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INCLUSIVITY IN PRACTICE: A QUEER EXAMINATION OF THE ACCEPTANCE OF TRANS COMMUNITIES FROM THE STANDPOINTS OF TRANS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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INCLUSIVITY IN PRACTICE: A QUEER EXAMINATION OF THE

ACCEPTANCE OF TRANS COMMUNITIES FROM THE STANDPOINTS OF

TRANS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

————————————————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

————————————————

by

Sean Thomas Earl Maulding

August 2021

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Despite attending the same universities and working toward the same degrees, trans students and cisgender students do not always have the same experiences during their college years. In addition to the hardships associated with being a university student, members of trans communities often also face gender-based discrimination and challenges that their cisgender counterparts do not. Although the mid-size Southern California university at which this research took place has taken steps toward fostering an accepting climate for all students, the transmale, gender nonconforming, and gender nonbinary students who participated in this study continue to experience a layer of rejection due to their gender identities and expressions. Using queer theory and feminist standpoint theory, this study sought to learn about the perceptions of acceptance at this university from the standpoints of members of its trans communities. Co-cultural communication theory was also used, in order to explore the communication strategies utilized by trans students as they navigate the differing levels of self-perceived acceptance at this university. Through these theoretical lenses and thematic analysis, it was determined that the variety of communication strategies utilized by trans students was impacted by perceptions of acceptance or rejection and that this university must take action to create a more accepting campus climate for its trans students. A list of actions universities could take, provided by the participants of this study, has been included in the discussions chapter.

Keywords: trans, university, standpoint theory, queer theory, co-cultural

communication theory, acceptance

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Jenny Allison and Karon Allison, my grandparents who passed away shortly before this master's program came to an end. They provided financial support when needed and a place to live throughout the large majority of my academic career. They put up with me during my sometimes-stereotypical undergraduate years and continued to support me as I developed into a young scholar during my graduate studies. They were always excited about my accomplishments, even the small ones and made me feel capable of handling anything. There is no possible way to know where I would be without them. They are loved and will be missed.

This thesis is also dedicated to the participants who agreed to donate their time, experience, and confidence to this thesis. I am very thankful for you all.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to every person who reads it or skims through it with the goal of uplifting any and all communities or people who have been marginalized or abused by those in positions of power.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Inclusivity in Practice

I'm very open about being transgender inside the school, and he went and

told some students that that's a man and students looked at me and were

like, 'What, that's not a man. Look at her face and she has breasts. That's

not a man.' So, they were standing and looking at me like if I was a circus

freak, you know . . . as usual. (Nadal et al., 2012, p. 69)

This excerpt from an interview with a university student about an

experience on campus at her university represents one of many experiences

uniquely lived by trans students, namely, an openly intrusive, negative reaction to

their gender identities or expression. One participant of this current study, a

student at a mid-size Southern California university, provided an unfortunately

similar quotation when he said, "I'm just used to people, like, staring at me all the

time back when I was on campus, you know, or like, audibly talking loud about

like, what gender you are and it's everywhere" (Max, 2021). This study aimed to

better understand the lived experiences of trans students like Max and the

communication strategies they utilize while navigating various self-perceived

feelings of acceptance or rejection.

Generally, a university has the expectation of being open and accepting

(Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018), but this is not always the case for queer

communities. Further, if this is not the case, then the underlying factors preventing it from being so should be investigated. Trans students are members of the campus community but are not always accepted on college campuses. In an effort to understand the perceptions of acceptance from the standpoints of members of this university's trans communities, this qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with members of those communities.

As trans communities continue to face marginalization and inequality, it is important to hear from members of trans communities. Using results from a national telephone survey, Flores (2015) found that 67% of respondents perceived they had sufficient information about trans people, and that only 10% had a close friend or family member who was trans. If not from a friend or family member, the information considered is likely coming from the news and entertainment media's power to shape public perceptions of minority groups (el-Aswad, 2013; Gilens, 1996). This is problematic, as the media has, historically, constructed the collective trans identity as pathological, deceptive, and ridiculous (Cavalcante, 2017; Lovelock, 2017; Raun, 2016). It is far likelier for a non-trans person to control the news and entertainment media's depictions of trans communities (Capuzza, 2014). Therefore, it is far less likely for trans folks to speak for their own experiences and their own communities, which is why the personal accounts of members of these communities are important.

Singh et al. (2013), worked with trans students on a college campus to hear about the experiences of trans communities. Singh et al. found that

members of trans communities at their university reported unhappiness and feelings of exclusion. When students are included, accepted, and given the opportunity to grow as individuals, college years can be a period of development (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). A disruption of this development can have detrimental effects on the wellbeing of trans students. To avoid this disruption, it is important to learn from the standpoint of members of these communities how it is they view themselves within the campus environment. As college functions as a time of self-discovery, it is important to know if trans students feel accepted and supported enough to grow and develop.

In order to better understand the perspectives of trans community members at this university, I interviewed students who identified as transmale, gender nonconforming, and gender nonbinary. I utilized queer theory to analyze the underlying power relations and their consequences and feminist standpoint theory to view these power relations from the perspectives of members of the trans communities listed above. Co-cultural communication theory was used to further explore the communication strategies employed by members of trans communities as they navigate verbal and nonverbal communication with more dominant cultures around campus. Following the literature review, which situates my research within similar studies surrounding the lived experiences of trans students at universities, is an exploration of the methods used for this research. This methods section provides an explanation of the interview and data analysis processes that guided this research. Following the methodological overview is an

analysis of the data from the interviews created using the theoretical foundations listed above. A discussion of the data and an exploration of its implications is followed by this study's limitations, suggested future research, and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trans students often undergo life changes that many college students experience (e.g., making their own schedules, learning the university environment, and being treated as responsible, independent adults), but likely do so with the additional pressure of navigating these changes while violating expected, cultural gender norms (Nuru, 2014). These norms are often the result of a misconception regarding the link between gender and biological sex. First, this literature review will explicate the difference between sex and gender and provide an overview of how gender can conform to or transcend the expectations assigned to biological sex. To unpack the potential negative experiences and possible factors contributing to the negative experiences of transcending gender norms on campus, this review will also include a discussion of research regarding fitting in at a university. For members of trans communities, fitting in might mean a decision between denying their true gender identity or facing violent harassment (Kirkland, 2006). An overview of the three theories used to guide this research (i.e., feminist standpoint theory, queer theory, & co-cultural communication theory) follows the review of literature surrounding trans students at universities.

Biological Sex Versus Gender

Gender and biological sex are separate terms with distinctive definitions and potential material outcomes. Although incorrectly considered by some to be synonymous, sex refers to biological traits (e.g., genitalia and sex-chromosomes; Oldham et al., 2017) and gender refers to a complex, socially constructed phenomenon (Browne, 2009; Mann & Huffman, 2005; Sweeney, 2004). Butler, in 1990, problematized the understanding of gender, by observing the way trans individuals (re)produced gender through the expression of perceived gendered expectations. Butler concluded that gender was, therefore, not fixed to biological sex (Brownlie, 2006; Namaste, 2009). Gender is not fixed to biological sex, but to popular discourse within a culture, and can be (re)constructed to conform to an individual's gender identity (Stryker, 2008).

Gender is comprised of multiple elements including identity (i.e., a person's internal feeling or identification with their gender(s); Price & Skolnik, 2017), expression (i.e., how the gender identity is displayed or performed; Catalano, 2017), the consequent social expectations for members of any given gender category (Nuru, 2014), and the relation of gender identity to biological sex. Today, gender studies scholars contend that there are virtually unlimited gender identities because every individual could interpret their personal gender identity in a unique way (Price & Skolnik, 2017). However, social expectations, which are far-reaching and permeate nearly every aspect of an individual's life (e.g., clothing, mannerisms, hobbies, careers, relationships; Catalano, 2017), are

more limited. For instance, as the COVID-19 pandemic struck the United States in 2020, a disproportionate number of women were forced out of the workforce to take care of their children (Matuson, 2021). This number remained true even in households with a working mother and father. The social expectation was that women-identified parents would leave their job to raise the children. This is only one example of how social expectations for a gender identity impact a person's life.

Trans

A current, self-assigned gender identity that aligns with the expectations for their biological sex is known as cisgender (Tate, 2017). For example, a female-bodied individual who also identifies as female and typically conforms to the cultural expectations of a woman. As an ever-growing set of literature and documented lived experiences demonstrate, not every person identifies with the gender expected of their biological sex. Trans is the umbrella term for individuals whose body and resulting societal gender-expectations do not conform to their gender-identity. These individuals experience transgenderism, or transcending gender norms and roles in favor of those of a different gender (Coleman et al., 2012; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Nuru, 2014). For example, a biological male who identifies as bigender might shift between communicating the expectations of masculine and feminine gender expressions (Luke et al., 2017). He might wear heals and paint his nails the day before joining his hockey team in the championship game. These examples of communicated gender norms are

grossly stereotypical and are only used as they are sometimes helpful for assuming understanding.

Transgenderism can also be performed by individuals with nonbinary gender identities that are outside of the male/female gender binary (Budge & Orovecz, 2017; Chadwick & DeBlaere, 2017; Chang & Chung, 2015). Additionally, while more controversial (Middelton, 2014; TSER, 2017), transgenderism has also been extended to include individuals whose gender expression does not match the expectations for their gender identity, which does align with their biological sex (e.g., crossdressers; Lombardi, et al., 2002).

Although transgender can be used as a label for many identities that do not conform to cisgender expectations (Burdge, 2007; Coleman et al., 2012; Flores, 2015; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2017; Nuru, 2014), it is not the accepted label for every community member. For this reason, and to lessen the risk of excluding identities, trans has emerged as a more accepted umbrella term for those with gender variant identities (Dame, 2016; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; United Nations, 2016).

A third umbrella term, trans*, was created, purposefully, to be inclusive of every queer gender possibility, beyond transitioning and transsexuals (Budge & Sinnard, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2017). Taking the asterisk from computer coding, which denotes a continuation of the word, is meant to signify that trans* is a complex and expansive category (Conrad, 2019; Middleton, 2014; Steinmetz, 2018; Tompkins, 2014). However, due to the asterisk being used to signal

illegitimacy in records and footnotes in research, the use of the asterisk is not

universal within trans communities (Garvin, 2019; Serano, 2015; TSER, 2017).

Although created to be inclusive, not all forms of gender non-conformity are

always accepted under the trans* umbrella. There are debates about who can

and cannot use trans* (e.g., cis-identifying, queer-expressing folks; Middleton,

2014; Titman, 2013). This has led to additional hierarchies within trans

communities (Nicolazzo, 2017), including some members of trans communities

believing trans folks are more trans than those who identify with trans*. Table 1

below provides a comparison of how transgender, trans, and trans* are defined

in the Oxford English Dictionary. Table 1 also provides an explanation of a

possible social understanding implied by the use of each term.

Table 1. Transgender, Trans, or Trans* As Defined By The Oxford English
Dictionary (2020)

Term	Definition	Social Implication
Transgender	Designating a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond to that person's sex at birth, or which does not otherwise conform to conventional notions of sex and gender.	Transgender is a generally accepted umbrella term for trans communities. In earlier use, transgender was used as a synonym for transexual and transvestite. Using transgender may be interpreted by some as exclusionary, as it includes gender, rather than an opening for self-identification.

Trans	Originally: designating a transsexual or transvestite person. Now usually designating a transgender person.	In today's vernacular, trans is used as an umbrella term for all gender identities outside of cisgender. Trans is often used to avoid applying a more specific label to individuals (e.g., transmale).
Trans*	Originally used to include explicitly both transsexual and transgender, or (now usually) to indicate the inclusion of gender identities such as gender-fluid, agender, etc., alongside transsexual and transgender.	Trans* was created as an attempt to be inclusive of all gender identities outside of cis-identified and cis-expressing. Trans* can be used as an intentional disruption to force the reader to consider its meaning. Trans* can be considered offensive as some see the asterisk as a sign of illegitimacy.

In an effort to avoid the possibility of excluding any member of any trans community, and because the definitions for transgender, trans, and trans* include the same communities (Oxford University Press, 2003; Oxford University Press, 2013; Oxford University Press, 2018), the term trans will be used as the umbrella for queer identities throughout this paper. However, this research is meant to explore the experiences of individual members of the trans communities who should all have the power to control their identity labels (Burdge, 2007). As such,

when presenting the data, I will defer to any identity label desired by individual participants.

  <u>Cisnormativity and Transphobia.</u> Trans communities challenge traditional, binary, gender norms in ways that are contrary to expectations in Western societies (Norton & Herek, 2013; Nuru, 2014). This is not without negative consequences from those who have internalized these gender norms. This internalization could lead to conscious or unconscious policing of gender. Goldberg and Kuvalanka (2018) explain one such consequence, cisnormativity. Cisnormativity is the incorrect belief that biological sex determines which of only two, stable genders applies to an individual. Often coupled with cisnormativity is genderism, or "the rigid adherence to the gender binary" (p. 111). Cisnormativity and genderism manifest in a variety of ways (e.g., surveys only including the options male or female and intersex surgeries to alter ambiguous genitalia; Brownlie, 2006).

  Cisnormativity and genderism can also manifest as transphobia, defined by Hill and Willoughby (2005) as "an emotional disgust toward individuals who do not conform to society's gender expectations," (p. 532). Transphobia results in various forms of discrimination and harassment, including policing restroom options and pronoun usage, refusing access to gender-specific shelter, and staunchly arguing that transness itself is not real. Transphobia can also lead to workplace and housing discrimination (Kirkland, 2006), violent attacks (Lombardi et al., 2002), and societal or familial rejection (Burdge, 2007). Discriminatory laws

and policies are being fought in courts and trans rights movements are continuing to succeed in their activist work. However, trans communities continue to face cisnormativity and transphobia.

The College Bubble

College is considered a time to for students to discover who they are and to grow as people (Klugman, 2014; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Oftentimes, the college years mark the moment young adults move away from their hometowns or families for the first time (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). For students moving from rural areas to urban universities, this can also be a time to experience more exposure to diversity and queer communities (Klein et al., 2015). The major influences often shift from parental guidance to peer and community examples and support (Galupo et al., 2014). Perhaps it is because of this changing support system that college years become so important for challenging preexisting values and beliefs (Holland et al., 2013). There are data to suggest that engaging in friendships with fellow students is even important for the development of commuter students living with family who may not experience as strong a shift from parental influence (Booth, 2007; Pokorny et al., 2017). College students, residential and commuter, often have support and guidance through these potential life changes that they may not find outside of this college space. At the university, students may have the freedom to explore new labels with less fear of negative judgements (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). This is the idealized college

bubble, which Yu et al. (2018) described as a "socially and culturally constructed space" within a larger environment (p. 2). It is a place to grow and explore yourself with the understanding that you are temporarily shielded from outside judgements. However, this is not always the experience for every community on a college campus.

Within the college bubble is the campus climate, or "the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (Garvey et al., 2017, p. 796). Due to power structures on campus, the campus climate is likely the overall attitudes and behaviors among the more largely represented campus community members (i.e., heterosexual, cisgender students). The climate they create shapes the experiences of all others. Although, studies have found a connection between universities and a greater acceptance of diversity (Holland et al., 2013; Rockenbach et al., 2017), the larger body of research suggests an overall lower level of acceptance of LGBTQ students compared to their cishetero peers (Evans et al., 2017; Tetreault et al., 2013). This creates a chillier climate for students within those minority groups. This is problematic for such students, because there is a direct correlation between campus climate and identity exploration (Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Consequently, the warmer, more accepting the climate, the more likely queer students are to explore and live openly with their LGBTQ status(es).

Supportive resources exist on campus to help trans students feel connected and accepted at their university. These resources vary, but can include LGBTQ centers, and social networks and programs designed to support the LGBTQ communities (Evans et al., 2017). Despite their inclusive intent, students can still feel pressure to conform to the normative expectations present within these peer-groups (Pryor, 2015). The fear of rejection, harassment, and discrimination present inside and outside of campus resource centers and peer groups, Holland et al. (2013) found, is the main reason students decide against expressing their queer identities. Students who received negative feedback regarding their queer status(es) felt emotionally and socially distanced from their peers (Evans et al., 2017). Queer students do not want to risk isolation, because during this time peer relationships are vital to the developing self (Klugman, 2014; Tetreault et al., 2013; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Discrimination and normative expectations were found to exist for both sexual minorities and gender minorities.

Sexual minorities on Campus

On campus, discrimination felt by sexual minorities can be different from the discrimination faced by gender minorities. However, Norton and Herek (2013) found that attitudes, whether favorable or not, towards trans communities could be predicted by looking at the attitudes towards the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) communities. That is, a person holding negative or positive views about

sexual identity minorities is likely to hold those negative or positive views of trans communities, who also lie outside of the cisheteronormative structure.

LGB students encounter what is known as homophobia or "the fear, hatred, or intolerance of sharing space with individuals who are LGBTQ" (Evans et al., 2017, p. 428). This is fear or intolerance of sexual identities that do not conform to heteronormative standards (e.g., homosexuality, pansexuality, bisexuality, etc.). Homophobia is present at universities and takes the form of students, staff, faculty, and policy communicating harassment, negative judgments, or exclusion (Evans et al., 2017; Tetreault et al., 2013). This homophobia does play a role in how LGB students perceive reactions to their sexuality, with some students choosing to remain closeted, rather than face discrimination or harassment (Holland et al., 2013). This is an important finding for the current study, as negative perceptions of LGB communities have been linked to negative perceptions of trans communities. Therefore, if LGB students are experiencing homophobia on college campuses, trans student communities are likely also experiencing discrimination.

<u>Trans Communities on Campus</u>

Like many other students, trans students are seeking to understand a more authentic identity (Klugman, 2014). They may be undergoing a process of trying new gender expressions or labels (Rockenbach et al., 2017). Within trans communities, Goldberg and Kuvalanka (2018) found a tension between living an authentic gender and feeling at ease, and a pressure to hide gender identities in

order to conform to the peer pressure of genderism. Violating the expectations of the peer groups has been shown to place trans students at further risk of social and emotional isolation (Pryor, 2015), which can lead to harassment and discrimination, both, on and off campus (Chang & Chung, 2015; Holland et al., 2013; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2013; Tetreault et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

Microaggressions are one type of harassment experienced by trans communities. Microaggressions refer to "subtle forms of discrimination in which brief, daily, behavioral, verbal, or environmental injustices may occur" (Chang & Chung, 2015, p. 220). These discursive moments can be intentional (i.e., purposefully and knowingly enacted), or they can be unintentional as is often the case with friend-to-friend microaggressions. Research suggests that microaggressions across multiple trans-microaggression-categories were most likely to occur from cisgender, heterosexual friends (Galupo et al., 2014). However, they also occur across campus from other sources. These can be looks or stares (Pryor, 2015), stereotypical assumptions (e.g., trans women must be heterosexual; Chang & Chung, 2015), insulting language (e.g., "You look so pretty I could hardly tell you were born a boy" or "You can't cut your hair and become a man"; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017), and the use of incorrect gender pronouns (Nadal et al., 2012). This is, unfortunately, not an exhaustive list of microaggressions experienced by trans communities, and facing the policing of

gender norms, fighting against stereotypes, and dealing with insulting verbal and nonverbal communication is still problematic.

Clear categories describing how members of trans communities perceived the perceptions of others to their gender identity (i.e., emotional, cognitive, & behavioral) were identified by Nadal et al. (2014). They noted that trans students face discrimination and harassment, which leads to feelings of depression or anger, taking time from studies to rationalize the behaviors of others, or confronting negativity to understand why they are not being treated equally. During a period of life known for personal development, trans students do not always benefit from the protections of the college bubble. It is helpful to conduct studies using methodology that begins from the perspectives of trans students. This can help researchers understand more about the perceptions of trans communities and the work that needs to be done to build more equitable programs. To satisfy the need for methodology that begins from the perspectives of trans students, I have chosen to use standpoint theory, queer theory, and co-cultural communication theory.

