COVID-19) and have fewer gender-related experiences altogether. Many of those who had only been on campus for a short time recalled their high school years and saw college as a great improvement. This led them to report little to no negative comments about campus and they expressed a sense of hope while juniors and seniors stayed pragmatic. Jean-Paul, a sophomore, strongly expressed their confidence in administration.

No, but I kind of feel, I honestly kind of have trust and confidence and faith in the administration. Like the president, she just gives me like, a really strong impression that she genuinely cares about students. And she, I have faith that she will do the right thing personally.

Seniors and juniors had more time on campus—including more time in in-person contexts before the pandemic, so they were able to draw from more campus experiences. This is apparent with Aether’s interview. When asked about his experiences with campus housing they remarked, “Fuck campus housing,” due to constant deadnaming on housing paperwork, experiencing deadnaming and misgendering while talking on the phone with housing staff, and on door decorations. Door decorations are a way of welcoming students to campus by having a piece of art with the names of the people who live in that dorm placed on their door. They are put up before move-in and re-done often through the semester. When housing documents do not include the correct name for someone, this
can cause an RA (resident advisor) to unknowingly misgender someone. Aether continued this discussion by recounting negative experiences they had in interactions with campus housing staff,

Okay. So, campus housing, you got to fill out this form every year or whatever, and they've got a legal name spot. They've also got a preferred name spot like, Ooh, that's great! They've got a preferred name spot; you fill in the preferred name spot. Do they ever use it? No! They're going to dead name you all day long! And then if you decide to put a different gender in your gender that you identify as; if you put something different there than what you put as your sex, they will call on the phone per semester to ask if there's anything they can do to help you. And they'll deadname you while doing that. I can't even, they've done that to me like two or three times. And I'm like, all right, step one, you use the preferred name that's listed there.

Not only did first years/sophomores and juniors/seniors differ in experiences on campus, but they also differed on how hopeful they were that Sunnydale University would make substantial changes in gender inclusivity.

When asked if she thought the school would improve its gender inclusivity, Cameron, a first year, said, “I think so. I think, yeah. Like they are already so aware. I think the school is moving in that direction.” Carissa, a sophomore, expressed similar beliefs,

I think that it will happen. I only have a year left because I'm graduating early. I don't think it'll happen in the next year, but I do have faith that Sunnydale is a decent school. I mean like people at Sunnydale are not horrible people. So, I think that it will happen eventually, like the gender-neutral bathrooms and like the housing. I think that will happen eventually.

Juniors and seniors were much more pessimistic in their thoughts on if Sunnydale would change. Rachel, a senior, said, “Of course, I wish there were more single stall bathrooms. But that one I guess, is wishful thinking, maybe like everything else.” Where Carissa believed that gender-neutral bathrooms were only a year away from being built,
Rachel had the idea that they might never happen, they might just be wishful thinking.

Faelyn, a senior, expressed mixed opinions on the likelihood that campus might change. They stated,

I like to think that they will happen hopefully while I'm in here… I think the bathrooms and stuff are more likely to change than anything, which I think, I think that the language is going to take some practice on everyone's account, who aren't as comfortable with it yet. Um, it's a little more, not as possible as the other suggestions.

Faelyn seemed hopeful that the school will add more gender-neutral bathrooms, but they were not as hopeful when it comes to use of gendered language. Rachel, who thought change was wishful thinking, commented on policy change and its lack of probability of changing,

So, when I say a lot of things are wishful thinking, I guess what I really mean is it feels like no place really makes these changes until it's unavoidable. As an institution, Sunnydale has shown me several times that they don't really care about my experiences and invalidate them.

In addition to differences by years of campus experience, the data revealed different trends in student perspectives based on major.

Major

A student’s major, or program of study, was one of the most influential demographics in participants’ experiences. Additionally, there were some overall agreements in views on other majors as being inclusive or not. Typically, social science/humanities majors were thought of as more inclusive spaces than Education/STEM fields. Almost all participants reported this, regardless of major. A table of students’ majors is presented below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aether</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck</td>
<td>M.A. Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briar</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carissa</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJ</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faelyn</td>
<td>Music Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finn</td>
<td>Political Science and Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freddie</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freya</td>
<td>Pan-African studies and individualized major (gender, sexuality, language, and deaf-hood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janessa</td>
<td>M.A. Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Paul</td>
<td>French and Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet</td>
<td>Medical Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lux</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Psychology and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onyx</td>
<td>M.A. Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>Social Studies Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River</td>
<td>Studio Design and Graphic Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>American Sign Language (ASL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tayler</td>
<td>Sociology and Philosophy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirteen of the participants in this study were social science majors and eight were in a humanities field. Although posters were hung in all buildings on campus, social science students were more likely to sign up for the study, which may point to possible differences in stigma created between social sciences and STEM. Two Education students and two STEM major/program students were also included in the sample.

There were many examples of differences in students’ classroom experiences based on major. All four students with majors in STEM or Education reported that professors rarely (or never) asked for pronouns in class and therefore often misgendered
them. Quinn, a social studies secondary education student, reported that some professors ask for correct names, but never pronouns.

A lot of the time, if it's not a class or requires attendance, they just default to whatever names come up on like role or emails or whatever. Other than that, I never had them specifically ask pronouns or anything like that. Just more of a specified name if attendance called for it.

Faelyn describes similar experiences in Music Education,

Not until this year. Teachers, I'll go to class meetings [online] and stuff. Which you like, you're welcome to put your pronouns and your name or anything, but that was kind of weird too, because there was only two of us, who were nonbinary, and we both weren't super out at the time. That kind of situation in this class was the only one that I've had upfront being like, introduce yourself.

Faelyn could only recall one experience of being asked correct pronouns in class and the way that they were asked was problematic due to the pressure the instructor put on the student to share and out themselves. Beck, a graduate student, had an excellent idea about asking for pronouns without putting pressure on the students,

The reason that the one didn’t do it [ask for pronouns] is a good reason… She said, ‘you can tell me your pronouns if you feel comfortable with it, but I have been pointed out by a trans student that having your students stand up and say ‘hi my name is so-and-so and I use whatever pronouns’ forces some students to out themselves when they’re not comfortable to.’ So, they’re the only person who has brought that to my attention so that is something that I plan on implementing in my classroom like saying ‘hey you don’t have to if you don’t feel comfortable, but you can if you want to.’