<div align="center">Feminist Standpoint Theory</div>

Introduced in the 1970s and developed throughout the 1980s, feminist standpoint theory (standpoint theory or FST) entered the realm of academia as a feminist epistemology and methodology in the social and political sciences. It allowed scholars to challenge the modernist and positivist epistemologies that

often privileged the most dominant members of society (i.e., white, cisgender, heterosexual men; Caresse, 2011; Harding, 1997). The roots for standpoint theory can be traced to Marxist beliefs that the proletariat and bourgeoisie experienced the world in different ways (Anwaruddin, 2013; Hartsock 1997). The standpoint of the proletariat was theorized to be different from that of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, research conducted among the proletariat would yield different perspectives than that conducted among the ruling class. Feminist scholars noted a similar power structure between men and women (Anwaruddin, 2013), and sought to create "conceptual frameworks in which women as a group became the subjects or authors of knowledge" (Harding, 2004, p.29). These conceptual frameworks became feminist standpoint theory.

Feminist standpoint theory was devised as a direct response to Habermas's concept of a democratic public sphere (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016) and to the modernist framework which sought to discover objective, universal truths (Harding, 1997; King, 1999). In 1964, Habermas, while working within a modernist framework, proposed the idea of the public sphere. The public sphere assumes two things to be true. The first is that the public sphere would be comprised of collective public opinions regarding popular and political topics, with access to the systems for contributing to this public voice (e.g., surveys, governing bodies, media, etc.) being guaranteed to all citizens (Habermas et al., 1974). The public opinion is formed by those with the power to control and access to critique the ruling structure of the state. However, as many ethnic and

racial groups in the United States were still fighting for civil rights (History, 2019) and women (Deslippe, 1996) were fighting for gender equality, this guarantee was challenged by postmodern scholars. Importantly, feminist scholars argued that throughout history women did not have this access and, consequently, were excluded from the collective voices that would form a public sphere (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016).

The second assumption is that the public sphere will influence the governing bodies and, in-turn, ruling structures in ways that will benefit the public. It is necessary to understand the distribution of political power at a given time, in order to hypothesize the concept of a public sphere. In 1964, for example, the year Habermas introduced this concept, the distribution of political power was vastly unequal. Results from surveys conducted in 1962 and 1966 showed the vast majority of members of congress identified as Protestant Christian or Catholic (Geiger et al., 2019). In 1964, there were only fourteen women in the United States Senate and House of Representatives combined (History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives, Office of the Historian, 2007). In addition, there were only five African Americans out of 532 members of congress (Congressional Research Service, 2018). Nearly every position of power in the United States government in 1964, meaning nearly everyone with the power to shape governing bodies and ruling structures, was held by a White, Protestant or Catholic male. Therefore, any public opinion formed in 1964 was virtually absent the voices of women, people of color, and minority religious

groups. Rather, this was the public opinion of White, Protestant or Catholic men. Those were the members of society with the power to inform the public opinion. Although Habermas may not have believed his concept of a public sphere had been realized in 1964, the concept was, nonetheless, influential for the feminist creators of standpoint theory.

Modernism, the second inspiration for FST, seeks a universal truth of reality. As the dominant voices are the ones with the power to shape what is considered that truth (Ardill, 2013; Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Hartsock, 1997; Naidu, 2010), "dominant groups [can redesign] social relations to fit their vision of an ideal society" (Harding, 2004, p. 30). The only standpoint available to this dominant, ruling group, which informed the societal laws and social norms, resources and hegemonic structures influencing the lives of every member of the United States, was its own. It was believed that what was best for them was best for everyone. They could not see the world from the standpoint of the oppressed and just assumed the social and power structures they were creating were natural (Harding, 1997; Hartsock, 1997).

Contrasting the belief in a universal reality, is the postmodern ontological claim that "reality only appears absolute because of the privileging of the dominant discourse" (Dougherty & Krone, 2000, p. 18). Postmodernism rejects universal truths, and, instead, favors the diversity of multiple truths (King, 1999). In other words, universal truths are actually the privileged and universalized realities of dominant groups (Hartsock, 1997; Naidu, 2010). As Ardill (2013) put

it, "postmodernism rendered all views partial and political, and as a consequence led to the demise of grand narratives" (327). This postmodern claim fractures the public sphere, by recognizing the subjective truths, privileged or marginalized, as equally valid. Rather than ranking standpoints, theories, or strategies, postmodern scholars believe they are all valid for creating truth within their contexts.

Feminism's critical aim was initially used to study different viewpoints of women in cultural settings (Allen et al., 2006; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005) in an attempt to understand the various ways oppression of women was created and justified in our society (Harding, 2004). As such, FST was a natural fit within postmodernism. The ability of dominant groups to enforce their reality as natural, leads to a social hierarchy of the oppressed under those enforcing the supposed natural reality (Caresse, 2011). FST work provides insight into how the perspectives of oppressed groups, particularly women, differ from those in different positions of power (Anwaruddin, 2013). Sample research questions from FST work include the following:

How did it occur that a double day of work, one unpaid, was regarded as normal and desirable for women but not for men? How come women who were going through such expectable biological life-events as menstruation, birthing, or menopause were treated by the medical profession as if they were ill? What social processes made reasonable the

belief that women made no contributions to human evolution? (Harding,

2004, p. 29)

Those who are not oppressed by these dominating structures might come

to view the double workday, the designation of bodily functions as illnesses, or

the elimination of women from the collective histories as natural or

unproblematic. Additionally, before women's realities were effectively added to

workplace discourses, what is considered sexual harassment today was nothing

less than everyday practice (Dougherty & Krone, 2000). Only when female

bodies gained more visibility in the workplace and formally communicated

incidents and patterns of inappropriate treatment was the term sexual

harassment created (Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Hines, 2017). The perspective of

women prevailed, only once it was validated by those in power (i.e., white,

cisgender, heterosexual males). Thus, FST necessitates a critical look beneath

the surface created by dominant voices, to explore alternative perspectives and

validate them as equally worthy of examination as those of more dominant

groups.

<u>Tenets of Standpoint Theory</u>

Standpoint theory is useful as an epistemological and methodological tool,

because it requires the researcher to start their work from as near the

perspective of the oppressed group as possible. Research with FST has taken

place through interviews and focus groups, as well as ethnographic studies

within organizations. Practitioners of FST must also understand that society is

structured with power hierarchies (Caresse, 2011). Standpoint theory also requires the researcher identify practical ways in which the research can be used to help marginalized groups (Hartsock, 1997). There are three tenets of standpoint theory: knowledge is situated, marginalization can result in an epistemological advantage, and research of this type must include some form of activism.

     Situated Knowledge. Standpoint scholars recognize that knowledge is located within individuals or groups within individual contexts (Allen et al., 2006; Anwaruddin, 2013; de Vries, 2015; Hallstein, 1999; Hekman, 1997). Harding (1997) explained situated knowledge using a stick in the pond metaphor:

> Is that stick in the pond that appears to be bent really bent? Walk around
>
> to a different location and see that now it appears straight … In an
>
> analogous way, standpoint theorists use the 'naturally occurring' relations
>
> of class, gender, race, or imperialism in the world around us to observe
>
> how different 'locations' in such relations tend to generate distinctive
>
> accounts of nature and social relations… Observing these differing
>
> relations is like walking around the pond. (p. 384)

By looking around the pond to view the stick from different locations, the researcher is able to observe a given situation from different perspectives of possibly shared experiences. All of the perspectives, or standpoints, are correct, only situated in a different location (Harding, 1997). Smith (1997) added that seeing the shape of the pond, by studying different perspectives, allows one to

grow their understanding of a given situation. This, in turn, allows the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive perspective and to illuminate power structures that work to create different standpoints (Ardill, 2013).

It is important to understand that standpoints are not merely opinions held by individuals. Rather, they are the outcome of existing at particular sites within social, power structures (Anwaruddin, 2013; Hallstein, 1999). For example, in a largely patriarchal culture, women tend to occupy positions considered subordinate to men (Hallstein, 1999, p. 35). This situates their standpoint differently from men's, shaping their knowledge and influencing experiences, opportunities, and understandings (Intemann, 2010). Because of this, women as a group become a different epistemological site for knowledge creation. Indeed, this is true for groups at every level of power.

Epistemological Advantage. The tenet *epistemological advantage* is the claim that certain oppressed groups have an advantage over dominant groups, by virtue of their place within the power hierarchy (Ardill, 2013; Caresse, 2011; Hartsock, 1983; Intemann, 2010). Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge or knowing, and with what can be considered "acceptable evidence" (Anderson & Baym, 2004, p. 603). The dominant voices, often present through mainstream media, have the power to offer their privileged versions of knowledge. For example, media coverage of a peaceful, indigenous peoples protest portrayed as a dangerous threat to a world leader (Ardill, 2013); media reports claiming the majority of welfare recipients are African American

(Gilens, 1996); Arabs depicted in media as terrorists (el-Aswad, 2013). Whether or not these are universal truths, they are depicted in the media as such, further legitimizing these standpoints.

However, as standpoint theory posits, marginalized groups have an epistemological advantage in some cases, because they are forced to understand the ways in which oppression and power structures work within their lives (Anwaruddin, 2013; Harding, 2009). Those in power, even those with good intentions, may never experience the oppression within their society, and, therefore, do not have the knowledge this version of reality provides (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011), nor can they easily see the standpoint of those with less power (Anwaruddin, 2013; Ardill, 2013; Caresse, 2011; Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Harding, 1997; Hartsock, 1997; Hekman, 1997; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011; Paradies, 2018). People in oppressed groups, who better understand their relations to power, serve as "situated knowers" (de Vries, 2015, p. 4), and can offer their partial view of truth to create a more expansive cultural understanding of reality (Hekman, 1997).

In order to navigate through oppressive environments, marginalized groups learn to see the world from both their own standpoint and that of those in power (King, 1999; Paradies, 2018). Those in power, however, only need to understand their own standpoint (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). If asked to describe the role oppression plays in their society, those who are oppressed and those

who are not will draw from different epistemological standpoints, and likely produce different knowledge from their different realities.

Activism. Standpoint theory is not value-free, nor is it intended as a neutral tool for objectively studying communities (Ardill, 2013). Standpoint theory is value-laden and intended to create positive social change (Dougherty & Krone, 2000). Standpoint theory requires the researcher to study sites of oppression, with the goal to use this work to "expose and undermine" divisive social relations (Sprague, 2001, p. 535) and "oppression" (Ardill, 2013, p. 332). Standpoint theory instructs the researcher to "study-up," by starting from the daily lives of the oppressed and learning which systems and institutions of power are bringing about oppression or hardships. Standpoint theory is a tool, as well as an epistemology, to understand what about institutions needs to change (Harding, 2009).

In their ethnographic study, Dougherty and Krone (2000) interviewed women working for a tech company. They found themes of isolation and varying levels of visibility. Rather than stopping once a standpoint was discovered, these researchers worked with the female participants to create change. These women helped others to better understand their own standpoint and collaborated on future projects to mediate their feelings of isolation. Standpoint theory helped Dougherty and Krone (2000) gain insight into marginalized groups, by mapping out practices of power and oppression (Harding, 2004, p. 32) and finding

solutions to this oppression. In this way, standpoint theory is not intended to be value-free, but, rather, a tool for not only uncovering but also fighting oppression.

Critique of Standpoint Theory

The main argument made against the use of standpoint theory is that it essentializes members of the named category (Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Hekman, 1997). Therefore, it is argued, standpoint theory does not truly fit the situated truth argument of postmodernism which contends truth is created in individual discourse and different for different communities, even among larger categories, such as gender or race (Ardill, 2013; Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Hallstein, 1999). Arguing for the validity of standpoint theory, Hartsock (1997) contended, "the focus is on the macroprocesses of power, those that, although they may be played out in individual lives, can be fully understood only at the level of society as a whole" (p. 371). In other words, although there is value in the individual experience, there is also value in the examination of a group's standpoint to uncover collective realities of power structures.

Additionally, standpoint theory can be aligned with postmodernism because standpoint theory demands an understanding that reality is situational and fractured (Anwaruddin, 2013; Hartsock, 1997; Hekman, 1997). Intersectionality of oppression within groups is part of standpoint theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011; Paradies, 2018) and serves to make the understanding of standpoints more sophisticated (Collins, 1997). Collins (1986) contended that, while differences among members of the larger categories will result in the

overall themes of oppression being felt differently, there are still overlapping themes of oppression that will be felt by the members of that category.

Further, scholars have argued that for the purpose of standpoint theory, groups are not created by scholars or bureaucrats (Collins, 1997) but exist, rather, based upon their position within the power structure (Anwaruddin, 2013; Ardill, 2013; Caresse, 2011; Hallstein, 1999). These are groups formed from a shared level of oppression, meaning shared experiences have already been established. This study argues that standpoints must be collective in order to effectively work as a method of political change (Dougherty & Krone, 2000). There is power in numbers and highlighting change that must be made at the group level, as standpoint instructs researchers to do, will make for a more powerful argument for change.

Queer Theory

Although the term "queer theory" is credited to Teresa de Lauretis, who used it in jest as the title for a 1990 academic conference (Halperin, 2003), the foundations of what would become queer theory began decades earlier. The deconstructionist work of Jean-Paul Sartre, John Gagnon, William Simon, and Sandra Bem, which challenged the fixed nature of social categories and the work of Simon de Beauvoir, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks that called attention to the varied oppression resulting from identity categories can be read as precursors to queer theory (Barker & Scheele, 2016). Additionally, Eve Sedgwick's work to de-

naturalize heterosexuality and Judith Butler's work to de-naturalize gender

identity are both retroactively considered foundational to shaping what would

become of de Lauretis's queer theory (Callis, 2009; Halperin, 2003; Miller, 2018).

Queer theory began to unify as an offshoot of LBGT studies in the early

1990s (Carlson, 2014; Yep et al., 2003). Although LGBT studies and queer

theory are both useful for providing tools and methodology for studying the

experiences of sexual and gender minorities (Carlson, 2014), early queer

theorists believed the identity politics of LGBT theorists were exclusionary and

too focused on assimilationist goals (Slagle, 2006). Queer theorists are not

seeking to fit in with dominant society by proving similarities; they are seeking to

challenge the power structures that create systems of oppression for certain

groups of identities and to create systems in which this oppression is nonexistent

(Henderson, 2003; Slagle, 2003). Theorists argue the categories of sexuality and

gender are unstable, so any system relying on these categories as fixed is

unstable. Therefore, simply fitting into a category is not the solution for queer

theorists.

The work of queer theory begins with observing the power structures

created by and sustaining norms of sexuality and gender (Henderson, 2001).

Queer theory goes beyond identifying norms or categories considered to be

queer or marginal and seeks to uncover why these are considered queer (Dilley,

1999). Queer theory practitioners examine who has the power to declare what is

normal and the power structures in which this discourse is able to take place.

Similar to the epistemological advantage of feminist standpoint theory, queer theory studies power structures starting from the margins of gender and sexual identities, arguing that these standpoints are equally as valid as any other (Henderson, 2001).

Many queer theorists agree that a single definition for queer theory is not possible (Alexander, 2003; Butler, 2013; Callis, 2009; Thomas, 2017; Yep et al., 2003). Queer theory is too complex. Part of this complexity stems from the inability to truly define the root word *queer*, the root of queer theory. Attempts to define queer are varied and include queer as an umbrella term for all members of the LGBTQ communities (Carr et al., 2017), as a derogatory term for non-heteronormative individuals (Callis, 2009), as a term for protesting fixed or stable identities (Henderson, 2001; Schotten, 2019), or as whatever is in opposition to what is considered normal (Dilley, 1999). Queer has also been used as a verb, meaning to question perceived or understood norms and categories (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009; Lovaas, 2003). Dilley (1999) contended that queer is defined on a personal level. Halperin (2003) argued that attempts to even define queer "limit its potential, its magical power to usher in a new age of sexual radicalism and fluid gender possibilities" (p. 339). So as not to limit its potential, this research will temporarily define queer in as broad a way as is reasonable: any identity not self-defined as heterosexual, cisgender, or heteronormative or as a verb meaning to challenge understood norms. For the purpose of this current study, I will briefly explicate the three tenets of queer theory and the five general

categories of work queer theory typically assumes rather than attempt an exhaustive definition of queer theory.

Three Tenets of Queer Theory

The work of queer theory in each of its five general categories is connected through three main tenets: it is non-essentializing; it looks beyond identity categories and any identifier considered to be normal; it makes the invisible visible. While they can be found in many forms, in some way, queer theory tends to adhere to all of these tenets.

Non-Essentializing. One of the early influences of queer theory was the recognition that essentialist categories were problematic (Abes, 2007; Slagle, 2003). An essentialist category is one that assumes similarities between members, simply by the essence of their membership (Barker & Scheele, 2016). For example, there is an essentialist category of womanhood enforced during the second wave of United States feminism that required living every part of your life with the experience and oppression of having a biologically female body (Gottschalk, 2009; Hines, 2017; Mayeda, 2005; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Sweeney, 2004). It was assumed that all women experienced the reality of womanhood in the same way, because they lived with a biologically female body. Queer theorists found fault with this membership requirement, questioning who had the power to define woman, and worked to move away from this essentialist category (Carr et al., 2017).

Relatively few categories (e.g., gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation), compared to the near infinite possible categories, have been deemed essential to dividing all of humanity, despite the diversity and lived differences among humans. Sedgwick (2005) posited that even people who share all or most of those relatively few identity categories can still be entirely unalike. Consider the diversity of the people of the United States of America. Per the United States 2020 census, the relevant categories for understanding every American are their sex, age, link to Latino origin, and race (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2020). Essentialists may believe that knowing the number of members for each of those categories will be enough to ensure equity for Americans. If they are in those categories, their needs should be the same as other members of those categories. Contrary to that belief, queer is an existential theory that strips the essentialism from assumptions of identity and replaces these assumptions with descriptions of how we are existing in the moment (Barker & Scheele, 2016). In other words, queer recognizes that identities are unstable and, instead, focuses on current attributes to form a temporary identity.

Looking Beyond Identity Categories and a "Normal". Queer theory calls for destabilization of identity categories and a denaturalization of what is considered to be normal (Alexander, 2003; Chávez, 2013). Identity categories, rather than setting expectations, become the results of unique performances (Butler, 2003; Halperin, 2003). People perform, repeatedly, personal understandings of identity category requirements, formed from a conscious or unconscious distillation of

societal, cultural, and familial expectations. Identity expressions are at all times in flux, and, through queer theory, it is possible to observe the variety in which humans can express their identities, beyond the need for rigid identity labels (Neto, 2018). If neither fixed nor stable, the identity categories become an untrustworthy source for generalization.

Further, when all identities are deemed unstable and there is no objective archetype to follow, then the concept of normal is exposed as unstable. Rather, certain aspects of identity, personally and culturally, become favored and others subordinated in order to adhere to the illusion of a normal (Gamson, 2003; Lovaas et al., 2002). In order to be considered normal, one would have to deny any part of themself that does not conform to the limits of that identity. For example, a genderqueer student may feel compelled to conform to a consistent masculine or feminine gender expression, in order to fit in with what their campus employer considers to be normal. This would require restricting mannerisms, clothing choices, discussions of certain interests, etc., so as to better conform to the imposed interpretation of normal. Queer theory work begins with the premises that identity categories are unstable and that normal is a created, illusory concept.

Making the Invisible Visible. What is learned from research depends upon what the research makes visible (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). The standpoint and theoretical positioning of the researcher impacts what will be made most salient through their work (e.g., the evidence labeled most important

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and the conclusions drawn). Queer theory shapes existing and new research, by disrupting the visible/invisible structure. Queer theory recognizes the power in the unspoken, in the areas beyond the specific focus of the researcher and works to make the still invisible elements visible (Lovaas, 2003; Slagle, 2003). In doing so, queer work looks beyond the elements of reality highlighted by the researcher to discover why certain aspects were privileged with visibility and what happens as a result of keeping other aspects invisible.