Beck is in the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Master’s program, a social science, and all but one [the one mentioned above] professor asked directly for students’ pronouns. This drastically contrasts with the experiences of the two education majors discussed above.

Students in STEM also discussed the lack of professors asking for pronouns.

Janessa, a graduate student in the computer science program, said, “I have never had a
professor mention anything about correct names or pronouns.” Janessa is a graduate student who has attended many classes at Sunnydale, yet she has not had a single professor ask/use her correct name or pronouns. When asked if the professors at the medical school asked for pronouns, Jet said, “Not most of the time,” and recalled an exception that made him uncomfortable,

We had name tags for a PBL, problem-based learning. You're put in a group of five or ten people with one expert. They're either a faculty or they're a clinician, I guess technically they are faculty. They didn't last time but this time when I changed clinicians, the person in charge of it asked people to write their name and pronouns on a name tag. So that was cool, but I don't know if it's because I, without them having asked, wrote my pronouns and then everyone felt uncomfortable and like added theirs after the fact, which happens a lot.

Nonbinary people are often held responsible for bringing up the pronoun discussion. In Social Sciences/Humanities, pronouns are asked much more often. Freddie, an English major said pronouns were asked, “In the English department always.” Lux, a Psychology major said, “Yeah, they do. They'll put out a paper and a card or something and ask for it.” When asked if all professors did this they replied, “Yes!” Again, this completely differs from the experience of STEM/Education majors.

I also asked participants about their experiences/opinions on majors outside of theirs. All participants hypothesized that Social Sciences would be much more open about gender identity than STEM. Some participants even tried to stay away from certain majors for fear of being discriminated against. Briar and Luke both said they try to avoid the business school due to a distrust in the field of study. Morgan also recounted a negative experience at the business school, “There was a LGBTQ flag that was hanging, I think it's the college of business (later confirmed by Finn in their interview), and then it
was, it got stolen. Like somebody took it down and stole it.” Faelyn also recounts a negative experience in the Music School,

There is, in all the ensembles syllabi there's a section talking about how people are expected to dress for concerts and there was a spot for men and women sections. So, then all of my friends, the one I mentioned earlier, the genderfluid person and the first person I came out to actually are on the student council who kind of started a resolution to kind of like ask teachers to drop that from their syllabus and just put like what people should wear. Um, and they brought that to the Dean. and the dean was like, ‘you should go and talk to your professors specifically. I can't mandate that.’

This dilemma was still being negotiated at the time of Faelyn’s interview. This can be seen as an act of discrimination, as Faelyn suggests,

I remember talking to my friend and they were like, ‘I don't want to go up to the band director and be like, Hey, I’m nonbinary take this out of your syllabus.’ ‘Cause it was like that thing that made them uncomfortable and like fearful for getting like, like discriminated against or treated differently for that. Which is understandable, I wouldn't want to do that either.

Recall Sue’s (2010) definition of microaggression: Common, often unintentional “verbal, behavioral, and environmental” acts that are “hostile, derogatory, or negative” to a person or group. A part of Faelyn’s environment is negative in that it erases nonbinary presentations from the options of attire. Faelyn is still nonbinary, just not able to express that part of their identity or have it recognized by others. As Faelyn and their friend state, it is difficult to advocate for one’s identity in a negative environment where discrimination is expected or feared.

Students also had very positive things to say about some majors. Aether, who is often in social science/humanities buildings said he does not feel uncomfortable in any of the academic buildings they frequent. Rachel spoke positively of their own major, English.
And of course, my experience in the English department, mostly humanities-based stuff, I feel like sort of the standard believes that there would be, that these are the people who are going to be more inclusive. To me, the humanities people are going to be the ones to be the most respectful, the most understanding, and the most willing to reach out to understand. Not just with pronouns, but even just like the things that they teach or are doing, how they speak, making sure that's inclusive.

Rachel feels very comfortable in English spaces because of the positive experiences they have had with people in the English department.

Overall, most social science/humanities majors agreed that their field of study was more positive about gender non-conformity than STEM/Business and Education majors. Most STEM/Education majors agreed with this idea, predicting that if they were in a social science major, they might feel more comfortable being out to faculty and peers in their major. Briar, who is technically on the social sciences side of things but is a criminal justice major, which they explain to be closer to the atmosphere in STEM, stated, “So I think that there's concerns just because of the department, like if I was an English major or philosophy, would I have those concerns? Not at all. So, I think it's just the nature of the department.” The concerns they were worried about were the lack of credibility they might have as a researcher in their field if they were to be out as nonbinary. They felt the need to keep their nonbinary identity out of their academics because of the uncomfortable environment in the criminal justice major.

It is clear from these examples that students’ experiences differed vastly based on pronouns used, race/ethnicity, students’ classification, and students’ major. As stated earlier, all volunteers who considered themselves to be gender non-conforming in some way or another, regardless of pronouns or gender identity, were included in the study. A couple differences were noticed between those who use some or all binary pronouns and
those who use exclusively nonbinary pronouns including a difference in respect of pronouns and correct names. While not generalizable, race/ethnicity also impacted student experiences including out-ness and professor support. This should be researched further. An unexpected finding showed that student classification matters in this discussion due to amount of time on campus and possibly COVID-19. Those who had only been on campus a short time (first years and sophomores) reported hope and positivity from their campus experiences while those who had been on campus a bit longer had more negative experiences which created less of a sense of hope. Finally, students’ majors had the largest impact on student experiences. Those in STEM/Education were more likely to suffer from microaggressions in the classroom while those in Humanities/Social Sciences had more positive classroom experiences. Participants’ perceptions of different majors matched the description given here. Despite differences in these perspectives, there were issues upon which all/most participants agreed.

**CONSENSUS TRENDS**

Although participants varied in their experiences, many of the same suggestions for a more inclusive campus came up throughout all gender identities, pronouns, race/ethnicities, student classifications, and majors. This section will discuss those common suggestions along with overall common experiences that led the participants to make the choices about what changes were most important to them.

Twenty-two out of twenty-four participants agreed that campus would be more comfortable if there were more gender-neutral bathrooms. Some students support gender abolition which includes making all bathroom’s gender neutral. Carissa argued, “Not in
the sense of completely getting rid of gender terms and whatnot on campus, but I see no reason that 95% of our bathrooms are not gender neutral and that doesn't apply to just campus that just really applies to the world.” Jet had a similar opinion,

And then take off the labels of the bathrooms just entirely. Yeah. Or gender neutral for both bathrooms, 'cause, I don't know where a single one is and there's no need, there's no need for them to be different I don't think. And they're right next to each other in the medical school campus. I, you know, just, I don't want more gender-neutral bathrooms. I want all the bathrooms to be gender neutral and I don't think that that's that hard. It, you remove the label and just say restroom.