For example, Raun (2016) conducted a study into trans digital communities created through the video sharing platform YouTube. Raun highlighted many stereotypes regarding trans communities perpetuated by the U.S. media before explicating the themes of his research. However, as Maulding (2020) argued, Raun's analysis placed too great an importance on body modification in female-to-male (FTM) trans persons, calling it a "rite of passage" (Raun, 2016, p. 149). Thus, perpetuating the unnamed stereotype that "to be trans, individuals must desire or undergo medical alteration of their bodies" (Maulding, 2020, p. 117). Allowing this stereotype to remain invisible, particularly when a list of stereotypes was provided, implicitly validates those readers who believe it to be true. When queered, one is allowed a more nuanced look at the role of body modification within trans communities and at an implied hierarchy within the FTM community that situates those who have undergone the surgery in a higher position of power.

Five General Categories of Queer Theory Work

      After reading from a selection of foundational and contemporary queer theory work, I was able to identify and justify the following five general categories of queer theory work: analysis, academic literature, activism, personal development, and a directive to queer. Queer theory began as an intersection between theoretical and activist work (e.g., AIDS activism work). As queer theory has expanded, an intersection of two or more categories, particularly a blend that includes activist work, is not uncommon (Henderson, 2001; Thomas, 2017). However, it is still possible to justify five distinct categories of queer theory work.

      <u>Analysis.</u> Queer theory can be used as a lens for analysis. Drummond (2003) conducted a textual analysis of Mathew Bourne's Swan Lake, in which the swan (i.e., the love interest of the prince) was male. Drummond's analysis used queer theory to explore themes of self-acceptance, sexuality, power, and masculinities, rather than conclude this was the "gay Swan Lake" (236). Queer theory can be used to analyze connections between discourse and material reality. For example, Henderson (2003) acknowledged that the rhetoric of sexuality influences sexual education laws. Queer theory analysis also explores the invisible. A 2005 study found that bisexuality in men was not proven to exist, despite bisexual tendencies in nearly all participants, because the arousal was greater from their stated preferred sex (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). The study could have concluded that bisexuality was proven to exist in nearly all participants, but, instead, reinforced the homo-hetero sexual binary.

Activism. Queer theory is political, shaped by a partnership with activism intended to end gender and sexuality discrimination (e.g., The ACT UP and Queer Nation protests of the United States' official reaction to the AIDS crisis; Carr et al., 2017; Henderson, 2001). With activist queer theory, it is not enough to study discrimination; with that knowledge comes the responsibility to act. Queer activism is designed to stand out (Callis, 2009) and has been known to mock gender and sexuality norms (Carr et al., 2017). For example, in 1981, being "extremely bored with the conformist atmosphere," Ken Bunch (Sister Vicious PHB), Fred Brungard (Sister Missionary Position) and Baruch Golden walked through San Francisco, dressed as Catholic nuns, to found The Sisterhood of Perpetual Indulgence (The Sisters, 2020). Today, The Sisters play a vital role in raising awareness and funds for AIDS research and LGBTQ support. In the same year, LGBTQ youth in Boston, Massachusetts rebelled against oppression by forming a more accepting version of the coming-of-age tradition, high-school prom (Davies, 2008). This work continues, as students fight against discriminatory school-district policies (Glaad, 2013; GLSEN, 2020).

Academic Literature. Although the earliest texts studied in queer communication literature were those created by activists (Henderson, 2001), literature and theories from within the academic realm have since been deemed necessary to complement activist work (Alexander, 2003). De Lauretis hoped to use the newly created term, queer theory, to open up academia (Halperin, 2003), not by wedging queer ideology into the research methods that had erased or

pathologized queer realities (Lovaas, 2003), but to inspire different types of research and analysis. Queer theory has expanded beyond gender and sexuality studies and is now helping to shape a wide variety of disciplines, including political science (Smith, 2003; Thomas, 2017), religious studies (Wilcox, 2006), education (Halberstam, 2003; Neto, 2018; Pinar, 2003), biology (Barker & Scheele, 2016) and communication studies (Gamson, 2003; Lovaas, 2003; Yep, 2003).

    Personal Development. Queer theory is also used for personal development, to help the practitioner understand themself beyond the imperative to be normal. Britzman (1997) details the power of queer theory for personal development:

> When it comes to questions of desire, of love, and of affectivity, identity is quite capable of surprising itself: of creating forms of sociality, politics, and identifications that untie the self from dominant discourses of biology, nature, and normality. This capacity and the labor of untying the self from normality in order to be something more than what the order of things predicts is an idea central to … queer theory. (p. 185)

As the concept of normal is unstable and socially constructed, it is not always possible to conform fully to the expectations of normalcy. As discussed above, certain aspects of ourselves are ignored or minimized, in order to believe we are normal (Gamson, 2003; Lovaas et al., 2002). Queer theory allows us to

understand our identities without the prerequisite hierarchy and, in this way, to grow, untethered from comparison to the culturally created normal.

      <u>Directive to Queer Theory.</u> In addition to opening up academia to new forms of inquiry, de Lauretis, when organizing the queer theory conference, called for researchers to queer theory (Halperin, 2003). Although the initial aim was "to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure" (p. 340), queer theory as a directive to queer has become significantly more expansive. In academic research, for example, it is now known that theories developed prior to the acceptance of queer participants are incomplete (Henderson, 2001). When queering societal norms, Elia (2003) details how schools promote heteronorms through abstinence only education. This assumes all students desire sexual activity that can result in pregnancy and that all students desire to be married. Queer as a directive calls us to question knowledge by looking at how it was constructed and, indeed, how the researcher was constructed (Dilley, 1999). Queer, as an active lens, calls us to deconstruct all knowledge, norms, and structures. Elia et al. (2003) extended this argument, stating "virtually anything can be queered" (p. 336).

<u>Critique of Queer Theory</u>

      Critics of queer theory have decried its suspension of identity categories. Alexander (2003) discussed his concerns with how identity categories are assumed unstable in queer theory, particularly because minority groups are having to re-establish their visibility to fight for their needs under the queer

umbrella. Queer theory's erasure of identity categories has been viewed as problematic for those needing such categories for survival (Johnson, 2001; Smith, 2003). Without a specific intersectional focus, the focus, even of queer work, is prone to being shaped by the needs of the most dominant voices (Chávez, 2013). Some scholars have attempted to focus queer theory in an effort to be more mindful of this critique. These include quare theory, which focuses on the perspectives of people of color (Johnson, 2001) and kuaer theory, which focuses on transnational, radical women within the queer communities (Lee, 2003). However, this remains a significant critique of queer theory.

There are a few rebuttals to this critique. A strong focus on identity categories and the resulting identity politics, not only creates the possibility for exclusions and othering (Callis, 2009), but can also lead to the very assimilationist practices that have left so many queer communities behind in the fight for equality (Barker & Scheele, 2016; Slagle, 2006). Further, queer theory, even before its formalized identity has been intersectional. Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech *Ain't I a woman?* queered the notion of stable identity categories, by highlighting the unequal treatment of women of color (Carr et al., 2017). Butler (2013) explains that queer has the power to yield to more appropriate terms (e.g., quare and kuaer), demonstrating its usability even for intersectional needs. Ultimately, queer theory allows a choice in identity categories, by drawing back the curtain and allowing a view of their less filtered reality. Queer theory provides the understanding needed to accept memberships within identity categories or to

deny them, a choice that is otherwise not available. The identity category may impact the communication between members of other identity categories. Co-cultural communication theory helps to explain the potential communication strategies.

Co-Cultural Communication Theory

Co-cultural communication theory (CCT) was introduced by Mark Orbe (1996) as an extension of intercultural communication. CCT was developed after Orbe synthesized the findings of several studies surrounding the experiences of a variety of members of nondominant groups (viz., economic class, race, gender, sexuality, location, age; Cohen & Avanzino, 2010; Orbe 1996). Beyond the communities from Orbe's early studies, CCT has been used to explore the discursive strategies of people who are physically disabled (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010), African American women pilots (Zirulnik & Orbe, 2019), marginalized groups within larger marginalized groups (Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008), communication about date rape on college campuses (Burnett et al., 2009), Koreans residing in Japan (Matsunaga, 2008), international students on US campuses (Urban & Orbe, 2007), Black male students on campus (Glenn & Johnson, 2012), and responses to heterosexist discrimination (Camara et al., 2012). Orbe found that, although the specific discourses may be different, the general communicative strategies used were consistent between and among co-

cultural groups. This has remained true in the years since its inception, despite the wide variety of studied communities.

Co-cultural communication theory was influenced by muted group theory's call to focus more attention to non-dominant and overlooked communities who do not typically form the dominant communication system within society (Matsunaga, 2008; Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999) and feminist standpoint theory's epistemological advantage (Orbe, 1998a). As such, CCT posits that dominant cultures gain and maintain power by developing communication norms that nondominant group members must understand and navigate through a variety of communication strategies (Burnett et al., 2009; Fox & Warber, 2015; Herakova, 2012). CCT recognizes the differences in personal experiences of co-cultural members, but also that co-cultural communities are situated in similar positions within social hierarchies and must utilize similar communication strategies to successfully communicate with members of more dominant cultures (Orbe, 1998b). For example, the Latin American college students who participated in Sanford et al.'s (2019) study chose to censor themselves by not correcting racist comments spoken by their white peers, for fear of being perceived as "the angry minority" (p. 169). Similarly, the Black female pilots who participated in Zirulnik and Orbe's (2011) study chose to censor themselves when faced with sexist comments from male passengers, in order to be perceived as competent and professional. Although Latin Americans and Black female pilots are members of different co-cultural communities, they both face oppression from more dominant

groups and must navigate this oppression through similar communication

strategies. Ramírez-Sánchez (2008) notes that these strategies are not

prescribed in advance, but instead "obey cultural factors that are both internal

and external to co-cultural group members" (p. 91). CCT is useful for

understanding the various elements that go into the specific discourses used by

members of co-cultural groups while communicating with members of the

dominant cultures. These elements include the preferred communication

approach and outcome and personal factors, as well as the resulting

communication orientations that influence communication strategy selection.

Communication Approach and Preferred Outcome

The two main factors that influence the selection of communication

strategies are communication approach and preferred outcome (Orbe, 1996).

There are multiple considerations made consciously or subconsciously (viz.,

context, field of experience, abilities, perceived costs and rewards) when

determining the most appropriate communication approach and outcome.

Communication Approach. The three strategic communication approaches

identified by Orbe (1996) are nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive.

Nonassertive behavior includes considering the needs of others above the needs

of the self (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010). A nonassertive approach may include

censoring the self so as not to cause discomfort to those around you or

apologizing so as not to cause a scene. For example, when confronted with

discrimination from a cismale co-worker, a transfemale may choose not to

address the discrimination rather than risk an uncomfortable reaction from her co-worker. An assertive approach can be described as a balance between nonassertive and aggressive (Orbe, 1996) and involves respectful communicative expression that represents the needs of the self and others. An example of an assertive approach can be requesting workplace accommodations for lactating mothers. An aggressive approach is more dominant, can be hurtful to others, and assumes control over the choices of others (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010). Orbe (1998a) found that often "a more aggressive approach is used by co-cultural group members when previous (nonassertive or assertive) attempts were unsuccessful" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 247). For example, an aggressive approach can be threatening to sue a company that does not provide workplace accommodations for lactating mothers.

Orbe (1998a) described the different communicative approaches as "overlapping and sometimes difficult to distinguish" (p. 246). This is, in part, because the approaches are judged both internally and externally. Assertive behavior can be perceived by some as aggressive, even if that is not the intent. (Orbe, 1998a). For example, a woman working in small groups, who is having trouble being taken seriously might choose to be more assertive. This can be interpreted by her groupmates as aggressively demanding her way (Orbe, 1998a). The co-cultural member may consider this duality when deciding which strategy to utilize. This could result in less assertive communication and more strategies to gain the trust of dominant group members.

Preferred Outcome. The three preferred outcomes, or desired result, of co-cultural communication strategies are assimilation, accommodation, or separation (Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). The preferred outcome can change in different contexts and is the result of asking what you are hoping to accomplish through your communication (Orbe, 1998b). Assimilation is the desired outcome of fitting in with the dominant culture. The result of assimilation does sometimes include giving up characteristics of the non-dominant cultures (Orbe, 1998b). Assimilationist communicators are conforming to the structures already in place. For example, a gender nonbinary person might choose to only express as male while at the grocery store to avoid uncomfortable or dangerous encounters with those who do not accept a nonbinary gender expression. Accommodation is being accepted into a dominant culture without giving up your non-dominant identity. This involves encouraging the dominant cultures to adapt, so that your communication behaviors and norms can be included and accepted (Meyer, 2019). This would include a gender nonbinary person expressing as male or female or both to challenge stereotypes regarding gender nonbinary people. Finally, separation involves only interacting with members of your co-cultural groups or close allies unless you have no other option (Orbe, 1996). With this outcome, the gender nonbinary person would seek out the company of other gender diverse people, rather than attempt to change the dominant communication culture.

Other Considerations. There are multiple factors that go into determining the appropriate approach and outcome for a communication event. These factors are context, field of experience, abilities, and perceived costs and rewards. The situational context is central to co-cultural communication and includes the setting as well as the existence of others in the setting (Orbe, 1998b). A lack of co-cultural support while communicating as the only co-cultural member can have an impact on communication strategy (Orbe, 1998b). The specific members involved in the communication can also affect the strategy you choose (Orbe, 1998a). For example, when interacting with co-workers, male nurses hoped for assimilation and accommodation. However, when interacting with outsiders, the male nurses seemed to only desire assimilation (Herakova, 2012). In another example, a female subordinate chose to only employ nonassertive assimilation when faced with discriminatory practices from her supervisor, for fear of retaliation (Camara & Orbe, 2010).

The second consideration is the field of experience of the co-cultural communicator. The field of experience includes all of the lived experiences that offer clues as to what is appropriate for a given situation (Orbe, 1998b). The field of experience is impactful and is also influenced by context, as certain experiences become more salient (Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). For example, Glenn and Johnson (2012) found that many of their participants chose separation strategies because of previous interactions with dominant cultural group members. One of their participants described choosing to interact solely with

Black students after the White students at a campus party repeatedly referred to him as Lil' Wayne or Waka Flocka.

The next consideration is the specific abilities of the co-cultural communicators (Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). Orbe (1998b) noted that not everyone has the abilities to enact some strategies. Some people might not be confrontational enough for aggressive tactics or have the opportunity to find liaisons for more accommodating strategies. (Orbe, 1998b). One respondent said their style was naturally quiet, nonassertive, because they are not comfortable with yelling (Orbe, 1998a). Some communicators might not have the ability to assimilate as well as others. For example, Black males are not able to turn off their blackness to assimilate fully into an all-white organization. They have to rely on other strategies, including speaking with a softer tone (Orbe, 1996) or avoiding stereotypes (Glenn & Johnson, 2012), so as not to be perceived as a threat.

The final consideration is the perceived costs and rewards (Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). These are subjective and can be positive or negative. They can include losing or gaining respect or weighing the cost of energy against the social rewards of speaking out against an injustice (Orbe, 1998b). Urban and Orbe (2007) found that international students on United States college campuses often feel pressured to give up their cultural identities in order to benefit more fully from studying at a United States university. These students often chose assimilation techniques in order to gain social status. Some participants chose separation

techniques when they believed maintaining cultural connections would be more beneficial.

Communication Orientations and Strategies

Communication orientation refers to a "specific stance that [co-cultural members] assume during their interactions in dominant organizational structures" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 269). According to CCT, there are nine possible communication orientations. Each orientation is the result of combining one communication approach with one preferred outcome (Orbe, 1998b). The nine communication orientations are nonassertive assimilation, assertive assimilation, aggressive assimilation, nonassertive accommodation, assertive accommodation, aggressive accommodation, nonassertive separation, assertive separation, and aggressive separation. Table 2 illustrates how the preferred outcomes and communication approaches pair together to create the nine communication orientations.

Table 2. Communication Orientations

	Assimilation	Accommodation	Separation
Nonassertive Approach	Nonassertive Assimilation	Nonassertive	Nonassertive Separation
Assertive Approach	Assertive Assimilation	Assertive Accommodation	Assertive Separation
Aggressive Approach	Aggressive Assimilation	Aggressive Accommodation	Aggressive Separation

There are many communication strategies that can be sorted into one of these communication orientations. Meyer's (2019) findings suggest that the communication strategies are not mutually exclusive, as more than one tactic may be deemed equally appropriate for a given communication event. Table 3 below from Orbe & Roberts (2012) provides examples and definitions of communication strategies sorted by communication orientation (p. 295). This is not an exhaustive list, as specific strategies can be added or changed to match the data (Orbe & Roberts, 2012), but it does provide a useful guide to commonly employed strategies.

Table 3. Co-Cultural Practices and Orientations Summary

Examples of practices	Brief description
Nonassertive assimilation	
Emphasizing commonalities	Focusing on human similarities while downplaying or ignoring co-cultural differences
Developing positive face	Assuming a gracious communicator stance where one is more considerate, polite, and attentive to dominant group members
Censoring self	Remaining silent when comments from dominant group members are inappropriate, indirectly insulting, or highly offensive
Averting controversy	Averting communication away from controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas
Assertive assimilation	
Extensive preparation	Engaging in an extensive amount of detailed (mental= concrete) groundwork prior to interactions with dominant group members
Overcompensating	Conscious attempts—consistently enacted in response to a pervasive fear of discrimination—to become a "superstar"
Manipulating stereotypes	Conforming to commonly accepted beliefs about group members as a strategic means to exploit them for personal gain
Bargaining	Striking a covert or overt arrangement with dominant group members where both parties agree to ignore co-cultural differences

Aggressive assimilation
  Dissociating — Making a concerted effort to elude any connection with behaviors typically associated with one's co-cultural group

  Mirroring — Adopting dominant group codes in attempt to make one's co-cultural identity more (or totally) invisible

  Strategic distancing — Avoiding any association with other co-cultural group members in attempts to be perceived as a distinct individual

  Ridiculing self — Invoking or participating in discourse, either passively or actively, that is demeaning to co-cultural group members

Nonassertive accommodation
  Increasing visibility — Covertly, yet strategically, maintaining a co-cultural presence within dominant structures

  Dispelling stereotypes — Myths of generalized group characteristics and behaviors are countered through the process of just being one's self

Assertive accommodation
  Communicating self — Interacting with dominant group members in an authentic, open, and genuine manner; used by those with strong self-concepts

  Intragroup networking — Identifying and working with other co-cultural group members who share common philosophies, convictions, goals

  Utilizing liaisons — Identifying specific dominant group members who can be trusted for support, guidance, and assistance

  Educating others — Taking the role of teacher in co-cultural interactions; enlightening dominant group members of co-cultural norms, values, etc.

Aggressive accommodation
  Confronting — Using the necessary aggressive methods, including ones that seemingly violate the "rights" of others, to assert one's voice

  Gaining advantage — Inserting references to co-cultural oppression as a means to provoke dominant group reactions and gain advantage

Nonassertive separation
  Avoiding — Maintaining a distance from dominant group members; refraining from activities and=or locations where interaction is likely

  Maintaining barriers — Imposing, through the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, a psychological distance from dominant group members

Assertive separation
  Exemplifying strength — Promoting the recognition of co-cultural group strengths, past accomplishments, and contributions to society

  Embracing stereotypes — Applying a negotiated reading to dominant group perceptions and merging them into a positive co-cultural self-concept

Aggressive separation
  Attacking — Inflicting psychological pain through personal attacks on dominant group members' self-concept

Sabotaging others — Undermining the ability of dominant group members to take full advantage of their privilege inherent in dominant structures

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This study, through the use of co-cultural communication theory, queer theory, and feminist standpoint theory, examines the lived experiences of trans students at this university and the self-perceptions of their acceptance at this University. Standpoint theory will be the guiding theoretical framework in order to ensure a focus on the trans perspectives. Queer theory will influence the examination of structures of power and inequality. Co-cultural communication theory will be used to analyze the discursive strategies used by members of trans communities to navigate the verbal and nonverbal communication they encounter with the university, the faculty and staff, and the students at this university. The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: How do trans students navigate their trans identities at this university, with regards to their relationships with campus and their relationships on campus?