Other participants stated a need for more gender-neutral bathrooms without the abolitionist perspective. In fact, E.J. stated that getting rid of gendered bathrooms would negatively affect the trans community.

And then also I do feel like it is important to have… I don't know if this is an unpopular opinion for like gender queer people. But I do feel like it's important to have gendered spaces. ‘Cause there is a place for that, there's even a need for that, within the trans community. Like to have differences between “I'm not nonbinary, I'm not nothing, I'm a man.” Like I know that's important to some people and I want to keep that for them.

This is a very important point that E.J. brings up. In order to continue being inclusive to all trans and cisgender students, eliminating all gendered bathrooms may not work. There is still a need for more gender-neutral bathrooms according to most participants including E.J.

At Sunnydale University, many of the binary bathrooms include a sticker on the door that says, “This restroom has been identified as a Transgender-Friendly Space.” Students still have to choose between a bathroom labeled ‘Women’ or a bathroom labeled ‘Men’ regardless of the additional sign. Many participants find issue with this sign signifying safety. Morgan had similar ideas to E.J. on gender abolition. They thought it
might create a less affirming place for binary trans students. However, Morgan also explained that these Transgender-Friendly stickers are not cutting it for nonbinary people.

Like it still says women's bathroom. Like, to me, that signals more that, if it's a women's bathroom, trans women might be more safe in that space, but not necessarily that… nonbinary people are still going to have to choose, ‘oh, am I going to go to the women's bathroom or the men's bathroom?’

Similarly, Luke stated,

And also, just the fact, they don't have many gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and the ones they have are often out of order or dirty. Like, I honestly don't feel safe in the men's room and I don't feel safe in the women's room either, but it's just like, I know of old buildings, like, you know, it's pretty much really hard to like, achieve that, but their solution has been to put a sign up that says this is transgender friendly. Yeah. It's going to stop hate crime.

Luke points out that a piece of paper put up by administration is not going to stop faculty, staff, or students from committing a hate crime or microaggression in that bathroom. E.J. explains how performative this gesture is, “It's just like, I'm not going to look at a piece of paper and be like, ‘well, I guess I can't be transphobic here.’” They continue their point with a joke from a meme, “It’s like saying this sign can’t stop me because I can’t read!”

to further his belief in how absurd the signs are. Candelario (2021) defines performative activism as,

Supporting a cause or issue to garner attention, support, or monetization from others rather than actually caring about making a difference in the cause. This behavior often aligns with the good Samaritan ideal or, for some, the “white savior complex.” These actions also show little to no effort is being made to learn or take action.

This definition fits the description E.J. gave about the school using performative action to convince the public that they are working on social change.
Many participants stated that they avoided bathrooms altogether because of the lack of gender-neutral options. When asked about their experiences in bathrooms on campus E.J. reported, “I have literally never been to a bathroom on campus except in my dorm.” When asked why he stated, “I’ve compulsively avoided public bathrooms ever since I came out.” Janessa agreed stating, “Which I will admit, because of the state that I live in, I generally don’t… I avoid at all costs using the bathroom in public.” Aether, the only participant to discuss locker rooms on campus, had similar feelings about the lack of gender-neutral spaces in the gym. He said,

The gym is scary. There is no gender-neutral locker room… I just avoid going to the gym or I change in a bathroom, in a different building before going to the gym… I go from class to jujitsu. So, it’s, it’s not as easy, you know, wear gym clothes to class. I mean, I do that anyway to avoid the locker rooms because no way in hell am I using the men's locker room at the gym… and I'm not going to use the women's room because that's just wrong.

Another consensus on changes needed for campus is removing gendered language from campus spaces. Finn suggests “More gender inclusive language being used by the university in general and like, by administration and stuff like that. So that's just like a wording thing that I think could be changed easily.” A lot of participants agree that this could be a quick fix if focused on by administration. Morgan states, “And they're like language and emails and things like that. I feel like those are easy things that they can change.” Other students agree that the school should try to eliminate gendered language, but they do not think it is going to be as easy as Finn and Morgan suggest. Faelyn states, “Yeah. Um, I think definitely drop the gendered language from everything,” but they also acknowledge that, “I think that the language is going to take some practice on everyone's
account, who aren't as comfortable with it yet. It's a little more, not as possible as the other suggestions.”

Along the lines of gendered language, frustration was displayed by multiple participants over the use of phrases like “she/he” and “ladies and gentlemen.” Robin sighed with exhaustion when asked about gendered language on campus and said, “I feel like it's so much easier to just put they in so many places and people don't and that's, it's really frustrating.” Lux explained how much simpler it would be to use they instead of gendered language. He voiced that, “It's kinda silly that they still use that when like, he/she's longer than they, you can just say they and include everybody that's there.” Beck provided a great example for how they, them, and their pronouns have always been used as singular, “I’m like, “For example, somebody left their keys, somebody left their keys, ya know? They need to get their keys back, you don’t know who lost their keys like you refer to somebody in that way, with they/them.” They wonder why it is so easy for people to use they in a singular way, as in the example above, yet they still cannot use they in a singular form for nonbinary people.

Gender-neutral housing was also brought up by a few participants. Briar had strong feelings about campus housing.

There was some big debate about having gender-neutral bathrooms or something on the floor. And it was supposed to be next to the diversity and equity center. And I guess the school nixed that, and they didn't tell anyone because my friend was on the committee and he just woke up one day and they were like, 'yeah, we're not doing it’… So, they would rather protect their money then make students feel comfortable. And I understand that from an administrative point of view, I get it with no funding like you can't do that, but I think that they need to get their shit together, grow some balls and stand up for the students, you know?
Briar’s points show the performativity entwined in the school’s inclusion efforts. Many participants mentioned this sense of performativity happening on campus. Briar also gives an example of this performative activism about the pride flags hung on campus,

> And I just think it's really, it pisses me off that they'll post pride flags, and they'll hang up banners and they'll do all these things. But at the end of the day, they don't want to make the state of [state Sunnydale is in] uncomfortable because that's where their funding comes from.