RQ2: What is the perception of trans students of their own acceptance at this university?

RQ3: What factors influence trans students' perceptions of their acceptance at this university?

RQ4: In what ways do perceptions of acceptance influence communication strategies?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

To answer the research questions, this study employed a qualitative approach, with one-on-one interviews and a thematic analysis. I chose this approach, because queer and standpoint theories require the practitioner to begin their research from the standpoints of the research participants and qualitative interviews are useful for viewing this university from those perspectives (Dilley, 1999; John, 2011). Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen because of its ability to be flexible with coding and theme creation, yet rigorous in its analytic procedures (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). TA was useful when working with queer theory, as both queer theory and thematic analysis are used to explore both explicit and latent data compiled through the research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). From using these methods, I was able to glean a better understanding of the self-perceptions of acceptance and communication strategies utilized by members of the trans communities at this university.

Methodological Orientation

I conduct my research from critical feminist (Hawkesworth & Disch, 2016) and queer (Barker & Scheele, 2016) perspectives. Although queer theory does provide the more dominant philosophic influence, I do appreciate critical feminism for its ability to work on a larger community-wide scale, with general

categories of oppressed groups. Critical feminist ideology is useful for activist research, because of the directions required of its practitioners: explore the forces leading to the systems in place that are responsible for oppression; learn how we can act to combat patriarchy and stop oppression (Meagher, 2005). Critical feminism works by studying systems of oppression and the required steps for correcting gender-based oppression, using established, essentialist gender categories. I find it is useful for discussing known, oppressed groups, such as trans communities.

However, I do believe the ultimate goal of critical ideologies will be realized through queer theory. Critical feminism helps conduct the necessary labor by focusing the research on marginalized communities and providing the language to discuss marginalized groups, but queer theory works to unmask the socially constructed and arbitrary nature off all systems where oppression can be found. Queer theory also supports my axiological position that research cannot be truly objective, nor should activist research be value-free. This research intends to expose hardships faced by marginalized communities existing within gender hierarchies. I believe that when the gender hierarchies become publicly exposed as meaningless, there will be no justification for continued gender-based oppression. The same will be true for race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc. Queer theory provides the unmasking (Barker & Scheele, 2016); critical feminism provides the less disruptive, better understood categories to bring to an equal

footing (Hawkesworth & Disch, 2016). It is an idealistic research perspective, but it is the one that informs my research.

For the particular study, it is important to further discuss my research perspective and how it relates to some of the concepts presented by these theories: epistemological advantage and the essentializing critique of standpoint theory. I conduct my research from a postmodern perspective. As such, I do not believe a universal truth nor a universal standpoint can be found, particularly not through research in the social sciences (Hallstein, 1999; Olsson, 2008). Rather, truth can be found within cultures, within moments, within conversations or communication acts. When discussing privilege or discrimination, marginalized groups do have an epistemological advantage, because they are able to recall relevant personal truths about hardships that members of society who have the privilege to avoid that discrimination might not even know exists. However, I do recognize that marginalized perspectives, themselves, are not complete pictures of truth or reality. They are merely one perspective through which to examine what has been interpreted as reality. This study deals with perceptions of acceptance or rejection for a marginalized community. This is where the localized epistemology is advantageous and why I chose to conduct interviews with members of trans communities.

I also recognize that no two people can truly every have the exact same reality. Too many factors shape the ways we experience our world to allow for identical interpretations. For this reason, I lean towards queer theory's anti-

essentialist design. It is not hypocritical to use feminist standpoint theory, despite the critique of its essentialist nature, because the essentialist categories created can be temporary and are created based upon similarities, rather than universal assumptions of a given group (e.g., women, men, bisexuals). That is, to even create a group there is the requirement of identifying similar positions on a power hierarchy (Anwaruddin, 2013; Ardill, 2013; Caresse, 2011; Hallstein, 1999). To further distance this research from the essentialist critique, I am careful to clarify that these experiences are of the participants of this research study, rather than all trans individuals. Although much standpoint research does not provide this qualifier, this research does because I want to make certain that this study's categories are not essentializing all trans people.

The Researcher's Position

I am a thirty-year-old graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino. I have held multiple roles on campus (i.e., student employee, representative to the board of directors, club president, campus newspaper manager, instructor, academic advisor, committee representative, undergraduate, & graduate student). In these roles, I have met with a variety of students, staff, faculty, and administrators and have become more involved than the typical commuter student. My presence around trans spaces on campus is not unusual, as I have spent, albeit limited, time in the campus queer and trans resource center (QTR) and have attended QTR events.

Although I publicly identify as cisgender, I have spent many years questioning and researching my own gender. Without being explicitly instructed to do so, I internalized a need to subordinate any part of my gender I believed to be outside of the norm for a cisgender male. Through the help of gender studies research, closer connections to queer communities, and support from friends, I no longer deny my gender identity or expression and identify as a member of the queer community. Through reflection, I came to realize my privilege as a cis-passing, hetero-passing male and I try not to take that privilege for granted. However, this ability to pass and the infrequency of my gender norm transgressions do inspire continued internal debate about my identity. Perhaps this tension is why I am comfortable with the existential nature of queer theory. I do not have to conform to any preconceived notion of gender to exist in any given moment regardless of how I choose to express my identity in that moment.

I am a part of the queer community, but my ability to pass has allowed me to escape much of the hardships detailed in trans and queer studies research. Further, perhaps due to my own internal struggle with identity, I have never felt comfortable in campus queer and trans resource centers. I believe this complicated my efforts to become closer to members of trans communities, as it limited my connections to potential participants. My knowledge from personal life and from research was helpful during the interviews and I was open about my gender identity with participants, as we worked to create knowledge together.

Research Site

I conducted this research at the main campus of a mid-size university located in Southern California. The campus does have a queer and trans resource center, which offers social events and events for raising awareness of issues related to gender and sexuality. This resource center is located in the campus student union. Additionally, this campus has a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee and houses a Title IX resource center. All students and faculty are required to undergo annual sexual violence prevention training.

Research Populations

To better understand the lived experiences of members of trans communities at this university, the participants were recruited from all students attending this university who self-identified in any way under the trans umbrella. To identify research participants, I sent a call for participants to LGBTQ focused organizations affiliated with the university (viz., the queer and trans resource center and the LGBTQ club) and other student organizations (e.g., the student union). Additionally, I used a program called MailMerge365 to send an email to the instructors of every course with a gender or sexualities emphasis taught at this university during the Fall quarter of 2020 and to every graduate teaching associate in the communication studies department during the same quarter. The call for participants identified a need for interested students who self-identify as any gender other than cisgender. This first attempt included sending a total of 79

emails. I did not send the call to my own students, because I did not want any of my students to feel they had to participate because of our relationship. Although many professors agreed to pass the information along to their students, only one student responded to the initial call. Seventeen days later, in an effort to reach more students, I used MailMerge365 again to send an email to every instructor teaching at this university during the Fall quarter of 2020. The second round of participant solicitation included sending 940 emails. After the emails, a total of eight students responded with an interest in participating. One student stopped responding to emails before a meeting could be scheduled, but the remaining seven did participate in the interviews.

Research Participants

Seven students agreed to be interviewed for this study. Of the seven, four identified as transmale, one identified as female gender non-conforming, one identified as transmale/gender-neutral, and one identified as nonbinary. No transfemale or agender identified students participated in this study. A pseudonym was provided for every participant. Only two participants chose to supply their own. The following sections are brief descriptions of the participants. These descriptions are only meant to provide relevant information about each participant to assist the reader in understanding who the participants were.

Drew. Drew identifies as transmale and uses masculine pronouns. He strives to be a kind person, soft, but in a strong way. He is openly trans at this

university and loves being trans. Drew has been involved with campus through employment, housing, and in-person classes. Drew chose his own pseudonym.

Max. Max identifies as transmale and uses masculine pronouns. He self-identifies as stealth and lives as a cismale as much as possible. Max has been involved with campus through housing, a student organization, and in-person classes.

Julian. Julian identifies as transmale and uses masculine pronouns. He self-identifies as stealth and lives as a cismale as much as possible. He has not looked into being involved with campus and has never taken classes in person at this university. Julian chose his own pseudonym.

Zack. Zack identifies as transmale and uses masculine pronouns. He self-identifies as passing enough to only be rarely misgendered. Zack is open about being trans but will only insert his trans identity into a conversation when it is relevant. He is a transfer student and has never taken classes in person at this university.

Grace-Ronaldo. Grace-Ronaldo identifies as nonbinary and uses gender-neutral pronouns. They present as they please, without feeling the need to be limited to one gender. They explained that the hyphen in their name indicates being neither man nor woman, but both at the same time. Grace-Ronaldo at the time of the interview was a first year and has not taken class in-person at this university.

Adan. Adan identifies as transmale/gender-neutral. He uses masculine or gender-neutral pronouns but prefers masculine pronouns. He writes the slash in his gender identity to indicate it is one identity. Adan has been involved with campus through employment, housing, and in-person classes. He has been advocating for trans students for a few years.

Sofia. Sofia identifies as female gender non-conforming. Sofia is a returning student, self-described as of an older generation. She has been gender-non-conforming since she was nineteen or twenty years old. She spoke of being coded by others as male, due to her external masculine look. Sofia works for human resources at a nonprofit and helps to educate her co-workers on issues of gender diversity. When in-person, Sofia takes her classes in the evenings.

Data Collection

I conducted interviews via Zoom (to adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols) to discuss the self-perceived reactions to their gender identities and expressions on campus and any other experiences they have had at this university they attribute to their gender identity and expression. These interviews were conducted in private locations (e.g., at a desk in my bedroom or in my car) to ensure the privacy of the participants. My camera was on for all of the interviews. Six of the seven participants had their cameras on as well. Six of the seven interviews were recorded, for a total of six hours and forty-eight minutes of

recordings, to supplement my notes and to simulate a natural conversation without needing to write everything down. One interview was not recorded, but detailed notes were taken. The detailed notes taken during each interview, including the interview that was not recorded, included descriptions of participants (e.g., clothing, hair, location) and their responses to questions. These notes also included my analytic memos of first impressions and preliminary patterns in the data to assist with coding (Saldaña, 2011). Examples of these memos include statements such as "he asked about my gender identity" and "naming their gender identity is important to them." These memos helped lead to the codes navigating communication about transness and the agency to define oneself, respectively. Ultimately, these memos were useful for drawing connections in the large data set that would have been more difficult to find by reading and re-reading the entire transcripts (Firmin, 2008). Instead, I could refer back to these memos as shortcuts to finding the information in the transcripts. Although this did not replace reading and re-reading the transcripts, these memos were helpful to create.

I took summary notes immediately following each interview. These notes typically included gender identity and pronouns, campus involvement, and any other details I could clearly recall. These summation notes allowed me to focus on what was most salient to me from the interviews. They were also opportunities to reflect upon the interview as I worked to build from the preliminary patterns (Saldaña, 2011). Ultimately, the process of taking these notes allowed me to dive

deeper into my data beyond merely relying on the transcripts. I then reviewed the notes taken during the interview to refresh my memory of other details I could add to the summary notes. Next, I used an automatic transcription service (i.e., Otter.ai) to transcribe the recorded interviews from an audio file created by Zoom. To ensure accuracy, I listened to the audio as many times as was necessary, while correcting the auto-generated transcripts. The automated transcription service was very accurate and I only needed to listen to the audio, at 75% of the normal speed, once for most of the transcripts. However, there were sections throughout that I listened to three or four times to ensure they were transcribed properly. In total, there were two hundred and four pages of transcribed interviews.

All interview data was saved on a personal flash drive used only by me for this study. After the submission of this study to ScholarWorks, I will only retain the written transcripts of the interviews and my researcher notes. All names have been changed and these documents cannot be linked to the participants by any person who was not personally involved with the experiences discussed during the interviews. All audio, visual, and other personally identifiable interview data will be securely wiped (using the program CCleaner) from the flash drive, as was stated in the IRB application. This study has been approved by the IRB of CSUSB. The IRB approval can be found in Appendix D.

There was one instance where additional information was needed outside of the interviews. To clarify the policy for gender-inclusive housing on campus, I

emailed and spoke on the phone with the Associate Director for Residential Education at this university. She did grant me permission to use her words in this thesis.

Data Analysis

This research used thematic analysis (TA) to analyze the data. TA is an analytic method that allows the researcher to divide, regroup, and resituate data in order to explore connections within the data set (Ayres, 2008). The study relied on participants' lived experiences and emic accounts to answer the research questions. As discussed above, standpoint theory calls for collecting emic accounts directly from the studied populations. An emic account, as defined by Tracy (2013) refers to a "perspective in which behavior is described from the actor's point of view and is context-specific" (p. 35). Research from personal accounts can produce complex, detailed data spanning a variety of topics and situations. TA is useful for this type of data, because of its ability to examine "the perspectives of different research participants," while "summarizing key features of a large data set" (Nowell et al, 2017, p. 2). TA allows the researcher to find patterns and shared meanings between and among the lived experiences disclosed through the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2012). First, I used TA to explore how transness is navigated and how trans students perceive their acceptance on campus. Second, I went back to the data to examine how those levels of acceptance impacted communication strategies.

The first step of thematic analysis is to compile the research (Castelberry & Nolen, 2018). This took the form of transcribing the interviews and gathering all of my researcher's notes and memos. This process was described above as part of data collection. From there, I was able to move to the second step of TA, disassembling. Disassembling is the process of taking the data out of its nested context and grouping it with other data from the data set based on similarities (Castelberry & Nolen, 2018). As is not uncommon with TA, I began with a few anticipated a priori themes created through the background research for this study (Ayres, 2008; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). As defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is an abstract category that "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). Initially, these themes were based on the concepts acceptance, rejection, and campus involvement. These a priori themes influenced the first level of coding, as the patterns I found most salient were those that related to acceptance, rejection, and campus involvement. As the coding progressed, I noticed more variety in the data, which led to codes outside of those initial themes (e.g., messages from campus, internal acceptance, virtual involvement).

Disassembling led to coding the transcripts into first, second, and third-level codes. I used in-vivo coding to identify the first level codes, as the theoretical framework made it imperative for this research to generate understanding from the experiences and words of the participants. This was the

purpose of in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2011). These codes included statements such as "Doesn't believe you need surgery to be trans" and "Cis people don't have the awkward what are you conversation." In total, there were five hundred and eighty-nine first-level codes.

From these in-vivo codes came the second level codes, which were more descriptive. Rather than using the exact words from the interviews, these codes described what the words were detailing (Saldaña, 2011). It was useful during this level to review my research memos to find any repetition in impressions or descriptions that could be compared to descriptions written out as second-level codes (Firmin, 2008). It was from this comparison that the themes passing and on-campus versus virtual involvement began to develop. This descriptive level coding yielded a total of two hundred and fifty codes. After further reorganization and searching for patterns, these became one hundred and twenty third-level codes.

I began the fourth step of TA once I was satisfied with the coding. The fourth step, reassembling, putting the data together with other data identified with each code (Castelberry & Nolen, 2018). It is during this step that patterns in codes are identified as themes. Although I did begin with a priori themes, the reflexive nature of TA made it possible to remain open to the themes evolving as the data collection and analysis continued (Saldaña, 2011). An example of this evolution is the division of the theme acceptance into four levels of acceptance. The data was too complex for only one theme of acceptance (Braun & Clarke,

2012). A few potential themes were discarded throughout the analysis (e.g.,

internal acceptance, external rejection), as patterns became clearer and findings

necessitated changes to the research questions. Repetition in responses did

solidify the creation and definitions of the eventual overarching themes (Firmin,

2008). There was a total of seven themes after combining similar codes and

highlighting data more relevant to my research questions (i.e., navigating

transness, campus involvement, active rejection, passive rejection, active

acceptance, passive acceptance, & passing). Table four below provides some

examples of the coding process from data to theme. These examples were

provided in order to demonstrate parts of the creation of major themes (i.e.,

navigating transness, campus involvement, passing, & active rejection).

Additional examples of coding and theme creation can be found in Appendix B.

Table 4. Coding Examples

Data	First-Level Coding	Second-Level Coding	Third-Level Coding	Themes
"I'm agender but I still identify as trans because I've transitioned from being cis to agender"	Agender is trans Self-identification	Trans doesn't have to be binary Trans is personal	Trans is not only binary Trans is personal	Navigating Transness

"Well, yeah, probably more aware because I'm the president of a student club"	Has signed up for clubs. President of clubs. More aware as president	Involved with campus. Increased involvement is increased awareness	Trans students can be involved with campus.	Campus Involvement
"And now I'm just kind of like, you know, I feel like I'm old enough. Now and I like just want to like live my life not be associated with any like, label or anything."	Wants to live without labels.	Agency to live without being outed as trans	Agency Choice Labels	Navigating Transness
"But like, I just know some people that like professors won't to do anything … because like their voice is high or something, you know."	Professors won't do anything. Students voice is high-pitched.	Misgendered by faculty. Student doesn't pass.	Power Agency Acceptance Rejection Passing	Passing or Not Active Rejection

Step five of thematic analysis is interpreting. Interpreting is the process of making the analytical conclusions necessary to discuss "the story that each theme tells" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). For example, based on the discussion generated during the interview, it was determined that active acceptance was an equity approach demanding special attention be paid to the specific needs of the trans communities. The data contained in this theme was differentiated from the data contained within passive acceptance, which required an equality approach. Each theme was defined by what was and was not included. For example, passive rejection included a lack of awareness of the problems being created for members of the trans communities. It did not include purposeful attempts to harm the trans communities. Data detailing purposeful attempts to harm the trans communities was included within the theme active rejection.

Finally, step six was an overall analysis of the data set and how it answers the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This level of analysis involves resituating the data within its original contexts, in order use the experiences of the participants to tell the story about the data and the themes it inspired (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For example, rather than simply write that misgendering is a form of rejection, the story from which the codes and themes were inspired is included. This helps the reader understand the theme from the emic account and how it answers the research questions. These six steps made it possible to identify the macro-level contexts in which the participants' communication was situated.

After identifying the macro-level contexts, I returned to the data to explore

the ways in which these larger contexts impacted communication strategies. I

turned my focus more directly to co-cultural communication theory to assist with

the analysis of communication strategies. For CCT, I returned to the transcripts

and the analytic memos. I disassembled the dataset looking for examples of

communication or situations where communication can take place. CCT provides

a clear list of potential a priori themes to focus the analysis (e.g., field of

experience, desired outcome, context). Initially, I reassembled each example into

larger categories based upon whether they contributed to or resulted from

perceptions of acceptance or rejection. Inclusion in these categories was limited

to the previously constructed definitions of the four acceptance or rejection

themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Next, these examples were further organized

into whether the acceptance or rejection fit the more specific definitions of active

or passive. After this, I went through each example and determined which

communication strategy was utilized. This allowed me to structure this data by

desired outcome (i.e., assimilation, accommodation, and separation) and then

approach (i.e., nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive). These were cross-

referenced with the communication structures identified during the first stage of

TA in order to discuss the relevant factors contributing to strategy selection and

its outcome (e.g., context, abilities, field of experience). The communication

structures were explained for each example of communication strategy. The final

step was to make note of any patterns in strategy found within and between levels of acceptance which might suggest reasons for specific strategy selection.