Ashton explains a similar idea, “So I feel like a lot of what Sunnydale does is performative to get the campus pride index up, but not actually do anything that is actually helpful.” Finn also agrees, “Cause I know a lot of times administration can do things that are just very like performative, and they're not really actively doing anything for people on campus.” On the surface it looks like Sunnydale has many examples of being LGBTQIA+ friendly. However, those who provide these scores are not always part of the LGBTQIA+ community, or if they are, they are not always nonbinary. In participants’ opinions decisions are not based on what experiences nonbinary people are actually having on campus, instead they are made based on what will not cause too much change in the University, which often includes things like flyers and empty promises. Carissa discussed the ease of changing both gendered bathrooms and gendered housing into gender-neutral spaces, “You can easily make bathrooms gender neutral. You can easily make housing gender neutral. So, I think the biggest change would be the spaces that students actually occupy, like physically should be less binary and more open.” This extends the argument to many areas on campus that have binary expectations. Gender neutrality on campus was brought up in one way or another by every participant
interviewed. Language, bathrooms, and housing are areas on campus that need to be focused on to make Sunnydale a more inclusive school for all students.

Although normalized in many social science courses, not all professors ask students for pronouns and even fewer use correct pronouns for students. Onyx faced this misgendering often in their program. They are a graduate student in sociology. Sociology is a social science, and therefore deemed fairly inclusive by undergraduate students who may not have much interaction with professors. Graduate students must work closely with faculty and may notice more often when they are being misgendered. Onyx stated that they want the school to, “Encourage professors to always ask for students’ pronouns.” Onyx has started their own form of resistance by always telling a group their pronouns even when it feels uncomfortable to do so.

But I feel like by stating my pronouns, I kind of make that statement. I'm like, ‘oh, and by the way, can we do this?’ And then it makes it uncomfortable for me because I don't want to, you know, impose things on other people, but also, I think it's a very good practice that people should just ask for people's pronouns in general.

Onyx may be more confident in supplying their pronouns in group settings because of the intimacy of the graduate program they are in. There are very small class sizes and the meetings they attend outside of class are also fairly small. Undergraduate students might not feel comfortable doing this in a lecture hall of 300+ people. Briar, who is an undergraduate student, stated, “I wish people would ask my pronouns. Would I tell them? I don't know... But I wish they would ask.” Briar also discussed not feeling comfortable being out in their criminal justice major which leads their decision to not speak up about pronouns in the way Onyx does. They still have a desire for their pronouns to be asked and used, but an uncertainty over whether that would help them be more comfortable
being out. Cameron explained a similar process to Beck’s idea on asking students’
pronouns, “But I think if every teacher made a point to be like, ‘Hey, like if you have a
different set of pronouns, just email me.’” This lessens the chance of forcibly outing
someone to the class, as Beck stated earlier. Cameron went on to say, “So I mean I would
hope everybody would have pronouns in their bio.” If everyone announced or included
their pronouns in e-mail signatures and biographies, then nonbinary students may also
feel more comfortable with saying their pronouns. My last name begins with an A, so I
am usually the first person to have to do an introduction. This is often nerve-wracking
because the leaders of meetings rarely ask people to say their pronouns. This leaves me
with two choices: 1) I do not reveal my pronouns and accept that people will misgender
me in this meeting to avoid the awkwardness of bringing it up to people who may not
care; or 2) I reveal my pronouns and feel awkward when no one else announces theirs.
Normalization is important in building an inclusive atmosphere on campus.

Many other suggestions were brought up by participants that do not fit in the
scope of this paper. Participants discussed a need for campus forms to include more
options (with identities and pronouns), educating people on LGBTQIA+ issues via
trainings, having more LGBTQIA+ events on campus that are not limited to pride month
and marketing those events better, having more specific LGBTQIA+ student groups on
campus (like a group for nonbinary students), learning about nonbinary identities within
course curriculum when possible, full curriculum changes to ensure inclusive lessons,
and more inclusion in campus health and counseling services.
DISCUSSION

While Sunnydale University overall is considered an LGBTQIA+ friendly school, nonbinary students of Sunnydale tell a different story. To answer my first research question, nonbinary students are still having many negative experiences on campus despite the inclusion efforts of administration. Their experiences do not match the school’s promise to support all students in their academic journey. Participants did not feel like the school fully respected them as nonbinary. This slows the process of social change as it silences nonbinary student opinions, which answers my next two research questions. Students need administration to listen and enact helpful policies for nonbinary students. They need a campus environment that is conductive to their learning. As mentioned earlier, many students felt the lack of inclusiveness in classrooms was too harmful to attend class at times. Ashton’s experience of being accosted in a classroom over their chosen name influenced his motivation to attend that class. It was a yoga class this happened in, which Ashton said she was initially excited for. This experience supports the need for professors and administration to listen. Instead of arguing against using someone’s chosen name, professors should acknowledge that trans students feel more comfortable and are more likely to do well in courses they are respected in.

Many first years and sophomores had more positive views on campus life. Their opinions were also formed during a pandemic when on-campus activities, including classes, were limited. They see the school’s visible acts of support before coming to
campus and expect inclusivity. Once they have experienced campus for a while, the illusion is shattered, and a realization is shared among juniors and seniors that Sunnydale is not as good as it seems. Recall Candelario’s (2021) definition of performative activism cited above as a performative wokeness that only gives the illusion that the organization is working towards change without effectively creating social change. As an example, AT&T posted an add during pride month claiming to be a “Proud Ally Since 1975.” This is a nice gesture, however, from 2017-2018 “AT&T donated $2,755,000 to 193 anti-gay politicians” (Ennis 2019)