An example of a discourse pattern and how this type of analysis allows it to be discussed using standpoint theory, queer theory, and co-cultural communication theory comes from the macro-level discourse pattern of being misgendered by university staff. As more examples of misgendering by staff were revealed, I began to see more of the macro level discourse in which these experiences were situated: each communication event with university staff involved the risk of being misgendered. From a trans student standpoint, the experiences on campus were shaped by the power of university staff to apply incorrect gender labels. This macro-level discourse shaped micro-level discourse events with staff, as the students' fields of experience influenced the communicative strategy they would utilize for future interactions. The decision was made in each interaction with staff whether to assimilate through ignoring the misgendering or to be more assertive or aggressive with the aim of accommodation. This is not a consideration the typical cis student has to make. From this, one can see that the power of university staff to misgender students typically only negatively impacts trans students on campus.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Trying to live as one's authentic self, have the college experience, and earn passing grades for the term can be difficult for any university student. This remains true for trans students who must navigate this university with the additional gender-based hurdles present for many trans individuals. This chapter will present the analysis of the data collected during interviews with trans students. The seven themes identified through the coding process (i.e., passive acceptance, passive rejection, active acceptance, active rejection, navigating transness at this university, campus participation, and passing) have been split into two main sections. The first, navigating transness at this university, will provide some information about how trans participants express their gender identities and the expressions of those identities at this university. The next section, perceptions of acceptance, will provide an overview of the four levels of acceptance perceived by the research participants (i.e., active acceptance, active rejection, passive acceptance, and passive rejection). This section also includes an explanation of communication strategies utilized by trans students who perceive each level of acceptance. The section ends with an explanation of two major tensions contributing to perceptions of acceptance: involvement with the campus and passing versus not passing.

The order in which data is presented is important when using thematic analysis, because they must "connect logically and meaningfully" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 69). The structure of this analysis chapter was chosen because it is important for the reader to understand how members of the trans communities expressed and navigated their transness on campus before acceptance or rejection was introduced. The understanding of gender expression and navigation provides the background information needed to understand how this expression and navigation, when encountered by members of the dominant cultures at this university, impacted self-perceptions of acceptance or rejection and, in turn, communication strategies utilized by members of the trans communities. It was also important to understand perceptions of acceptance or rejections, in order to draw comparisons between communication strategies utilized at each level. Further, it was necessary to understand the self-perceptions of acceptance or rejection to make sense of the two major tensions impacting acceptance or rejection.

Navigating Transness at This University

For the participants of this study, it was important to have the power to define their own gender identity and gender expression. When asked about expressing his gender, Adan referred to the ability to define your own gender identity and gender expression as the power of defining yourself before someone

else can define you. Drew provided good insight into why defining gender is personal:

> There's no one set way of being trans, you know. Like, I still wear feminine clothes. … I still do things that are considered like, that would be considered feminine. But like, to me, I'm just like, I'm doing the thing that I want to do. This is my experience, you know. It's important to me, so I just do things that I feel comfortable with.

These participants each assumed agency over their gender expression, through a variety of personalized gender expressions, because there is no one way to be trans: it is their personal experience. For example, Grace-Ronaldo lives their gender through expressing fluidly, without regard for one gender identity, because that is how they feel best represents who they are. One day they may express in an androgynous manner and the next day, they may choose to express their gender in a feminine dress. Zack once believed the act of binding his breasts, or using a cloth or specialized product to flatten the breasts against the chest to make them less visible, was required for transmen, but now chooses not to do so. Adan faced the decision between appearing more masculine through binding his breasts or risk being misgendered by not restricting his breasts. Ultimately, he chose not to bind, as a way to live a more authentic self. He described this decision as living his truth.

For some trans students, there is a conundrum of gender. In other words, some trans students want to express their genders in a personal way, but also

attempt to adhere to gender stereotypes to align more closely with their gender identity. Again, Drew provides some insight into this reality:

> It's like, I don't want to fit in a box … but the same time, I do want to fit in like a little bit of the box, because it's like, I do like some stereotypical things as they make me feel a little bit better about my gender expression and identity. But at the same time, I'm not going to adhere to every single one of those things.

The goal is not to adhere to all stereotypes, but to live authentically. However, as Drew explained above, some of the participants did subscribe to some gender stereotypes that influence their gender expression. Drew deepens his voice. Julian also mentioned his deep voice as evidence of masculinity. Max mentioned his voice deepening as evidence of his transition progress. Drew tries to walk more masculinely, which to him means walking taller. To express his masculinity, Max grew a beard during this past calendar year. Sofia displays her gender-nonconformity through ironing her button-down shirt and slacks to pair with her Doc Martins for attending classes. The highlighted stereotypes provide some insight into how each of these participants views living their authentic selves. These also provides insight into how each participant perceives the requirements for being accepted at this university. They have learned through their interactions that beards, height, and deeper voices communicates masculinity, while not adhering to cultural gender norms (i.e., being masculine as a female or alternating gender expression) conveys gender nonconformity.

Through a diversity of gender expressions, these participants are all expressing their gender identities openly at this university. Not every participant was living their trans identity openly, preferring to be stealth or "under the radar" (Julian), but none of the participants were refraining from expressing their authentic gender expression as best as they could.

In order to navigate their transness at this university, trans students must manage their interactions with staff and faculty in ways cis students will likely never experience. This includes for many trans students a predictable dialogue with staff and faculty. The conversation is either a preemptive introduction with their correct name and pronouns or a correction of a wrongly used deadname and pronouns. A deadname, also referred to as birthname or old name, is the name assigned to a trans person, typically at birth, that has been replaced with a name chosen to align with their gender identity.

Specifically, when interacting with professors, trans students often have to introduce themselves as their correct name, with the hope that the professor will understand and change the name on the roster. The university does allow students to change their name on the rosters and on Blackboard, which has helped end some deadnaming in class. However, because the name on the student email does not change, the change to the roster is only helpful in a limited sense. When emailing other students for groupwork, there is an incongruity between the name of the student and the name shown on the email. This can lead to an unplanned explanation of their gender identity. This is also an

issue if the professor forgets the name correction and has to determine why the names on the roster do not match the names on the emails.

Perceptions of Acceptance

Throughout the conversations with research participants, it became apparent that being accepted was more complicated than "accepted" or "rejected". When asked the question "how do you define acceptance," the responses varied widely. Some examples include the more passive "seeing trans people as … normal" (Zack) and the more active "fighting outside the binary" (Adan). When describing their experiences with acceptance at this university, the term became even more complex. Some participants desired a passive acceptance, that would allow them to assimilate into the dominant culture at this university, without an emphasis on their gender identity. Others desired a more active and directed acceptance where trans lives would be uplifted and valued. Four levels of acceptance were identified through the analysis of the interview data and will be explicated in this chapter: active acceptance, active rejection, passive acceptance, and passive rejection. Participants provided examples of interactions on and with campus that were used as evidence to justify the structuring of perceptions of acceptance into these four levels.

Two sets of tensions were reoccurring throughout the interviews that suggest possible reasons for perceptions of acceptance experienced by trans students: passing versus not passing and on-campus involvement versus strictly

virtual involvement. Differences, both explicitly stated and implied through a queer reading of their responses, can be observed along these lines. There are other factors which may impact a student's perception of acceptance (e.g., major), but this study did not focus enough on these factors to draw a conclusion about them.

Table 5 was created to assist the reader with making sense of the communication strategies explored below. Additionally, the following is an example of how the data became identified as a communication strategy. Julian spoke about flying "under the radar" by living his life as a cisman. In doing so, his stated goal, or preferred outcome, was distancing himself from trans communities and assimilating into cis communities. His previous experiences with going stealth contribute to the field of experiences that tells him he will be successful in flying under the radar. To reach this preferred outcome, Julian must communicate his intent to assimilate through his words or actions. When choosing to not out himself as trans and when using a private email account to communicate with the university, thereby avoiding his email address displaying his deadname, he is employing the strategy *strategic distancing*. He is distancing himself from any possible connections to the trans communities. This strategy and many others were utilized by the participants of this study while navigating the four levels of acceptance at this university.

Table 5. Examples of Co-Cultural Orientations and Practices

	Assimilation	Accommodation	Separation
Nonassertive Approach	Nonassertive Assimilation

Example: Censoring-Self: Zack chose to censor himself, rather than respond to inappropriate comments about his gender. | Nonassertive

Example: Increasing Visibility: This was not seen in this study but can take the form of deliberately joining organizations to increase the level of trans presence in that space. | Nonassertive Separation

Example: Avoiding: Drew chooses to avoid unpleasant interactions with cis faculty and students by hanging out with his close friends. |
| Assertive Approach | Assertive Assimilation

Example: Bargaining: The students who identify as passing bargain with professors by asking for them to use their correct names while not bringing up their trans status. | Assertive Accommodation

Example: Educating Others: Drew chooses to educate others about his trans identity through artwork. | Assertive Separation

Example: Exemplifying Strength: This was not seen in this study but could take the form of highlighting group achievements to convince others to separate with you from the dominant group. |
| Aggressive Approach | Aggressive Assimilation

Example: Strategic Distancing: Max does not go to the QTRC or QTRC events because he does not want to be labeled as a trans community member. | Aggressive Accommodation

Example: Gaining Advantage: This was not seen in this study but can take the form of making a dominant member feel guilty about hardships faced by a marginalized group, in order to gain compliance. | Aggressive Separation

Example: Attacking: This was not seen in this study but can take the form of bullying members of the dominant group because of their identity in order to create a psychological distance. |

<u>Four Levels of Acceptance</u>

The four levels of acceptance were devised through the processes of coding the interview transcripts and working with patterns in what was stated throughout the interviews. Additionally, the micro-level discourse from the interviews was analyzed with the macro-level discourse in which it was situated. For example, when Julian brought up his concerns regarding the student email addresses, it was situated within the larger discourse of hardships brought up by trans students. Together, these macro and the micro-levels make visible the patterns in responses and how they relate to experiences of other trans students at this university. These patterns also allow for the identification of intragroup connections between the standpoints of trans students at this university, which, in turn, makes the macro-level discourses more visible. These are not merely the definitions for acceptance provided by participants. They are the result of an analysis of the experiences shared by the participants.

<u>Active Acceptance.</u> The activist level of acceptance is active acceptance. This type of acceptance follows an equity approach, which means it involves identifying which actions and resources are needed to uplift trans communities and to bring them from the margins of this university. To Zack, active acceptance includes "finding ways to support" trans communities, "trying to make it easier" for trans communities and providing trans communities the resources they need. Active acceptance at this university is felt when the students, faculty, or administration take action specifically focused on helping trans students.

One example of active acceptance at the university level is the Queer and Trans Resource Center (QTRC) on campus. This university took the steps required to open a resource center specifically for queer and trans students. This center is staffed by members of the communities who can assist those students in need. During our interview, Max brought up some of the ways the QTRC helps trans students:

> Pretty much the only time I've gone in there is like to ask, like, how to change my name, and like how to do this or that because like, you know, legal forms are hard. So, they have people there that'll like walk you through stuff. … They're also the ones I was just thinking about it that got me my doctor to start hormones.

It is true that some trans students on campus do not believe the QTRC is the perfect solution for their communities. Drew described the QTRC as "a bunch of like, white queer people," and stated it does not fit his needs as "a Hispanic Chicano person." Adan recognized the QTRC as a good first step, but argued it was not where the campus support needs to end for trans students. However, the QTRC is an example of the University taking action it believes to be in the interest of helping trans communities.

Another example of active acceptance comes from the students chartering an LGBTQ club on campus. This club is less than a year old, but is a collaboration of students, faculty, and staff to support and uplift the LGBTQ communities. As explained by Adan, this action was needed for trans students

because it goes beyond "just a sticker on the door." Rather, it creates an active community of students and professors they can seek out and feel safe with.

A third impactful example of active acceptance is the existence of queer housing for students. The Associate Director for Residential Education as of the Fall of 2019, clarified the official housing policy that she enforces. She explained, "a student identifying as transgender [or] any other non-binary gender identity could live in any of our communities based on their preference (and based on space availability). They do not need to live in a specific designated area" (H. Allar, personal communication, November 13, 2020). However, the option for queer housing is available to this university students who wish to live with a queer community. Drew, who lived in a queer housing community during his first year, referred to his floor in the STEM building as the LGBT dorm and spoke happily about the friends he made there, stating "they were very understanding. They're so cool. I felt very accepted there, you know, even though it was like a small handful of people."

The active acceptance does not require such large steps as opening a resource center, becoming a faculty member of a campus organization, or creating a queer community on campus. When a professor unintentionally deadnamed Drew in an email, that professor quickly sent a follow-up with an apology. She understood the mistake and corrected herself. Other professors ask every student for their pronouns during the first day of class, as an ice breaker or simply as part of the first-day curriculum. As Sofia argued, some

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professors are attempting to "lead by example" through their use of pronouns in email signatures. Each of these examples were received positively by the research participants, because it set the tone for their acceptance in the course. In those moments, their identities were validated.

Communication Strategies. The only communication orientation utilized by participants who were feeling actively accepted was assertive accommodation. There were no examples of assimilation or separation as the preferred outcome and no examples of nonassertive or aggressive communication approaches. These participants wanted to express and find recognition for their diverse standpoints within the dominant culture of this university (Orbe, 1998a). The participants gave examples of communicating self, utilizing liaisons, and intergroup networking.

Accommodation Strategies. *Communicating Self* is defined as "interacting with dominant group members in an authentic, open, and genuine manner; used by those with strong self-concepts" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 250). This is considered an assertive approach. One example of communicating self comes from Drew expressing himself through his artwork. He describes his art department as "very supportive" and "proud of him," stating:

> I was in the art department. And I felt very accepted in the art department cause like, no one batted an eye. Everyone was like, super understanding. And there was my work and my work is about me as a trans male. And, like, it's like, my work is about tidbits of my life. Like, I'm exposing myself.

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And they're just like, they're very proud of me. They're very supportive,

and they understand.

The context is a supportive department. He is communicating with people who encourage him and support him. This context, including members of the department, allow Drew to feel comfortable with communicating authentic details about his trans identity. Because his experience in this context has been encouraging and accepting, he knows he can be vulnerable and share parts of his marginalized identity through the art he creates.

The second and third communication strategies utilized by participants perceiving active acceptance were *using liaisons* and *intergroup networking*. Using liaisons is defined as "identifying specific dominant group members who can be trusted for support, guidance, and assistance" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 250). Intergroup networking is defined as "identifying and working with other co-cultural group members who share common philosophies, convictions, and goals" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 250). The strategies are not mutually exclusive, meaning multiple strategies can be utilized during the same communication events, depending on the communicator's preferred outcome and communication approach (Meyer, 2019). Adan identified the faculty advisors of the campus LGBTQ club as trusted liaisons and recognized their shared queer identities:

The queer club … is good because they have faculty and staff attached,

so we know there's certain people we can go to as students, that we can

talk to … because they're open and … out and we can feel safe with them.

Adan has recognized a shared identity among the faculty and staff connected to the campus LGBTQ club. While they may not identify as trans, they do share similar locations on power hierarchies due to their queer identities. It is because of these queer identities that Adan believes he can trust these members as connections to the dominant culture of this university. These trusted liaisons serve as a bridge between marginalized communities and dominant power structures on campus, through their accepted association with marginalized communities and affiliation with dominant cultures. He knows he can seek them out for support, safety, and guidance while communicating with members of the campus at large and navigating the spaces of this university, because they are actively supporting his community beyond a "safe space sticker."

Active Rejection. Active rejection is the opposite of active acceptance. Whereas active acceptance required a concerted effort to uplift trans communities, active rejection requires action with the intent to harm or bring down trans communities. What sets this apart from passive rejection is both the intent to not accept trans students and the understanding of your actions as problematic to trans students. Both Max and Adan discussed their issues with living on campus that contrast with Allar's commitment to support gender diverse students in residential housing. These events occurred before Allar took over as the Associate Director for Residential Education. Max shared the details of his experience with securing on-campus housing as a transmale:

My second year, they put me … they would always put me in an all-girls

dorm, like, and I would have to call like seven different people. I'd be like,

can you not do that? I was like, can I be with the guys? And they were like,

no, like, we're not allowed to, like, do that. … They made me stay in a four

bedroom by myself because they didn't want to put me with guys but I

wouldn't go with girls. It was kind of like, I feel a little segregated.

Max was denied the opportunity to live with male students because of his trans

identity. Despite his transmale identity housing would not allow him to live with

cismen. Instead, he was segregated in a dorm by himself because campus

residential services did not respect his identity as male. This is active rejection,

because the university was actively harming trans students by enforcing an anti-

trans housing policy. This same policy forced Adan to be housed with female

students, despite, himself, being a male.

At the student-to-student level, several of the respondents have

internalized being stared at as "normal". Max, despite identifying as passing,

described examples of being stared at all around campus, including the

restrooms. Max also discussed situations around campus when other students

would be "audibly talking loud about what gender you are." The students surely

understood the negative consequences of their actions and yet Max stated this

happens "everywhere" on campus. Active rejection is taking an action, knowing

the consequences will be harmful to trans communities or their members.

Communication Strategies. There was a slightly wider variety of communication orientations utilized by participants who perceived active rejection than with active acceptance. With active rejection, participants held two communication orientations, instead of one. Just as with active acceptance, no assimilation or aggressive strategies were found for active rejection. However, some participants did choose a separation strategy.

Accommodation Strategies. Adan used the educating others strategy from an assertive accommodation orientation in an interaction with one of his professors. After his attempts to insert trans women into the curriculum were rebuffed and after his instructor spoke of the problematic pink pussy hats as "revolutionary," Adan decided to continue his attempts to educate his classmates about trans issues. In this context, he was speaking with an instructor who decided not to include trans women in the curriculum in a way he believed they should be included. The instructor was not "talking about Marsha P Johnson, … Sylvia Rivera, or any of those queer … leaders of color" (Adan). Refusing to assimilate by remaining silent in the face of what he perceived to be "emotionally damaging," Adan attempted to actively assert his desire to educate his classmates about the experiences of trans people. His field of experience allowed him to recognize the benefits of speaking up for trans students and of the need to "create space" for himself when those in power will not provide it. His previous activist work at this university and at a community college contributed to that field of experience, which in turn influenced his decision to take a more

assertive approach to educate others about trans issues. After a more assertive communication approach, Adan was able to present in class about trans issues.

The second communication strategy identified, *obtaining satisfaction*, was created from the interview data. This communication did not fit with the existing strategies and an addition of this strategy was necessary. CCT does allow for this type of expansion when necessary (Orbe and Roberts, 2012). Obtaining satisfaction is an assertive accommodation strategy defined as using assertive, nonaggressive methods to assert one's voice, with the expectation, but not guarantee, of being accommodated. This strategy is a non-aggressive demand. The example found with perceptions of active rejection is in Max's interaction with the campus housing department. Max was assigned a room in an all-girls dorm, despite being a male student. Max began the interactions with a negative preconception of interacting with campus admins, believing the administration to be "pretty bad to trans people." His willingness to continue calling admins from the housing department, despite this preconception, shows his unwillingness to assimilate in this situation. He did not use an aggressive strategy and did not attempt to violate the rights of members of the dominant culture. Instead, he chose to assert his voice and demand to not be housed in an all-girls dorm. The eventual result was being isolated in a four-bedroom dorm, but his desire was strong enough that he still actively asserted his right to be accommodated within the dominant power structure.