The experiences of the participants in this study suggests that gender is not an immutable identity that does not change after age 7 (as Kohlberg 1966 argues) and is fluid, potentially changing throughout one’s life. Gender is also a performance that can align with gender scripts or challenge them. Berger and Luckmann (1966) tell us that those who are not socialized according to society's dominant realities and those who do not benefit from them are catalysts for social change. In this setting, it is incumbent on gender non-conforming students to create the social/cultural change that the University purports to take leadership on. The participants’ gender performances alone have the potential to lead to social change, even as they come up against recalcitrant or ill-informed professors, a lack of bathrooms, and a general failure of the campus community to make them feel included, valued, and safe. When those students are silenced, the hegemonic reality that oppresses them stands. This leaves little room for the suggestions given by participants to happen. Policy changes moves slowly or not at all when students are not listened to. Sunnydale often gives the illusion of support in the performative acts discussed in the previous section. Students are asking for substantial changes like adding
more gender-neutral bathrooms and changing online systems to better include gender non-conforming individuals. The school instead hangs pride flags and gives out buttons, which participants said is nice and welcoming, but does not address the actual issues happening to students to make campus more structurally inclusive.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) also make the argument that language can create social change but when met with constant opposition due to institutional discrimination is not likely to. An example is pronoun use. In this paper I have used a mixture of pronouns for participants who use multiple sets of pronouns. This creates a ‘linguistic gender fuck,’ so to say. Readers may be confused when a sentence uses “he,” “she,” and “they” to describe one person like, “Jet recounts an experience in one of his classes in medical school where they were called on by the professor to teach the class about trans people after she had made a comment about the professor using the term ‘birth mother’ rather than “birth parent.” This change of language may educate those who hear it in turn creating social change. However, the confusion surrounding this new language because of how binary language has been written into all social scripts, halts this social change and can even worsen the social problem itself. This is shown in the participants’ ideas on why people cannot just use ‘they/them’ pronouns instead of the gendered “she/he, her/him.” As reported earlier, Beck and Lux were both puzzled at why people refused to just use they/them pronouns as they end up being shorter to say than “he slash she.” The resistance to this switch of language comes from confusion because of how binary language is institutionalized throughout society. Despite this resistance, the act of being deviant to social norms is an important agent for social change (Durkheim 1893). Participants are considered deviant for putting forth a linguistic challenge to binary
conceptualizations of gender. In turn, they are being required to educate others and perhaps more importantly, they are creating social change which, as applications and other forms are revised and bathrooms changed and housing arrangements made, will create institutional change.

Participants are all connected through similar experiences of discrimination on campus. Although there is that connection, important differences can be looked at to determine where/how discrimination happens between participants. These differences are crucial in fully understanding the experiences of nonbinary students. Future research should study people with different gender identities in isolation so distinctions can be made. However, for this study all gender identities (besides agender and two-spirit, both identities scarce in the current literature) were represented at least twice and analysis was done based on shared experiences between participants with similar qualities. In the example above, first years and sophomores have a more positive view of campus because of their lack of experiences. Those who identify with binary transgender identities are less likely to be misgendered because their pronouns fall within the current system of society. Sweet (2001) describes college as a microcosm of society. They state that, “Colleges and universities tend to reflect many of the same social structures, culturally based expectations of social conduct and patterns of interaction that we see in the larger society.” Since society has not yet created room for nonbinary people in its institutions, college life follows similar patterns. Majors determined comfort because curriculums are different. While a gender studies student is learning the difference between genders and the oppression different genders have faced, a biology student is learning that females have one set of chromosomes and males a different set of chromosomes. Intersex people
are not often taught about in biology, but they are covered in many of the sociology courses the department offers. Sociology classes are more likely to describe gender as a construct than mathematics classes. STEM/Education professors may need extra training to understand gender in the way that social science professors do because of the nature of their courses. This may not be applicable to all social science professors (or all STEM/Education professors), so all professors would benefit from training related to respecting students’ genders. Having students lead trainings could have a positive impact on their effectiveness. Students have first-hand knowledge on what it is like to be on campus and how they wish campus would change to better fit expectations. The experiences of the students interviewed are the most important part of this research because they tell the story of how actual nonbinary people are experiencing campus, which may help others understand the issues being faced more than traditional training methods (online modules, people with no experience living as a nonbinary person giving trainings, etc.).

The pride index rates schools on how well they are doing in eight areas and uses that information to assign a number (1-5) to show how well a school is doing (Beemyn, Rankin, and Windmeyer 2022). This is done through quantitative methods and while it is helpful in supporting change at colleges, it could never account for the infinite number of experiences that students have. Qualitative research, like this study, does a better job of accounting for multiple experiences but it is also important to note that one study could never explain an overarching nonbinary experience. Nonbinary people are diverse, and

4The 8 areas looked at by the pride index include policy inclusion, support and institutional commitment, academic life, student life, housing, campus safety, counseling and health, and recruitment and retention efforts all relating to LGBTQIA+ support (Beemyn et al. 2022)
that diversity gives them a unique perspective on society. Having an intersectional approach is important to think about when doing research around diverse populations.

Limitations

As stated earlier, this study did not have enough racial/ethnic diversity in the sample. Advertising was done in all buildings on campus and e-mails were sent to leaders of the diversity and inclusion office and an LGBTQIA+ group for people of color. Future research should further attempt to recruit a more diverse sample by sending additional e-mails to students and faculty in organizations that provide services for people of color. This could include non-LGBTQIA+ specific organizations like Greek life or academic groups as well. Future research should also strive to recruit more STEM/Education majors to further explain their experiences as opposed to social science majors.

While it was important to me to have a large inclusive sample size, future studies could be more specific over their study populations. For example, I included first years in my sample even though they often did not have much to say due to their limited on-campus experiences during the pandemic. They also found questions related to change difficult because they were still exploring what campus life was like. Future studies should focus on students with more experiences, like juniors and seniors rather than students who just arrived on campus. Another example is gender identity. I included anyone who expressed that they felt gender non-conforming regardless of their specific identities. A different study could be done comparing the different specific gender identities. What do agender students experience differently from genderqueer students? How do genderfluid students navigate campus as opposed to binary trans students? Pronouns could be looked at in this light as well. Only one participant in this study used
neo-pronouns. Neo-pronouns are pronouns outside of the widely known she/her, he/him, and they/them that refer to those with an identity outside of the binary. Although they are scarce in current research, these pronouns are not new. Many are derived from pronoun sets used in the 19th-20th Century. The neo-pronouns e/em/eirs were derived from the pronouns e/em/es/emself that were discussed by James Rogers in an article for “The Writer” in 1890. A study looking at a large sample of students who use neo-pronouns would be of important significance in this field. These experiences could also be compared to those who use only they/them or use they/them in combination with binary pronoun(s).

While this study has a larger sample than many, all participants did come from the same school. A study that examined multiple schools would provide more robust answers to the research questions. Different schools have different majors, so more majors could be looked at in regard to experiences than just using one school. Additionally, each school has its own idiosyncrasies in policies, programs, and campus life. The type of school, location, political affiliation, and racial makeup of an area might have hidden implications on results. Including multiple schools in the sample may reveal findings that were not considered in this study. It may also debunk some of the findings presented in this research. Future studies should take this into account and interview nonbinary students at multiple types of schools across the area that is being looked at.
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APPENDICES

Pre-Interview Survey

Pre-Interview Volunteer Demographics Survey

Thank you for your interest in this research study! This study will be looking at the unique experience of gender non-conforming students on Kentucky state college campuses. If you consider yourself gender non-conforming and a college student at a Kentucky state school, we want to hear your voice! Please fill out this demographics survey along with your preferred contact method and a researcher will be in touch shortly to set up an interview time. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes and there is no compensation for participating. Thanks!

Note: Your responses will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law and no one outside of the research team will have access to your contact information.

1. Which of the following best describes your gender identity? Feel free to select more than one option.
   - Agender
   - Androgyne
   - Bigender
   - Demiboy
   - Demigirl
   - Gender Expansive
Gender Non-Conforming
Genderfluid
Genderqueer
Man
Neutrois
Nonbinary
Pangender
Transfeminine
Transgender
Transmasculine
Two-Spirit
Woman
Prefer to self-describe:

2. What pronouns do you use? Feel free to select more than one option.

Ae/Aer/Aers
E(y)/Em/Eirs
Fae/Faer/Faers
He/Him/His
Per/Pers
She/Her/Hers
They/Them/Theirs
Ve/Ver/Vis
Xe/Xem/Xyrs
Z(i)e/hir/hirs
I prefer to be called by my name only
Prefer to self-describe:

________________________________________

3. How would you describe your sexual and/or romantic orientations?

____________________________________________

4. How would you describe your racial and/or ethnic identities?

_______________________________________________

5. What is your age in years?

___

6. What is your student classification?

First Year
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Graduate Student (MA)
Graduate Student (PhD)

Prefer to self-describe:

___________________

7. In this research your identity will be protected. In order to do that, pseudonyms (fake names) will be assigned. If you have a preference for what you want your pseudonym to be, please list that here. Otherwise, a random pseudonym will be assigned.

___________________

8. Please leave an e-mail address so that the researcher can contact you to schedule your interview (your contact information will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team).

___________________
Unsigned Consent Statement

Nonbinary Students’ College Experiences in Kentucky

Date

Dear ________:

You are being invited to participate in a research study by answering questions in the attached survey and participating in an interview that will last around 90 minutes about nonbinary college students’ experiences on Kentucky state school campuses. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed, and only pseudonyms will appear in the transcripts. This study is conducted by Dr. Patricia Gagne, Professor of Sociology and Cat Alexander, M.A. student in Sociology, both at the University of Louisville. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The information you provide will contribute to making suggestions for college/university campuses to be more inclusive of gender-expansive identities. Your completed survey and interview recording/transcripts will be stored on a password protected encrypted computer. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes time to complete, and the interview will last approximately 90 minutes.

Individuals from the Department of Sociology, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence.
to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By answering survey questions, you agree to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact: Dr. Patricia Gagné at (502) 852-8014 or patricia.gagne@louisville.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You can discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also call this number if you have other questions about the research, and you cannot reach the research staff, or want to talk to someone else. The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this research study.
If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24-hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Sincerely,

Patricia Gagne, PhD  
Cat Alexander
Interview Guide

Coming out and being out on campus:

1. Interviewees’ experiences

   a. Tell me a little about yourself and how you came out as [gender identity from demographic survey]

      - when did you first think, “Hey I might be [gender identity from demographic survey]

      - was it during college?

      - if during college, college peers’ reactions?

      - any differences between binary and nonbinary peers’ responses?

      (Tell me about that.)

      - faculty and staff? administration? family?

      - if before college, reactions of those around you during that time (family, friends, etc.)

   b. Can you tell me about a time on campus when you have felt supported in regard to your gender identity?

      - tell me more about your experience(s)

      - did experience affect academic confidence/motivation?

      - how so?

      - who do you feel really supports you and your gender non-conforming identity?

      - how do they show support?
- and difference between binary vs. nonbinary peers? (Tell me about that.)
- faculty? Family? Others on campus?

c. *Can you tell me about a time on campus when you have felt uncomfortable because of your gender identity?*

   - tell me more about your experience(s)
   - would you consider this experience harassment? (How come?)
   - did this experience affect academic confidence/motivation?
     - how so?
   - who do you usually feel most uncomfortable around?
     - peers (nonbinary vs. binary), faculty, staff, visitors to campus?
     - tell me more about what makes you uncomfortable around these people
   - where do you usually feel most uncomfortable?
     - dorms, academic buildings, diversity/LGBTQIA+ centers, clubs, intramurals?
     - tell me more about what makes you uncomfortable in these areas.

2. Administration

   a. *Can you describe any positive and/or supportive actions completed by your schools’ administration during your time on campus regarding gender identity inclusivity?*

      - maybe in emails, newsletter/newspaper articles, proclamations, or other activities?
- who made these communications?
  - president, provost, dean, other staff?
- how does this action affect your experience of gender identity inclusivity on campus?
  - can you tell me a little about your feelings regarding these actions?
  - could your campus be doing anything better?
    - can you tell me more about that?

b. On the other hand, is there a time that you can describe for me where your school’s administration was unsupportive towards gender identity inclusivity?
  - again, in emails, newsletters/newspapers, proclamations, or other activities?
    - who made these communications?
      - president, provost, dean, other staff?
    - do you consider these actions hostile or violent?
    - how did this affect your experience of inclusiveness on campus?
      - can you tell me about how these actions made you feel?
    - what could your campus be doing better?

3. Faculty and Staff

a. Do your professors usually ask about correct names and pronouns during introductions?
  - if they do, do they also use these correct pronouns through the semester?
  - reactions to this process?
- any refusals?
- how does that make you feel?

b. *Can you tell me about your opinions/feelings regarding professors (and others) using gendered language?*

- when professors say, “Ladies and Gentlemen,” “Girls and Boys,” “Hey guys,” “She/he,” etc.
- does this affect how included your feel in the classroom?
  - in what ways?

c. *How have your professors on campus contributed to gender expansive changes on campus? Please only mention professors that you have personally had experiences with, whether as teachers, advisors, or mentors.*

- can you give me some examples of what your professors have done?
- tell me more about that instance?

School policies and programs

1. LGBTQIA+ support services

   a. *Do you know if there any LGBTQIA+ student support services on campus? (LGBTQIA+ Centers, student groups, etc.)* Tell me about them

- if there are not any services, how does that make you feel?
  - effects on academic confidence/motivation?
  - have you gone to or used any of these services?
- if you have, what was that experience like?
  - how did the service help or support you?
- how could they have done better?