Separation Strategies. There were two examples of separation, both of which were nonassertive. The nonassertive separation orientation involves a decision to passively separate, when possible, from interactions with members of the dominant cultures (Orbe, 1998a). Both examples of nonassertive separation were *avoiding* or "maintaining a distance from dominant group members; refraining from activities and/or locations where interaction is likely" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 250). This communication strategy was utilized by Max, Drew, and Adan. As stated above, Adan spends time in the library to avoid people who will "mess with him." Drew separates himself from the dominant cultures, through the "safe space" he created with his friends. This is where he feels "the most comfortable." Max, when he was beginning his transition, spent his time in the theatre department or the QTRC to avoid the stares and "weird" behavior he encountered from cis students. In each case, these students felt less comfortable around members of the dominant, largely cishetero cultures and avoided interactions with them when possible, preferring instead isolation, interactions with members of queer communities, or the company of close, trusted friends.

The second type of nonassertive separation involves avoiding situations, not necessarily entire cultures, where you will have to communicate in ways that are uncomfortable or unpleasant. During his first two years at this university, before he was able to live as stealth, not every instructor would accommodate Max's request to use his name and pronouns. Max stated:

Ever since I came I was out even though I didn't look like the guy. I still like emailed all my professors and like I told everybody. For the most part [everyone accepted the name and pronouns] and then if there was any that wouldn't, I just dropped their classes and switched. … They … would give some excuse that like legally grading wise it has to say like a certain name or something, which doesn't make any sense because like 90% of professors would do it.

Max was not allowed to transition at home, because his mother did not accept his trans identity, and knew what it was like to not have his trans identity recognized by others. When he came to this university and realized he could "just do whatever [he] wanted," that previous experiences influenced his decision to avoid situations, when possible, that would involve denying his trans identity. With his new freedom to transition and strive for acceptance as a transman, he refused to be misgendered and deadnamed by his instructors. The desired outcome was to separate himself from that situation and so he dropped the course to avoid communicating with instructors who would not use his name and pronouns.

Passive Acceptance. Passive acceptance is seamless acceptance, with no gaps or differences in treatment between people or communities. When asked for her definition of acceptance, Sofia provided this definition of passive acceptance: "it's not saying I need special; I don't need special rules. I don't need special accommodations. I need to be treated fairly and equally like everyone else. That's what acceptance means to me." In this context, Sofia defined

passive acceptance as being treated like every other student. This type of acceptance follows an equality approach, with the goal to be balanced with the distribution of power and resource to all students without providing any special accommodations or allowances for any community. Under the equality approach, every student is treated equally, regardless of their gender identity. The call for equality is also present in the definitions provided by Max and Zack. Max, speaking for the institutional level, states "they don't have to, like have trans pride everywhere or like, have, you know, like, extra things for us just kind of a balanced thing." At the person-to-person level of this university, Zack states his hope that trans people are seen as normal. "You see [trans students] and you're like, yeah, like, there's nothing to question about that, like that is completely run of the mill at this point. There's nothing like different about it." Their gender identities do not receive different treatment. Passive acceptance does not set trans communities apart from cis students as they navigate life as a university student.

Interacting with instructors was a reoccurring element in the discussions. For passive acceptance, Drew told a story about interacting with his professor when checking out equipment necessary for his coursework. In this example, the letter X was used instead of the actual last letter of Drew's deadname, to ensure confidentiality. Drew recounted:

When I was renting out my [equipment], my professor was like, what's your name again, and I was like, Drew, because I had my deadname on

there and the last letter of my [deadname] is X and so she put the W on

top of the X, and I was like, I didn't have to tell her. She like just

understood, you know. And I was like, she didn't, she didn't question

anything. She just asked me, what's my name again. And it's just so nice.

Drew's professor did not ask for a deadname or require additional paperwork to use the equipment. As for any other student, the professor ensured that Drew provided his information. This is the key aspect of passive acceptance. Drew was not denied access; he was granted access with his name, the same as cis students. It is important to note that the passive acceptance was from the professor, not the university that still uses Drew's deadname for all official purposes. For the university to be passively accepting, Drew's real name would be on all official documents. He would not have felt compelled to write out his deadname in this situation.

With passive acceptance, students are treated equally, regardless of their gender identities. It is through passive acceptance that Max, Julian, and Zack feel comfortable living as stealth. There is no special attention paid to marginalized gender identities because this type of acceptance calls for all gender identities to be accepted and treated as equal. Zack is not disturbed by a lack of emails from the university regarding his gender. "I've seen a lot more related to my degree, as opposed to my gender, which I mean, good" (Zack). Julian defined acceptance as not being labeled as different. With passive

acceptance, trans students living as stealth are able to blend into the collective cultures of gender identities at this university.

Passive acceptance is also present when instructors use the proper pronouns and names of their students. Both Drew and Max spoke about the passive acceptance of their departments through their use of student names and pronouns. Outside of his department, Max stated that most of his professors would use his name and pronouns as long as he talks to them on the first day of class. For passive acceptance, the professors do not have to go out of their way or do extra work to ensure identities are respected. When they learn the identities do not match the roster, they correct the roster for trans students just as they would for any other student whose name is incorrect on the roster. The University would not have to do any extra work for trans students either, beyond recognizing and correcting, as they would for any cultural group, the issues that are making student life more difficult for trans students at this university. This is what makes it an equality approach, which, in turn, makes it passive acceptance.

Communication Strategies. There was a wider variety of orientations and strategies when participants perceived a more passive acceptance than with active acceptance. Passive acceptance led to the highest number of communication orientations (i.e., four orientations) of all four levels of acceptance. With a total of five communication strategies, passive acceptance was also the most diverse in terms of specific tactics utilized by marginalized communicators. As with active acceptance, no participant perceiving passive

acceptance described any separation orientations. However, all three approaches of assimilation were used by participants of this study. In addition to the assimilation strategies, assertive accommodation was also utilized with perceptions of passive acceptance.

<u>Assimilation Strategies.</u> Passive acceptance was the only perceived level of acceptance that involved all three approaches of assimilation. Nonassertive assimilation techniques are chosen by those whose desired outcome and approach are not intended to disrupt the existing power structures (Camara and Orbe, 2010). The nonassertive assimilation strategy utilized was *censoring self* or "remaining silent when comments from dominant group members are inappropriate, indirectly insulting, or highly offensive" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 249). Zack described using this strategy when told he is "passing enough where [they] never would have guessed" he was trans. Rather than choosing to correct this assumption that men must look a certain way to avoid suspicion they may be trans, Zack perceives the statement as evidence he is "male masculine presenting to the point where people don't question it." His goal, as evidenced by our discussion, is to live as stealth, with his gender unquestioned. He maintains the agency to out himself only if "it's necessary to the conversation" or required to understand his standpoint on a topic. In the context of general conversations, Zack does not see it necessary to disclose his trans status. Therefore, being able to pass without question is a result of the blending in afforded by passive acceptance and no correction is needed when he's told he passes well enough.

Therefore, he uses the censoring-self strategy and does not correct his co-communicators.

The assertive assimilation orientation, while maintaining the goal of assimilation, takes on less passive communication techniques and does not necessarily privilege the needs of the self or of the dominant culture (Orbe, 1998a). The assertive assimilation strategy found in the interviews was *bargaining* or "striking a covert or overt arrangement with dominant group members in which both parties agree to ignore co-cultural differences" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 249). This took the form of Max and Julian emailing their professors informing them of their names and pronouns, when they did not match the names and pronouns on the class roster or email. Although other trans students emailed their professors requesting they use the correct names and pronouns, the other trans students were more open about their trans status. The attempted bargain was for the teacher to use the proper names and pronouns, without having to discuss their trans status or differences any further. Max and Julian prefer to live as stealth and attempt to assimilate as cismen. Through successful bargaining, Max and Julian do not have to out themselves as trans to any person other than the instructor. Unfortunately, though, because of student email addresses, they are outed when any group work is required outside of the classroom. However, this strategy does allow Max and Julian to retain more agency over their own self-disclosures of gender identity.

With the aggressive assimilation orientation, the desire of the self to "fit in" with members of the dominant society are communicated as more important than the need of to maintain a connection to the communicator's marginalized cultural groups. These communicators actively attempt to distance themselves from members of their marginalized communities (Orbe, 1998a). There were two aggressive assimilation strategies utilized by participants of this study. The first is *mirroring*, defined as "adopting dominant group codes in an attempt to make one's co-cultural identity more (or totally) invisible" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 249). Drew uses this strategy while on campus through his posture. He explains:

> I want them to also look through how I represent myself as trans and how I navigate through my world and like through my tidbits of my life, you know, and so I kind of bring that more so into the classroom, but when I'm out there walking around, I kind of like, I walk normally, but sometimes I kind of like I try to sit up straighter. … I try to like mimic a guy.

Drew's field of experience tells him that guys are taller than him, so he attempts to make himself physically larger. This example of mirroring is conveyed through his nonverbal behaviors. He is consciously aware of his height and posture while in the presence of cismen around campus and tries to mimic their height and posture. Drew, through this strategy, changes his natural posture and stance in order to change the way he is perceived. He believes changing those factors will change the way he is perceived by those watching his nonverbal behaviors. Being taller will connect him to cismen, rather than transmen.

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The second aggressive assimilation strategy is *strategic distancing*, or "avoiding any association with other co-cultural group members in attempts to be perceived as a distinct individual" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 249). The participants in this study who used strategic distancing (viz., Julian, Zack, and Max) all identify as stealth and use strategic distancing simultaneously with mirroring to distance themselves from trans communities while assimilating with the cismale communities. Julian describes this as "flying under the radar." Zack states "I typically only assert that I'm trans when it's like story relevant." Max mentioned that, although he is a member of the LGBTQ communities, he doesn't "really identify like that." In choosing to strategically distance themselves from trans communities, in favor of aligning more closely with the more dominant cis communities, they are minimizing connections to their trans identities.

Before he identified as stealth, Max would communicate his trans identity through artifacts (i.e., pins) and attendance at pride events. Now, Max prefers to live his life not "associated with any label or anything." However, Max identifies as stealth and has the ability to pass as cis. By choosing not to disclose his trans status, minimizing his connections to trans communities, and living without labels, Max is likely to be assumed a cismale. This is the result of his strategic communication. Max stated his goal was to "live as cismale." His aggressive assimilation strategies help him to do so.

Accommodation Strategies. The assertive accommodation strategy, which was utilized by Zack, was *educating others*. Educating others is

defined as "taking the role of teacher in co-cultural interactions; enlightening dominant group members of co-cultural norms, values, and so forth" (Orbe, 1998a, p. 250). When the information about his transness is "story relevant," Zack will disclose information about his trans identity. Zack spoke about educating his classmates in a philosophy course about his experiences as a transmale. His instructor made him feel accepted in class through opening the floor for students to discuss their personal experiences. This was open to all students, not just to trans students. Zack used this opportunity to discuss growing up with people who still view him as he publicly identified before coming out as trans. During our interview, Zack spoke about the support he received from his mother as a reason he is comfortable sharing this experience with his classmates. His field of experience told him it was alright to disclose when he felt accepted. Zack felt accepted in class and decided to use the opportunity to educate his classmates through communicating a potential duality in the perceptions of trans people.

Passive Rejection. As with passive acceptance, no special action is required to be passive rejection. The difference, however, is that the absence of action in passive rejection is harmful to trans communities. Passive rejection occurs when there is a lack of understanding about an issue, either of its existence or of the magnitude of its harm, resulting in no perceived need to solve the problem. With passive rejection, there is no intent to harm trans students, but

there is also no desire to understand how actions or policies are negatively impacting students.

One example of passive rejection is the unavailability of menstrual products designed for trans men. As some trans men do have their period, menstrual pads have been designed to fit different types of undergarments. These products are not available on campus at this university, despite being useful to some of the university population. Having menstrual products that require women's underwear works well for gender-conforming, ciswomen, or for transmen who wear women's underwear, but not for the trans students who do not wear women's underwear and do not want to express differently while menstruating.

A second example of passive rejection is the lacking availability of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. Drew recognized the gender-neutral bathrooms at this university as lacking, while speaking of necessary changes for the university:

> I have to rush to the one in the Student Union, you know, or, I mean, I think there's another one in like, the newest building, but it's like, there's like two to three. And it's like, that's not enough. You know? It's like there, here's one. Deal with it. We did our job.

Drew's concern with the availability of a safe bathroom was shared by Adan and Grace-Ronaldo, both questioning which bathroom they would use. The administrators at this university either have not been made aware of these issues or do not believe the issues are large enough to correct. This is an important

distinction between active and passive rejection. If the administration is ignoring the issues, rather than working to solve them, this is active rejection. If the administration is not putting in the effort to reach out to trans communities in an attempt to understand their needs, this lack of adequate effort makes this passive rejection.

Towards the end of the interview, Max joked that one of the biggest takeaways from his responses should be "admin sucks." He shared a story detailing his reasoning:

Anytime I have to do forms or something [with administrators], they just kind of suck. Like, I was just, I just had like, an email exchange, like a couple days ago, where I was trying to make an advising appointment. And I signed like, hi, my name is Max like I, you know, I want to make an advising appointment. And then I signed it, Max. And then she answered like, hello, birthname, we're gonna make an appointment with blah blah blah. And then I replied, and I was like, Okay, that sounds good. By the way, my name is Max. I signed it Max. She was like, great and then like a couple minutes later she was like just wanted to remind you of your appointment, birthname, and then I replied, like, please stop calling me birthname. And she was like, Oh, I'm sorry. And then like, finally, and I was like, this happened like seven times in a row. And I was like, are you just not reading? Or are you just ignoring it, but it happens every time I email an administrator, like, they just like will look at the email name

instead of the signature. … I've gotten used to it. It was just like when they

repeatedly do it that it gets annoying. (Max)

To make an advising appointment, Max had to ask multiple times to be called by

his name. He had to make multiple requests before the advisor corrected herself,

but Max still anticipated being deadnamed again at the appointment they

scheduled. Although the emailed responses from the advisor may have been

constructed using an automatic template, had the advisor read the emails this

template could have been adjusted before the seventh email. She did eventually

use his name, rather than his birthname, which means this was a possibility

available to her from the first response. Julian, Adan, and Drew each told their

own stories of being deadnamed by the university, confirming this was not an

isolated event experienced by Max. For these students, there is the expectation

that if your name does not match the legal or deadname required by the

university, the university is not going to use your name. Instead, your identity will

be invalidated by deadnaming in emails sent directly to you from administrators

or university departments. This does not include all emails from listservs sent to

mass audiences, but to those emails personally addressed to your student email,

the email address required for official university interactions.

Passive rejection is also the "little things that you interact with every single

day that just remind you of how kind of invisible you are in these spaces" (Adan).

These are the microaggressions that occur when male and female are the only

options on forms and when male and female restrooms are labeled with dresses

and pants. It is living with a constant fear of being misgendered because it "happens all the time on campus" (Drew), when cis students, faculty, and staff do not realize this is a problem. Passive rejection occurred when Drew watched his boss skimming through the sexual assault prevention training required by all members of this university. To Drew this was not acceptable. Drew explained:

> [Trans people are] also in mind within these trainings, like, when I was doing my training for work they had talked about, like, trans people, like gender but I was like, I had watched my boss do it and he was just kind of like skimming through it, like, kind of just like, quickly going through. It's like, people don't care. People don't care to understand the training and why it's important.

Drew did not believe his boss was taking the training seriously enough, in part because, as Drew argued, he did not care to understand why it was important to learn about sexual assault prevention. There may not be the intent to harm trans communities, but without expending the effort to understand the problems being created or perpetuated, trans communities do suffer.

> *Communication Strategies.* Just as with perceptions of passive acceptance, participants perceiving passive rejection employed nonassertive assimilation, aggressive assimilation, and assertive accommodation strategies. However, there were no examples of assertive assimilation with passive rejection.

Assimilation Strategies. There were three examples of the strategy censoring self, a nonassertive assimilation technique. They all involved being misgendered by campus faculty and staff. The examples of this strategy come from Grace-Ronaldo, Drew, and Max. Grace-Ronaldo described being misgendered by their instructors even after two attempts to correct the instructor's mistake. In this situation, after their accommodation attempts were denied, Grace-Ronaldo employs censoring self with the preferred outcome of assimilating with their fellow students. Grace-Ronaldo described their level of self-acceptance and familial support as the reason for not being more assertive with misgendering corrections. Drew described censoring himself when dealing with faculty and staff. In this instance, Drew's field of experience influenced him to believe the faculty and staff were "higher up" on the social hierarchy. Drew described "feeling tiny" and without the power to correct their misgendering. Because he felt he lacked the power for a more assertive, accommodating approach, Drew chose the nonassertive strategy of censoring himself. He did not correct the faculty or staff in these encounters who misgendered him.

The third example came from Max's communication with campus doctors. From previous experience, he assumes they will call his birth name. At the time of the interview, Max could not think of a single instance of a campus doctor calling his name and could only recall instances of being called by his birth name. He described the process of seeing a campus doctor as an always expected routine, stating:

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I'll go to a doctor's appointment, and they'll like call on my birth name, like,

look around, and then I'll stand up, and then they'll like say it again,

because they're like, you must have misheard me. And I'm like, no, that's

me. And then they'll just like, stare at me for a second and then they'll be

like, okay.

This deadnaming occurred in a public waiting room, sometimes with other

students around, after he had already written his name for the receptionists at the

check-in desk. He has no choice but to go through this process when being seen

by a campus doctor. To expedite the encounter in the public waiting room, Max

chooses to censor his corrections, until after he is in a private location with the

doctor. This approach allows him to avoid a public confrontation regarding his

trans status, which is important, because this encounter disrupts Max's ability to

live as stealth.

Another form of assimilation with passive rejection was the aggressive

assimilation strategy called mirroring. Drew employed this strategy when he felt

passively accepted and when he felt passively rejected. While interacting with

members of faculty he fears might not respect him and accept his gender

identity, he attempts to take on more communicative cues that would be

expected of cismale students. In addition to standing taller and being mindful of

his posture, Drew mentioned strategically deepening his voice while introducing

himself as Drew. He asserts his desire to assimilate into the dominant culture by

taking on what he perceives to be a more masculine sounding voice.

Accommodation Strategies. In the same way Adan utilized the strategy of using liaisons for active acceptance, he uses this strategy while perceiving passive rejection. During his first year at this university, Adan attempted to navigate the "cisheteronormative" and "cishomonormative" contexts around campus. He was able to seek advice and support from trusted cisgender friends who could lend their perspective and experience to assist with his navigation. He explained they were helpful during this period because they "would steer [him] clear from certain people and put [him] towards people that [he] should talk to … and classes [he] needed to take as a trans person at [this university]." Within the contexts Adan perceived as passively, or in some cases actively, rejecting his identities, communicated with liaisons he could trust and be vulnerable with made it easier for him to navigate his first experiences at this university. He knew who to avoid and who to approach, as well as which courses to take to improve his perceptions of this university.

The second assertive accommodation strategy paired with perceptions of passive rejection was obtaining satisfaction. Drew was asked by his boss to dress more professionally and was handed from his boss a women's blazer. Drew relived the story, stating:

> I was wearing my cargo black pants and a dark navy-blue t-shirt. And [my boss told me] I have an assignment to go to and I had to wear like a polo. And I was like, okay, well, I thought what I was wearing was fine. And he was like the President might be there. I was like, I doubt that, but he made

me put on a women's blazer and I was like, um, I had no idea. I, I was

afraid, and I felt like I couldn't say no. So I put it on. I just felt so, I felt so

dysphoric immediately. And I just, like it was awful and he said how does

Drew look and I was like, I know I don't look good … He's like, you look

good. I was like, no, I don't and my coworker, the guy coworker, he was

just like looking at like, I know, he felt so uncomfortable. And I just like I

took it off. And I was like, can I go back to my dorm and just quickly go get

my polo.

In this instance, the strategy obtaining satisfaction was an escalation from an

uncomfortable assimilation to oblige the manager to an assertive demand to be

accommodated. Drew felt powerless to say no to his boss's request and put on

the women's blazer. Soon after, however, his being forced into the center of

prolonged attention and his dysmorphia demanded a more assertive

communication strategy to change that unpleasant situation. The desired

outcome was no longer to assimilate. It was now to be accommodated. He

needed to communicate to his boss his need to be accommodated. This need

impacted the direction of their communication and he demanded satisfaction by

asserting his desire to wear clothing that made him feel more comfortable.