- if you have not, why not?

b. *Do you know if there are any gender-neutral bathrooms on your campus?*

- what about gender inclusive housing units?

- what are you experiences with using these services?

  - how do you feel about these services? are they needed? could they do better?

- are they easy to find?

  - plenty on campus or only a couple? Or none?

  - do you have to walk far to find a gender-neutral bathroom?

- how are the bathrooms labeled? (All gender bathrooms, gender-neutral bathrooms, gender friendly bathrooms, etc.)

  - how does this labeling make you feel?

- tell me what it is like when you have to use a binary bathroom and/or locker room?

  - do you avoid these bathrooms?

  - how do you handle those situations? Just having to pee and not having a place to do so?

  - have you ever been threatened or teased in a binary bathroom?

    - can you tell me more about that experience?

c. *What would you change about campus life to make it a more comfortable environment for gender non-conforming individuals?*

    - can you tell me a bit about how you decided on those changes?
- what experiences have you had that make these issues important to you?
  - how would you like to see those changes implemented?
  - how likely do you feel that these changes may happen in your time on campus?
  - do you think it will take a while for these changes to happen?
  - is there anything else you would change?
  - repeat previous prompts

d. Your school (does or does not) include gender identity in its non-discrimination policy, how does that make you feel?
  - in what ways is that reflected in the campus environment?
  - what do you think your campus could do better to be reflective of their non-discrimination statement?

e. Are there any other policies or programs not already mentioned that you would like to see change in on your campus?
  - tell me more about that
  - what changes would it take for you to be able to call you campus inclusive or supportive of nonbinary gender identities?

Is there anything else we have not mentioned yet that you think it important for me to know?
  - Anything about support services?
  - What about campus life, extra-curriculars, dorm life, academic environments?
Recruitment Flyers

Recruitment Flyer for Web:

Gender Non-Conforming Student
Volunteers Needed!

Cat Alexander, a graduate student of sociology at the University of Louisville, supervised by Dr. Patricia Gagné, Professor of Sociology, is conducting research on the experiences gender non-conforming students have on college campuses.

* Seeking volunteers for in-depth interviews that will last around 90 minutes
  * Can be conducted wherever you are comfortable
  * In-person, audio/video platforms, and phone calls are all options

* Focus of interview will be your lived experiences and suggestions for campus improvement!
  * All privacy and confidentiality will be protected to the extent provided by law
  * Your name and any potentially identifying information will be removed from any presentations or publications

If you are interested in learning more about the research or have questions you may contact Dr. Patricia Gagné at patricia.gagne@louisville.edu / (502) 852-8014 OR Cat Alexander at cat.alexander@louisville.edu / (502) 705-6043

If you are interested in volunteering for this study use this link in order to review a consent statement outlining your rights as a participant and, if you choose to do so, fill out a pre-interview survey detailing your age, year in college, how you identify and the best way to contact you.
Gender Non-Conforming Student
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If you are interested in learning more about the research or have questions you may contact Dr. Patricia Gagné at patricia.gagne@louisville.edu / (502) 852-8014 OR Cat Alexander at cat.alexander@louisville.edu / (502) 705-6043.

If you are interested in volunteering for this study, you may scan the QR-Code to the right of this text in order to review a consent statement outlining your rights as a participant and, if you choose to do so, fill out a pre-interview survey detailing your age, year in college, how you identify and the best way to contact you.
Email Template for Individuals:

Dear [insert name here],

Hi! My name is Cat Alexander, and I am a graduate student with the Sociology Department at The University of Louisville. I am currently working on my thesis research project under the direction of Dr. Patricia Gagne, Professor of Sociology (502-852-8014). In my research I am conducting interviews on the lived experiences of gender non-conforming students on college campuses and suggestions these students may have to create a more inclusive and welcoming space for gender non-conforming students. In order to do this, I hope to conduct many in-depth interviews with gender non-conforming students enrolled in Kentucky state colleges.

I am contacting you specifically because of your involvement with [insert office, center, or group person is affiliated with here], which is often visited/used by students identifying as gender non-conforming. I was hoping you would help me in my research endeavors by forwarding this email to others you know who may be interested or know of students who may be interested in this research. With your help I plan on conducting interview with gender non-conforming college students in order to create positive change so that college campuses are inclusive to students who do not fall within the gender binary.

The identities of participants will be protected and kept confidential to the extent provided by law. This will be done by using pseudonyms for participants and for the
names of colleges/universities while also not revealing specific characteristics that might give away the identity of the participant. These protection measures will be used in this thesis, any presentations given, any publications, and any other results from this study.

If someone is interested in participating, all they have to do to sign up is fill out THIS pre-interview survey that asks for a contact e-mail address or phone number and some demographic characteristics of the individual and then a researcher will be in touch shortly to set up the interview time. I appreciate the time taken to read and possibly forward this e-mail to others.

Kindest regards,

Cat Alexander
(they/them/their)

University of Louisville

E-mail template for groups:

To whom it may concern,

Hello! My name is Cat Alexander, and I am a graduate student in the master’s program in sociology at the University of Louisville. I am currently working on my thesis research project under the direction of Dr. Patricia Gagne, Professor of Sociology (502-852-8014). In my research I am conducting interviews on the lived experiences of gender non-conforming students on college campuses and suggestions these students may have to create a more inclusive and welcoming space for gender non-conforming students. In
order to do this, I hope to conduct many in-depth interviews with gender non-conforming students enrolled in Kentucky state colleges.

I am contacting this (group/office/center) specifically because similar college (groups/offices/centers) are often visited/used by students identifying as gender non-conforming. I was hoping this (group/center/office) would help me in my research endeavors by forwarding this email to members or non-members who may be interested in this research. With your help I plan on conducting interview with gender non-conforming college students in order to create positive change so that college campuses are inclusive to students who do not fall within the gender binary.

The identities of participants will be protected and kept confidential to the extent provided by law. This will be done by using pseudonyms for participants and for the names of colleges/universities while also not revealing specific characteristics that might give away the identity of the participant. These protection measures will be used in this thesis, any presentations given, any publications, and any other results from this study.

If someone is interested in volunteering to participate, all they have to do to sign up is fill out THIS pre-interview survey that asks for a contact e-mail address or phone number and some demographic characteristics of the individual and then a researcher will be in touch shortly to set up the interview time. I appreciate the time taken to read and possibly forward this e-mail to others.

Kindest regards,

Cat Alexander

(they/them/their)

University of Louisville
CIRRICULUM VITAE
Cat Alexander
502.705.6043~cat.alexander@louisville.edu

Education

University of Louisville, Expected MA
Louisville, KY
- Applied Sociology
  Fall 2020-Current
- Awarded the Diversity Fellowship (full tuition, health
  insurance, fringe benefits, and 18,000 stipend per year
  renewed once, 2020-2022)
- Awarded departmental Fellowship (full tuition, health
  insurance, fringe benefits, and 18,000 stipend per year
  renewed twice, 2022-2025)

Morehead State University, BA
Morehead, KY
- GPA: 3.630 (Overall), 3.72 (Major)
  Fall 2016-Spring 2020
- Major: Sociology, Minor: Gender Studies
- Study Abroad: Scotland (2019), Ireland (Cancelled due to COVID, 2020)
- Received AT&T Savings Scholarship ($1000 for one academic year, 2016-2017),
  Bonnie Strangio Education Scholarship ($1000 for one academic year, 2016-
  2017), Kentucky Scholar Award, ($4000 renewable for four academic years,
  2016-2020), MSU Study Abroad Scholarship, ($300 for one trip, 2018)

Research Interests
- Sociology of Gender
- Sociology of Religion
- Sociology of Education
- Intersectionality

Academic Professional Experience
Graduate Teaching Assistant  

- **Sociology 201: Introduction to Sociology**  
  Fall 2020 & Spring 2021  
  - Lead discussion sections once a week in both in-person and online formats.  
  - Graded papers of thirty students on a bi-weekly basis.  
  - Held office hours twice a week in an online format, using this time for tutoring and review.  
  - Created/edited and distributed quizzes and exams throughout the semester.

- **Sociology 202: Social Problems**  
  Fall 2021 - Fall 2022  
  - Created lesson plans for each class utilizing active teaching strategies.  
  - Independently led classes twice a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes during fall and spring semesters and five times a week for 1 hour and 30 minutes during the summer semester.  
  - Graded papers of 8-22 students on a bi-weekly basis.  
  - Held office hours twice a week, using the time for tutoring and review.  
  - Created and distributed quizzes and exams throughout the semester.

Graduate Research Assistant

- **Uncovering Racial Logics within Louisville: Engaging Community Partners in Research**
  - Assistant to research team of interdisciplinary professors, graduate students, and undergraduate students.  
  - Collaborated with archival team in conducting a content analysis of Louisville Oral histories relating to race in Louisville in regard to social, educational, and housing movements.

- **Youth Responses to Racial Inequities: Community Listening Sessions**
  - Attended Community Listening Sessions as tech help and a note-taker.  
  - Helped with recruitment efforts.  
  - Helped with transcription and analysis of focus group interviews.

Research Projects

- **“Men’s Awareness of Toxic Masculinity”**
  - Undergraduate Research Fellowship project (2018-2019)

- **“How Toxic Masculinity Specifically Affects Transmen”**
  - Undergraduate Research Fellowship project (2019-2020)

Research in Progress

- **“‘I don’t want to upset anyone; I just want to exist’: Nonbinary College Student Experiences at A Public Mid-Southern University”**
A qualitative study on how nonbinary students experience support and lack of support from higher educational institutions (2020-2022: Thesis)

- “Predictors of Gender-Neutral Bathrooms on Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio Colleges and Universities:
  - A quantitative study on significant factors that predict how many gender-neutral bathrooms campuses have per one thousand students.

Presentations

- “I don’t want to upset anyone; I just want to exist”: Nonbinary College Student Experiences at A Public Mid-Southern University
  - Southern Sociological Society Annual Conference  Birmingham AL, 2022
- “How Toxic Masculinity Specifically Affects Transmen”
  - Celebration of Student Scholarship at Morehead State University  Morehead KY, 2020
  - Southern Sociological Society Annual Conference  Virtual, 2021
- “Cookies, Crafts, and LGBTQ+ History”
  - Presenter and organizer at Rowan County Public Library  Morehead KY, 2019
- “Feminism 101: Gender Studies Saves the World.”
  - Tri-State Diversity Conference at Morehead State University  Morehead KY, 2019
    - Panel presenter and organizer, with Dr. Bernadette Barton and Lisa Hinkle
- “Men’s Awareness of Toxic Masculinity”
  - Celebration of Student Scholarship at Morehead State University  Morehead KY, 2019
  - Posters at the Capital Conference  Frankfort KY, 2019
    - At the Kentucky State Capital Building

Publications: Other Types


Co-Curricular Professional Experience

PLAN Workshops (Professional development, Life skills, Academic development, and Networking)  Louisville KY, 2020
- Increased professionality through:
  o Creating community in the classroom
  o Imposter syndrome workshop
  o Academic job search panel discussion
  o Cover letters workshop
  o Workshop the CV
  o Teaching Philosophy

The GTA Academy  
Louisville KY, Fall 2020 & Spring 2021
- Attended both part 1 and part 2
- Increased Professionality through:
  o Teaching for Learning
  o Designing a Class: Activities, Assignments, and Lesson Planning
  o Maximizing Active Learning in Higher Education
  o Creating a Civil Classroom Culture: Classroom Management Strategies
  o Current Conversations in Teaching and Learning
  o Assessing Student Learning
  o Translating Learning Theory into Teaching Strategies
  o Creating Your Statement of Teaching Philosophy

McGraw Hill Education Professional Development Webinars  
Louisville KY, 2020
- "Breaking down the pandemic from a sociological perspective"
- "Enhancing student engagement in an online environment using the Online Learning Consortium framework"

Honor and Awards
- Graduate Student Award for Teaching  
  Louisville KY, 2021 & 2022
  o Highest student evaluation scores of all graduate students
- Outstanding Sociology Student  
  Morehead KY, 2018
  o Morehead State University Merit Award
- Leadership Academy  
  Atlanta GA, 2017
  o Elected by National Honor Fraternity, Phi Sigma Pi, to attend

Certifications
- CPR and First Aid Certified  
  November 2019
- Leadership in Action and Leadership in Action Facilitator Certified  
  March 2019
- Safe Zone and Safe Zone Facilitator Certified  
  October 2017

Software Workshops  
Louisville KY, 2020
- STATA
- Atlas.ti
- Descript
- Get started with InDesign