Two Influential Tensions

Although, there are certainly other factors contributing to perceptions of

acceptance versus rejection (e.g., social circles, department, age), the responses

from participants in this study made possible a direct comparison between only two: passing versus not passing and on-campus involvement versus only virtual involvement with this university.

<u>Passing Versus Not Passing</u>

Rodriguez (2020) provides a succinct definition of passing in trans communities: the goal of passing is "to emulate one half of the traditional dichotomy between masculine and feminine appearance as transgender" (p. 33). If you are a transman attempting to pass, you are attempting to present, unquestioned, as a cisman. The same is true for a transwoman attempting to pass as a ciswoman. Of course, as Rodriguez posited, this does exclude those trans individuals who do not live within the gender binary. Passing is not always the goal for trans individuals. However, as previous research on this topic suggests, passing does play a role in perceptions of acceptance (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Max shared his belief that passing does play a role in acceptance at this university, stating:

> I also think it depends on how much you pass. because I have trans friends that don't really pass, and they have way worse campus experiences than me … I just know some people that like professors won't do anything and like administration sucks, because like their voice is high or something.

Throughout the interviews, there were differences in the responses from students who self-identified as stealth, or passing, and those who did not, which lends credibility to Max's statement above.

Max, who identifies as stealth, describes his experience with being misgendered in class. After the university allowed him to change his name on the roster, he says, it has been "pretty chill." He is not misgendered in-class, because of how he passes as a cisman. Once the issue with his name is corrected, the issues in a typical course are corrected. Julian, who identifies as stealth and Zack who has legally changed his paperwork also experience few issues with misgendering in a typical class.

Both Max and Zack shared stories of their experiences prior to going stealth. Max spoke of being assumed a lesbian and of having to drop courses because being misgendered by professors was problematic. Zack lost a friend he was making in class after Zack rejected his romantic advances. His friend, who coded Zack as female, stopped attending the course.

Zack, after dealing with being misgendered during his transitioning process now has the agency to out himself at his discretion, stating his transness only becomes relevant when sharing an experience requiring the understanding that he is trans (Zack). Adan, who spoke of being coded as female and of being misgendered as "a knife in the heart," does not have that same agency in class. Adan spoke of being hurt by the need to out himself but having to do so for safety

issues. He feels safer outing himself and controlling his perception than with being misgendered.

The roster change was not adequate to solve the issues Adan faces, either. Being misgendered in class requires the emotional labor of creating safety for himself and other trans students. He still needs to create the dialogue around transness when his instructors fail to do so. He still has to offer to explain pronouns to classmates and professors, as well as find ways to insert trans perspectives into classroom discussions. Passing does appear to impact perceptions of acceptance in the classroom.

Through day-to-day experiences at this university, passing appears to play a role, as well. Julian uses his personal email to circumvent the problems caused by deadnames in student emails and reported no issues so far. Zack asserts he does not have to think about his transness on a usual day. Max is able to live his life without labels.

The interviews with those who did not go stealth were different. Adan spoke of being aware every day of his gender identity: "we evaluate ourselves every single day, in the spaces that we're in. And we affirm ourselves, deal with body dysmorphia, deal with imposter syndrome, deal with those mental issues that come with the gender identity that we have." Adan has had to seek places to be accepted without judgement and has taken on roles to better the university for the next group of students. Drew, who fears being misgendered, spoke about his on-campus boss never correcting others who misgendered him. Drew felt

powerless as a student to correct administrators and had to internalize their misgendering, saying "I still feel a little below because of how I, you know, express myself and my gender."

The data analysis suggests that passing does play a part in acceptance at a university. The participants' responses from this current study suggest that this factor impacts whether they feel accepted personally at this university.

On-Campus Versus Strictly Virtual Involvement

The second factor that appears to affect whether a trans student believes this university is accepting is whether they have been involved with this university in-person or only online. The responses from participants suggest that this factor impacts whether the student believes this university is accepting of trans communities more generally. Grace-Ronaldo, who did not identify as stealth, Zack, and Julian have never attended classes in person due to the pandemic and perceive this university as accepting of trans communities. When asked whether this university has sent any messages that have made him believe this university is accepting of trans communities, Zack replied, "I'm sure I've gotten some emails talking to me about the club. I've gotten a few maybe recently about something related to transgender." Without being involved on-campus, these messages, and others like them, demonstrate this university's acceptance of trans communities.

Max believes he was accepted at this university on a personal level. However, after his experiences with the admin who are "pretty bad to trans

people" (Max) and with being misgendered by advisors, receptionists, and doctors and with instructors who refused to accommodate his pronouns and name change and with being repeatedly deadnamed by a "bunch of paperwork with my birthname on it" due to his desire to become more involved with campus, Max also believes that this university is not as accepting for trans communities in general. Adan and Drew, who face more daily, gender-based difficulties on campus and who do not self-identify as stealth, agree that this university is struggling with its acceptance of trans communities. Drew described finding campus employment as "a tough battle" for trans students who have to worry about workplace discrimination and who wonder if they're able to "actually present [themselves] as who [they] really [are] and still get the job."

Sofia is the one exception. She has taken classes on campus and does believe this university to be accepting. However, this exception may be explained by her non-traditional student status. She spoke of only attending courses in the evenings and not having time to get involved with campus.

These responses appear to indicate that the more you are involved with this university in-person, the less you believe it is putting in the work to fully accept and support trans communities. Sofia, who was only on campus for classes in the evening, Zack, and Grace-Ronaldo were not familiar with the campus QTR center or the LGBTQ campus club on the main campus. Julian said he thinks he knows of the QTR center. Without even knowing about those resources, those participants believed the campus was accepting of the trans

communities. Grace-Ronaldo assumes this university is accepting simply because it is a university. There are either messages being sent to students to convince them this university is accepting, or messages being communicated to students on-campus that convince them this university is not accepting of the trans communities in general. Either way, campus involvement appears to influence whether a student believes trans communities are more accepted, but more research is needed to better understand which messages the university is sending to sway this belief.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study found multiple levels of acceptance perceived by members of trans communities at this university. It is clear that a variety of factors impact the perceptions of their own acceptance at this university, some in positive ways and others in negative ways. In addition to exploring perceptions of acceptance at this university, this study also sought to better understand how those perceptions impacted communication behaviors. When feeling accepted, trans students are able to communicate their identities in ways that feel authentic to them. This acceptance helps them explore who they are and grow as individuals. However, when their trans identities are rejected, students do not feel like equal members of this university. When rejected, they are forced to become activists as well as students or might choose to separate themselves from campus involvement. This university has taken steps toward actively accepting its trans students. However, before this university can receive its "gold star" (Drew), there are far too many examples of rejection the administration must address. This chapter will discuss the findings of this study, including its theoretical and practical contributions. The various reasons for perceptions of acceptance and rejection will be identified and suggestions for improving this university for its trans communities, as provided by members of the trans communities will be listed. This chapter will end with the limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and concluding remarks.

Findings

The findings are segmented into three main sections. The first is meant to discuss the theoretical contributions of this study. The second section is an overview of practical contributions and situates some of the issues faced by trans communities within the power structures at this university. The practical contributions section also includes a list of suggestions for improving trans experiences at this university provided by the participants of this study.

<u>Theoretical Contributions</u>

This thesis has four theoretical contributions: a research framework for queer theory and standpoint theory together, a comparison of communication strategy selection with different levels of acceptance, an expansion of CCT's communication strategies, and a connection to trans studies research. The first theoretical contribution is an additional example of a successful queer standpoint framework. This thesis was shaped by two competing theoretical frameworks: feminist standpoint theory and queer theory. These frameworks are often considered at odds with one another because standpoint theory relies on essentialist categories (Dougherty & Krone, 2000; Hekman, 1997), while queer theory finds this type of fixed, generalized category problematic (Abes, 2007; Slagle, 2003). As discussed in chapter three, standpoint theory is useful for analyzing social dynamics for groups of people. The groups are identified by locating individuals and their placement in power hierarchies (Caresse, 2011), which was useful for this study, as I intended to understand the perceptions of

trans students of their own acceptance within the power hierarchies of this university. In order to benefit from queer theory's call to unmask power dynamics in the visible and invisible, I needed to create temporary categories, based on truths and experiences shared by research participants at the time of their interviews.

Pairing these theories was useful for critically observing power dynamics affecting trans students at this university and explaining the findings using familiar categories (i.e., transmen & gender non-conforming people), rather than as occurrences with individual students in isolation. Although I was careful not to generalize all trans students, finding similarities between participants suggested similar positions on the power hierarchy of this university, which allowed for the creation of larger temporary categories (e.g., trans students on campus & trans students who have only attended this university virtually). Forming these temporary categories allowed for an exploration of the experiences of trans students using a queer lens. For example, I was able to identify possible issues faced by students who have actively participated on-campus versus those who have not, by comparing responses to questions about acceptance and opportunities at this university. I believe this will be beneficial for research going forward, as it provides a guide for using queer theory with temporary essentialist groups created specifically from the data of each study, without simply ignoring queer theory's call for non-essentialist arguments.

The second theoretical contribution was a comparison of co-cultural communication strategies with different levels of perceived acceptance. It was useful to identify perceptions of acceptance before exploring communication strategies using CCT. This allowed me to focus on the role of context, specifically perceptions of acceptance, in communication strategy selection. Although context is a fundamental aspect of CCT (Orbe, 1998a), no previous studies have examined the communication strategy selections between the same participants as the perceptions of acceptance change in different contexts.

When participants perceived acceptance at this university, there were no examples of separation strategies. This was true for both passive and active acceptance. Both passive and active acceptance involved examples of assertive accommodation. When feeling accepted in the communication contexts, the participants chose communication strategies that allowed them to seek accommodation for their marginalized cultures. Active acceptance included communicating self, using liaisons, and intergroup networking as strategies to seek accommodation. With perceptions of passive acceptance came the strategy of educating others about trans issues. What is clear is that when supported and accepted most of the trans participants chose to be involved with campus as members of their marginalized communities. They felt comfortable enough to assert their right to be accommodated.

However, there is one difference between active and passive communication. Namely, when participants felt only passively accepted as

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members of trans communities, they employed a variety of assimilation strategies. This was not the case for active acceptance. With passive acceptance, participants attempted to remain silent when faced with discrimination, to make deals with members of the dominant culture, and to strategically code themselves as members of the dominant group while distancing themselves from their marginalized identities. This could be a result of feeling accepted enough to not feel the need to separate from the dominant culture, but also not accepted enough as members of a marginalized community to assert that identity.

When participants perceived rejection in the communication context, there were examples of assimilation, accommodation, and separation strategies. The students had to choose between communication strategies that would allow them to assimilate, take activist roles, or stop attempting to change the power structures governed by the dominant culture. With active rejection came the activist strategy of educating others. Participants who felt actively rejected also chose to avoid interactions with members of the dominant culture. With passive acceptance came censoring self and mirroring to assimilate and using liaisons and obtaining satisfaction to assist with navigating less accepting spaces. The appearance of the separation strategy only occurs when participants felt actively rejected at this university. These students distanced themselves from the microaggressions and discrimination, rather than attempt to change the communication environments.

When comparing acceptance versus rejection, many of the same communication orientations are present. With active acceptance, all three strategies were assertive accommodation. With active rejection, two of the three strategies were assertive accommodation strategies. The difference between these assertive accommodation strategies is the context in which they are situated. Rather than feeling comfortable enough to share information about trans identities with acceptance, the accommodation is more of an attempt to force a change in what the dominant cultures accept. The examples that come to mind are Drew creating art to communicate aspects of himself after feeling supported by the art department and, by contrast, Adan speaking up for trans folks after the problematic events in his women as agents of change course forced him to continue his activist work.

When comparing passive acceptance to passive rejection, we see the same communication orientations with nonassertive assimilation, aggressive assimilation, and assertive accommodation. This time, however, the contexts do not provide so neat a contrast as with active acceptance and rejection. It is not clear from the data whether the students who experienced passive acceptance attempted to assimilate because they did not feel their trans status was accepted. With Max, Julian, and Zack, the reason for their aggressive assimilation strategies were because they wanted to be perceived as cismen. However, Drew's assimilation technique of straightening his posture may be because he did not perceive active acceptance of his "slouch" (Drew). He could

be straightening his back for the same reason he deepens his voice when experiencing perceptions of passive rejection: he wants his identity as a man to be accepted by the other communication participants. Six of the seven participants of this study spoke of being in environments in which they felt accepted or rejected. Sofia only spoke of feeling accepted. This study was able to directly explore the impact of perceptions of acceptance on the selection of communication strategies.

The third theoretical contribution is the addition of the assertive accommodation strategy obtaining satisfaction. This strategy serves as a final step in assertive accommodation, just before aggressive accommodation. Aggressive accommodation is characterized by taking away the choice to accommodate or not from members of the dominant group (Orbe 1998b). For example, threatening a lawsuit if accommodations are not made. Assertive accommodation does not take the choice away from the dominant group but does actively communicate your desire to be accommodated. Obtaining satisfaction does still allow for the dominant group member to deny your accommodation (e.g., Drew's boss could have denied his request to change clothes), but it does strongly assert your intent to be accommodated more forcefully than other assertive accommodation communication strategies. Rather than stretching the definition of an existing category to fit this type of communication, I chose to create a new category. This additional strategy may prove beneficial to future studies using co-cultural theory.

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The final theoretical contribution is the more general connection between this thesis and trans experience research. Although this thesis only focuses on one university campus, it does contribute to a larger body of research surrounding trans student experiences at universities worldwide. There were similar findings regarding passing leading to higher perceptions of acceptance between my study and others (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; Pusch, 2005), which can be used to support the notion that this is not isolated to one campus or university location. Future research can include this thesis in a wider analysis of trans student experiences throughout academia.

Practical Contributions

This thesis includes three major practical contributions for this university: reasons for perceptions of acceptance or rejection, strategies for increasing the acceptance of trans communities, and a list of suggestions to improve this university created by members of the trans communities at this university. The first practical contribution is an overview of acceptance versus rejection and potential reasons for perceiving acceptance or rejection. There were four levels of acceptance, defined throughout the analysis chapter, which were identified through coding the interview data (i.e., active acceptance, active rejection, passive acceptance, & passive rejection). There were two tensions that appear to be tied to acceptance of gender identity and expression communicated by the trans students who participated in this study (i.e., passing versus not passing & on-campus versus strictly virtual involvement).

Passing versus not passing was linked to perceptions of acceptance on an individual level. To the trans respondents who identify as stealth, their own perceived acceptance was greater than for those who do not identify as stealth. By Max's own responses, his experience improved along with his ability to blend in with cismen. Julian described the biggest hardship he has regarding his gender identity at this university is when his student email does not allow him to pass as cisgender. This should not be the case. Acceptance should never be tied to perceptions of passing as cisgender. Trans students should not have to blend in to feel fully and unquestionably accepted at this university. Yet, Drew's fear of being invalidated through being misgendered is realized far too often.

The second tension, on-campus or virtual involvement was linked to perceptions of acceptance of trans communities in general. For those participants who have lived, worked, or participated in student organizations in-person at this university, there are issues with acceptance at this university. Whether being misgendered by staff and faculty (e.g., doctors, professors, counselors), audibly mocked by students, or having too few safe spaces to exist without judgement (e.g., gender-neutral bathrooms, in close social circles, academic departments, the library), these students are feeling the effects of this inequality. Passing or not and on-campus or virtual involvement are both variables for perceptions of acceptance at a university where students should feel accepted regardless.

The second practical contribution are ways to increase the levels of perceived acceptance of trans students at this university. There was one issue that transcended passing or not and on-campus involvement versus virtual involvement. This was the student email address. The student email address, the primary method of contact for this university and the required email for official campus business, an email address easily taken for granted by cis students, creates numerous hardships for trans students whose name does not match the legal name this university requires. Even for trans students who are stealth and can avoid much of the day-to-day hardships, the email is an issue. The email address outs students as trans when working with other students virtually on student collaboration. It outs students as trans when emailing admins, who do not always respect expressed name corrections. It outs students as trans when emailing professors, even after changing their names on the class rosters. Despite this university's institutional learning outcomes encouraging students to participate in the campus community (Office of Academic Programs, 2021) and touting engagement as "critical" to an academic journey (Office of Student Engagement, 2021), the deadname in an email discourages some students from being involved in campus organizations or student employment, by forcing a choice between not getting involved on campus or dealing with multiple occurrences of identity invalidation through deadnaming. It cannot be denied that this creates a type of unequal experience for only trans students to go through.

Another big issue is that some students feel the need to separate themselves from the dominant culture of this university. This can be an issue for less assertive students or students who are not prone to activist work. If perceptions of rejection lead to separation strategies, these students may miss opportunities to participate in high-impact practices that require campus involvement. This is an outcome this university needs to work to avoid. There is no excuse for doctors to stare at a student they deadnamed in the waiting room (Max) or for a trans male to be asked to wear women's clothing at their campus job (Drew). There is no excuse for trans students to feel as though, in addition to trying to succeed as a student, they must take up the bulk of trans activist work the campus fails to support (Adan). More solutions to these issues were provided by the trans participants of this study as the third practical contribution.

The third practical contribution of this study is a list of ways to improve this university for trans students. The interviews ended by asking each participant a hypothetical question: "what changes would you implement if you were declared the unquestioned leader of [this university]?" The following is a synthesis of these changes. This list is not merely my suggestions but was inspired by the responses of this study's participants. If you recognize these needs or know of solutions, do not dismiss them. They are the hopes for improving our campus, directly from members of trans communities. There were three university-level suggestions:

1. University administration should be more vocal with their advocacy for trans issues and needs. The university should be more deliberate when ensuring trans students feel comfortable and have the same opportunities around campus.

   a. Trans students should be invited to the table to discuss how they are affected by all aspects of this university, even those taken for granted as cis topics (e.g., birth control, pregnancy).

   b. Trans students should feel empowered to make complaints, knowing the university will take them seriously.

   c. There should be more queer representation around campus.

      i. The trans flag should fly.

      ii. There should be queer therapists, administrators, and professors.

   d. The university should create a video that teaches about trans identities and bullying and how we can be more inclusive.

   e. A gender studies course should be a requirement for every student.

   f. Queer and trans students should never feel they are not being treated with respect and with human dignity in academia.

      i. Queer and trans students should be compensated for their activist labor.

      ii. Queer and trans students should receive the same accolades as cis students doing the same work.

2. This university should audit its use of gender specific norms. Not everything needs to be (cis)gendered.

   a. There should be more gender diversity in sexual assault trainings, so that trans students feel they are included in attempts to make all students safer on campus.

   b. Menstrual pads for masculine underwear should be available in stores and menstrual products should be available in all restrooms.

   c. There should be more gender-neutral restrooms on campus so that trans students who rely on these do not have to rush to certain buildings.

      i. Single-occupant restrooms with a locking door are safe for everyone.

3. This university should allow for more authentic identities on official documents.

   a. The names on campus emails need to reflect true names, not deadnames.

   b. There should be no gender boxes to check that are exclusively male or female.

   c. The names on campus ID cards should allow for the inclusion of true names, instead of only deadnames.

There were three faculty and staff-level suggestions.

1. Faculty and staff should be required to take gender-sensitivity training seriously.
   a. This is a campus of diverse students who may need to rely on faculty and staff to know what to do in difficult situations covered by these trainings.
2. Faculty and staff should respect and use the proper identities of the students.
   a. Students may face many institutional and personal barriers when trying to legally change their names. This legal change should not be a requirement to feel their identity is respected.
   b. Faculty and staff should learn about pronouns so that their use becomes natural for all.
3. Every syllabus should declare the classroom a safe space and every professor should take that seriously.
   a. Curriculum should be open for debate.
   b. Queer and trans histories need to be included even if they make students or professors uncomfortable.

The campus's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Board should take these suggestions as opportunities to enact positive changes for these campus communities. If the goal is to foster equity and inclusion, then making the efforts to learn from marginalized communities is an absolutely necessary step for this board and for all members of this university.

This study can also contribute outside of this university to other universities attempting to improve the conditions for marginalized communities, specifically trans communities. Student emails, student centers, student IDs, rosters, and administrative staff are now commonplace at colleges and universities. Each of these provides hardships and opportunities for improvement that can be used as guides for other universities.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study. First, only seven trans students volunteered to be interviewed. Although I am grateful for every one of them, the study would have benefited from comparing the experiences of more participants. With campus being closed due to COVID-19, I was not able to recruit students in-person. However, it may have been worthwhile to have included in the solicitation emails sent to instructors a request to speak about this research in their Zoom sessions. It is definitely true that a more robust recruitment effort was needed to reach more trans students. The second limitation of this study is that the conversations naturally flowed into topics of acceptance more so than to topics of navigating transness. Therefore, this study did not benefit from a wider variety of gender expressions and experiences of navigating gender identity on campus. This expanded variety of gender identities and expressions would have allowed for a deeper comparison between

expressions self-identified as passing and those that were not self-identified as passing, which would have added more data to the passing or not tension.

Future Research

Future research should be conducted to identify the perspectives of transwomen on campus, as this thesis did not include any transwomen-identified participants. Future research should also include comparisons of trans students of different majors. There were two participants who spoke highly of their levels of acceptance within their major. It would be worthwhile to compare the experiences of students from different majors to determine the impact this has on their perceptions of campus. Finally, future research should be conducted at the satellite campus of this university. That campus is different in size, population, and location and it has had an, albeit inactive, LGBTQ club for much longer than the main campus.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis was undertaken as an effort to better understand the perceptions of trans students of their own acceptance at this university and what contributing factors were at play. Through one-on-one interviews with seven trans students at this university and a thematic analysis with a queer lens, we were able to uncover a variety of factors contributing to their perceptions of acceptance. These included passing versus not passing, participating with this

university on campus or virtually, as well as factors this thesis did not explore (e.g., age and academic major). The results of this study suggest the perceptions of acceptance on an individual level increase with the ability to pass as cisgender and that perceptions of acceptance of trans communities in general decrease with more involvement on-campus at this university. Using co-cultural communication theory, it was shown that as feelings of acceptance increase, so do supported and welcomed opportunities to assert a desire to be accommodated as a member of a marginalized community. It was also found that when participants chose to separate themselves from the dominant culture, it was due to feelings of active rejection and discrimination.

As noted in the researcher's position statement, I have been involved with campus in nearly every way possible for a student (viz., student employee, club president, elected representative, academic advisor, representative on campus-wide committees, forensics team member, undergrad, graduate student, instructor). It was eye-opening and disappointing to learn that not every student at this university can benefit from these positions without deciding to undergo the mental hardship of seeing their identities invalidated through deadnaming. College should be a time for all students to be supported and accepted enough to grow. It is my hope that this thesis can be used by those in power or those finding their own power to not only understand a problem exists at this university, but to use the words of trans students to make the positive changes they have suggested.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Opening

   I.   Greeting

      a.   Hello, thank you for helping out with this thesis. My name is Sean Maulding. I am finishing up my thesis at California State University, San Bernardino.

  II.   Purpose of interview

      a.   We'll be talking today about your experiences at [your university] that you believe are related to your gender identity or expression.

      b.   This interview is part of my study, which seeks to better understand the perspectives of trans students at [your university] of their own acceptance at [your university].

 III.   Structure of interview

      a.   This interview is going to be informal and semi-structured. I'm hoping it will be conversational. I'm interested in knowing about your experience at this university.

      b.   There are directions I might need to steer the conversation from time to time, but it's perfectly alright to move topics around or to go in directions you feel are important.

 IV.   Informed Consent

      a.   I have your informed consent form and just want to remind you of a few items.

          i.   This entire interview and all of the information revealed during it will be kept entirely confidential. Your name will be changed, as will all names that are brought up.
        ii.   You have the right to withdraw from the research at any point, even after our conversation today, with absolutely no penalties. All of the information you provided me during this interview will be removed from my data, should you ask to withdraw.
      iii.   This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.
  V.   Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions/Discussion Prompts

These first few questions are about terminology. It is important that I use the correct words.

   1.   How do you define trans, in your own words?

      a.   Do you write trans or trans*?

   2.   Would you say there is a trans community at [your university] or that there are trans communities, or both?

   3.   What words or descriptors do you use to identify your gender?

   4.   This study deals with perceptions of acceptance. How would you define acceptance?

      a.   Are there any other words, besides acceptance that you would consider the goal in an ideal world?

i.　(If yes) how would we define those terms?

Thank you. These next questions are about your experiences at [your university].

5. Are you living openly as (their identity descriptor/s) at [your university]?

   a. What does/would living openly look like for you?

   b. (If no) is there any part of [your university] that stops you from living openly as (their gender descriptor/s)?

6. Outside of the university, are you living openly as (their identity descriptor/s)?

7. Let's ask the big, two-part question: what is your perception of your own acceptance at [your university] and what is your perception of the acceptance of the trans community at [your university]? We can think about this as between people, in relationships, or with the university itself (classes, policies, resources, structures, etc.).

   a. Why do you suppose that is?

8. Let's talk a bit about identity formation, and that connection, or lack thereof, to [your university]. Is there anything specific about our university, as related to gender identity formation or understanding, that is different from the outside world?

   a. If yes, would you be comfortable sharing some examples of how these differences have affected you?

9. Did this university, the university itself (policies, classes, structures, services, etc.), play any part in your gender identity formation?

   a. How about in your gender expression?

10. What about with your relationships with the people on campus (students, staff, instructors)? Has this part of your university experience been affected by your gender identity? If so, in what ways?

11. How do you navigate your transness while on campus?

12. As you go about your day at [your university], are there times when you are more and times when you are less aware of your gender identity playing a role?

   a. Would you mind sharing some examples of this?

13. Do you believe that members of the trans communities have the same opportunities for campus involvement (clubs, centers, jobs, student government, events, committees, Greek Life, etc.) as do non-trans students? Would you mind if we talked about that?

This second to last bit puts you as the hypothetical unquestioned leader of [your university]. What you say goes.

14. You're creating the ideal [university] for the trans communities here. What does our campus look like when you're the unquestioned leader?

   a. (If changes are proposed) what is the first thing you do?

One final bit.

15. Do you have anything else you would like me to know about your experiences or those of the trans communities?

16. Is there something we did not cover that you believe needs to be covered?

Closing

I.   Final Check

    a.   Do you have any questions for me about the study now that the interview is complete?

II.   Thanks

    a.   Thank you for taking part in this interview. I really do appreciate your help with this research. Be safe and enjoy the rest of your day.

APPENDIX B

CODING SAMPLE

First Level Coding

I think a good thing that any university should have is to sort of, I don't know how to say this, but like annihilate gendered bathrooms, because like, you know, you go into a restaurant and they've only got like that one bathroom with like the door and like the lock on it sort of deal.	[Redacted Location] should get rid of gendered bathrooms
But like anybody can use that bathroom, it's like, there's no reason why you can't have like, non binary or like gender neutral bathrooms, throughout campus, to sort of like, kill hassle.	No reason to not have gender neutral bathrooms

Lack of gender neutral bathrooms is a hassle |
| And also ensure that like you are safe when you're in the bathroom. | |
| Because I know a lot of trans people are very nervous about going into their bathroom of choice, because what if there is somebody in there who's transphobic | Knows trans people who are nervous in gendered bathrooms |

and is going to attack me while I'm trying to use the bathroom.	Trans concern about being attacked in bathroom
I think having like the personal sort of stall thing where you can, like close and lock that door is like defeats that problem, it makes it safe, and you don't have to deal with anybody, and people can't safeguard that bathroom from you, etc.	Single stall with lock makes bathrooms safe
It's such a small thing, but it makes a difference to have bathrooms like that.	Small thing, but single stall bathrooms make a difference
And honestly, they should be everywhere. Like, there's no reason to have a gendered bathroom.	No reason for gendered bathroom anymore
At least not anymore. Cuz like you hear in the news, like all the time we're trans, like people who are ignorant about trans people always say that, like trans women are just trying to get into women's	

bathrooms so they can peep on them or whatever.	
Like, it's always very assumed that trans women are very predatory, of ciswomen.	
And you would defeat that with the, the inclusion of like, these personal sort of bathrooms.	
Other than that, though, I don't know.	
I mean, you could very similarly to the acceptance thing, if you just made resources available to trans people who need them, and like, advocated that they were there.	[Redacted Location] could make resources available for trans people [Redacted Location] should advertise that they have resources
Like, all campuses have like their bookstore that has like your basic things that you need.	

And I know, they probably have like, basic essentials like menstrual pads, etc.	
Like if they advocated to those being available to like everyone, or like they also like sold like those gender neutral menstrual menstrual pads, etc.	[Redacted Location] should advocate for menstrual pads being for everyone
Or ones made specifically for like men's underwear.	
Like that would also be something that like is very inclusive towards trans people, and like, helpful to like, knowing that they are being accommodated for on campus, just like anybody else.	Should have products trans people need.
I can't think of anything else, but I think that's a good place to start.	Having products and gender neutral bathrooms is a good start

So I think acceptance is kind of just making not making trans people's lives hard on campus, you know, like, have them have the same kind of experiences as everyone else, you know.	Acceptance= not making trans lives harder on campus Acceptance= trans have same experiences as cis
Cuz like, my ID, and every time I email to the university I'm like, they don't care, you know, they're just.	ID= dead name Email admin= dead name Admins don't care about pronouns or names
So like, make things balanced.	
You know, they don't have to, like have trans pride everywhere or like, have, you know, like, extra things for us just kind of a balanced thing.	Not asking for trans pride everywhere Not asking for extras for trans people Acceptance= balance for trans and nontrans
So I would say like, that's what [Redacted Location] should strive for.	
Pretty much acceptance.	

You know, everyone doesn't have to agree with it. Like all the faculty and staff to just like, be nice about it	Not everyone has to agree with trans Everyone, faculty and staff, have to be nice about it.
The reason why I feel it's performative is like the pronoun thing. It's like, okay, you did that, but you're not putting it to work, you're not putting it to action. So it's like you say these things, but do something else. And I know that we have like, a, the QRTC or something the queer center. And I've only been in there once, but I don't really feel like comfortable, even though that's like my space.	Adding pronouns but not putting in the work to use them Say one thing and do something else Visited QTR center once Did not feel comfortable in QTR center

I just didn't feel comfortable.	
You know, it was a bunch of like, white queer people and I was like, and I'm a, I'm a Hispanic Chicano person, you know?	QTR Center was a bunch of white queer people Hispanic chicano
I didn't feel so like comfortable even though like, you know, I'm sure I was accepted.	Believes he was accepted in the QTR Center
It's like, I didn't feel comfortable there.	
And so I just made my own, like, safe space with my friends.	Made own safe space among friends
You know, that's where I felt the most comfortable. but, like, the school, I feel that the school can do so much for its trans and non-cis students.	Feels most comfortable with friends School can do so much for trans and non-cis students
Because the pronouns thing, I mean it's great, you know, great.	

But you're not putting it to work.	
You're not you're the people who work there don't they don't read.	People who work at school don't read pronouns
You know, they don't read between the lines and actually, like, put it to action.	
So it's like, what are you doing for us? Really?	Wonders what the school is doing for noncis students
yeah, it's like, people just think oh, I'm, I'm, it's like, oh, a gold star for me.	
Because I put my pronouns at the end of my email.	
You know, it's like, just they think it's a gold star.	Putting pronouns gets you a gold star *sarcastic

Like they're doing something but like, yeah, you're doing something but are you actually fulfilling that something?	Doing something but not fulfilling that something
Are you actually crossing the line to actually fulfill people like, the actual thing like oh, reading people emails and reading the signature and their names.	
Are you actually reading that?	
Or are you just skimming through it and not paying attention to the fine details?	Skimming, but not reading names and pronouns

Second and Third Level Coding

First Level	Second Level	Third Level
[Redacted Location] should get rid of gendered bathrooms	Changing [Redacted Location]	Suggestions

No reason to not have gender neutral bathrooms	Changing [Redacted Location]	
Lack of gender neutral bathrooms is a hassle	Hassle cis people don't face.	
Knows trans people who are nervous in gendered bathrooms	Hassle cis people don't face. Feeling unsafe	Rejection Trans as reason for hardship
Trans concern about being attacked in bathroom	Hassle cis people don't face. Feeling unsafe	Rejection Trans as reason for hardship
Single stall with lock makes bathrooms safe	Changing [Redacted Location] Safety	
Small thing, but single stall bathrooms make a difference	Changing [Redacted Location] Small change	
No reason for gendered bathroom anymore		
[Redacted Location] could make resources available for trans people	Make available Changing [Redacted Location]	Active Acceptance

[Redacted Location] should advertise that they have resources	Doing Something	Active
[Redacted Location] should advocate for menstrual pads being for everyone	Changing [Redacted Location] Resources	Active
Should have products trans people need.	Changing [Redacted Location] Resources	Active
Having products and gender neutral bathrooms is a good start	Changing [Redacted Location] Start More to come	Active
Acceptance= not making trans lives harder on campus	Acceptance Currently harder Actions	Active
Acceptance= trans have same experiences as cis	Balance Not more difficult	Passive Balanced
ID= dead name	Resource Required Deadname	Rejection Unbalanced
Email admin= dead name	Communicating	Rejection

	Hardship	
Admins don't care about pronouns or names	Don't care	Rejection
Not asking for trans pride everywhere		Balance
Not asking for extras for trans people		Balance
Acceptance= balance for trans and nontrans		Acceptance Balance
Not everyone has to agree with trans	Agree or disagree	
Everyone, faculty and staff, have to be nice about it.	Agree or disagree Changing [Redacted Location] Respect	
Adding pronouns but not putting in the work to use them	Performance Pointless Fashionable	Performative Activism
Visited QTR center once		
Did not feel comfortable in QTR center	Center wasn't comfortable Perceived discomfort	

QTR Center was a bunch of white queer people	White students Not diverse enough Lacking	Not enough
Hispanic chicano		
Believes he was accepted in the QTR Center	Perception of acceptance	Accepting
Made own safe space among friends	Action Create safe space	Active Social Support
Feels most comfortable with friends	Accepting Comforting	Acceptance Social Group Social Circle
School can do so much for trans and non-cis students	Longing Change [Redacted Location]	Rejection
People who work at school don't read pronouns		Rejection
Wonders what the school is doing for non cis students	School is not advertising acceptance	Messages from [Redacted Location]
Putting pronouns gets you a gold star *sarcastic		Performative

Doing something but not fulfilling that something		Performative Actions
Skimming, but not reading names and pronouns		Performative Acceptance

Codes to Themes

[Redacted Location] could make resources available for trans people Should have products trans people need. Having products and gender neutral bathrooms is a good start	Active Acceptance
Acceptance= not making trans lives harder on campus ID= dead name Not asking for trans pride everywhere	Passive Acceptance

Acceptance= balance for trans and nontrans Acceptance= balance for trans and nontrans Not everyone has to agree with trans Believes he was accepted in the QTR Center Feels most comfortable with friends Made own safe space among friends	
Adding pronouns but not putting in the work to use them Say one thing and do something else Putting pronouns gets you a gold star *sarcastic	Performative Acceptance

Doing something but not fulfilling that something Skimming, but not reading names and pronouns	
Email admin= dead name Admins don't care about pronouns or names People who work at school don't read pronouns	Passive Rejection
[Redacted Location] should get rid of gendered bathrooms	Suggestions

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for [Redacted Location]Students

This research has been approved the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB).

Part 1: Information Sheet

The Researcher: I am Sean Maulding, a graduate student of CSUSB in the communication studies department. I am conducting this study under the guidance of Dr. Julie Taylor, a professor of communication studies in the same department. My research focuses primarily on queer and trans communication, which has led to this current study.

This form is your invitation to participate in this study. My contact information is listed at the bottom of this form, so that you may contact me for further information before deciding whether to participate. If there are any words or concepts with which you are unfamiliar, please reach out and I can help you understand them.

The Research: This current study, which will result in a master's thesis, seeks to understand the perceptions of acceptance and inclusion of the trans communities at [your university], from the standpoints of trans students, themselves. This study will be informed by your experiences as a trans student at [your university] that you believe to be affected by your gender identity or expression.

Participation: Participation in this study would require an interview conducted, either through email or Zoom. The emailed interview will begin with the same list of questions drafted for the Zoom interview and may require optional follow-up responses. The Zoom interview will last approximately forty-five minutes. With your permission, a follow-up interview may also be conducted. Both options will be semi-structured, conversational interviews that will explore your experiences with and at [your university], with an emphasis on those affected by your gender identity or expression. You may skip or refuse to answer any question or questions during the interview.

Your participation, even after signing this form, is completely voluntary and can be withdrawn, along with the information you provided, at any point until the final thesis is submitted. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from this study.

Risks: It is possible that these interviews may cause some psychological discomfort. The contact information for our university's counseling and psychological center has been provided below, for anyone who needs this information.

Counseling and Psychological Services' Phone Number: [redacted for confidentiality].

Benefits: This thesis will contribute to a larger body of research regarding the levels of acceptance and inclusion of trans communities at universities around the world. This thesis will also be submitted to the Office of Student Affairs at [this university], so that the university may learn from your experiences.

Confidentiality: With your permission, these interviews will be recorded for accuracy of transcription. Use of the webcam feature is not required. All names, including yours and any others you share during the interviews, will be changed for privacy and security during the transcription process. The recordings will not be viewed by anybody except for me and will be securely deleted once the transcripts have been typed. All data collected will be remain confidential and stored on a password-protected flash drive kept securely in a private desk drawer.

Primary Contact	**Secondary Contact**
Sean Maulding	For any issues related to participant's rights or
(760)-927-6413	injuries, please contact Dr. Julie Taylor.
Sean.Maulding@csusb.edu	Julie.Taylor@csusb.edu

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

Audiovisual Recording Consent

Please initial the lines below to give consent.

_____ I understand the zoom interviews will be recorded and consent to these recordings.

_____ I understand these recordings will be kept confidential and securely deleted after the   transcripts

     have been typed.

_____ I decline to be audio-visually recorded, but still consent to being interviewed.

General Consent

_____ I understand my participation in this study is completely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any

     time, until the thesis is finalized, without penalty.

_____ I have been provided with a copy of the full consent form that I may keep for my personal records.

I have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

 Participant Name   Participant Signature

_____   _____

_____

Today's Date

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL

September 21, 2020

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB-FY2021-22
Status: Approved

Prof. Julie Taylor and Sean Maulding
CAL – Communications
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Prof. Taylor and Sean Maulding:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Inclusivity in practice: A queer examination of the acceptance of the trans communities at [university] from the standpoints of the trans communities at [university]" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. Important Note: This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit the Office of Academic Research website for more information at https://www.csusb.edu/academic-research.

The study is approved as of September 21, 2020. The study will require an annual administrative check-in (annual report) on the current status of the study on September 21, 2021. Please use the renewal form to complete the annual report. If your study is closed to enrollment, the data has been de-identified, and you're only analyzing the data - you may close the study by submitting the Closure Application Form through the Cayuse IRB system. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study. Please note a lapse in your approval may result in your not being able to use the data collected during the lapse in your approval.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the
IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission Webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.

- Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implementing in your study.

- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events experienced by subjects during your research.

- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risks and benefits to the human participants in your IRB application. If you have any questions about the IRBs decision please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2021-22 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive regarding your research from participants or others should be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.
Sincerely,

Nicole Dabbs

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

ND/MG

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