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# What Is Needed, What Is Valued: Trans Students' Perspectives on Trans-Inclusive Policies and Practices in Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study of 507 trans and gender-nonconforming students (75% undergraduate, 25% graduate) aimed to understand (a) what institutional factors are associated with the presence of more trans-inclusive policies/supports, (b) what trans-inclusive policies/supports are viewed as important by different groups of trans students, and (c) how the presence of such policies/supports is related to trans students' sense of belonging on campus and their perception of campus climate. Results indicated that religiously affiliated institutions and two-year institutions tend to lag behind in their inclusivity of trans students. Gender-inclusive restrooms, nondiscrimination policies that are inclusive of gender identity, and the ability to change one's name on campus records without legal name change were among the supports that students valued most. Students articulated many concrete suggestions for institutions seeking to be more inclusive of their trans students. The known presence of trans-inclusive policies/supports was related to a greater sense of belonging and more positive perceptions of campus climate. These findings provide consultants and practitioners with guidance in identifying and promoting systems-level changes needed to support trans students.

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Although only a modest literature exists on the experiences of transgender (trans) students in higher education, research is consistent in showing that these students are exposed to implicit and explicit forms of marginalization and victimization. As Beemyn (2003), Beemyn (in press), and Seelman (2014a) have noted, there is a need for greater attention—by higher education administrators and consultants—to the systematic ways in which college/university structures and practices serve to privilege and uphold the gender binary, thereby rendering trans students vulnerable to negative personal and academic outcomes. Furthermore, there is a need for greater

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understanding of what can be done to transform the highly gendered, trans-exclusionary culture of college and university campuses into more trans-inclusive and trans-sensitive settings, which may in turn have powerful effects on trans students' emotional and physical well-being.

The current study, which focuses on trans students in higher education, draws from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems model of human development, which emphasizes the role of various systems—from proximal microsystems, such as families and neighborhoods, to the larger societal macrosystem—in shaping individuals' development and well-being. For students in higher education, the *microsystem* encompasses social and physical proximal forces, such as family, religious institutions, and the university. The university system itself encompasses multiple domains, including faculty, students, staff, and policies, and curricula that communicate institutional norms (Hickey, Harrison, & Sumsion, 2012). The *mesosystem* represents interactions between these microsystems, such as the interrelationships between religious and university contexts. The *exosystem* consists of those systems affecting the individual's development in which the individual does not participate and encompasses state and national policies, including government policies and national educational policies. Finally, the *macrosystem* represents the broader cultural context.

To have an impact on individual well-being, it is often necessary to intervene within these various contexts—particularly educational systems, which play a major role in enhancing or undermining academic, social, and psychological functioning among youth (Gutkin, 2012; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). Thus, we specifically draw from Meyers, Meyers, and Grogg (2004, 2012) ecological approach to organizational consultation, which can be applied to the challenge of assessing, and informing critical systems change within, higher educational settings. According to Meyers et al. (2012), “to serve children optimally from an ecological perspective, professionals such as counselors, psychologists, social workers ... educators, and administrators must provide effective services to the educational systems in which children are embedded” (p. 107). To enhance youth outcomes, then, consultants must look beyond individual students or teachers to assess the entire educational system, including the learning environment, curriculum, climate, policies, and resources within that system, with the goal of informing systemic change that can ultimately benefit many students (Gutkin, 2012). Indeed, assessment and diagnosis of problems within the multiple domains of the college mesosystem—in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including trans students and faculty—can lead to effective intervention and systems-level change, which can enhance student outcomes (Meyers et al., 2012; Meyers, Meyers, Proctor, & Graybill, 2009).

Over the past few decades, institutions of higher education have become increasingly aware of the need for organizational consultation focused specifically on countering systemic inequities and marginalization. This has

resulted in an increasing demand for diversity consultants (e.g., psychologists, educators) to provide expert evaluation and input and to support efforts aimed at reducing disparities and injustices related to race, gender, and sexual orientation (Schmidt, 2016). School consultation professionals are equipped to play a pivotal role in facilitating socially just educational practices, given their familiarity with educational ecologies, and the myriad ways in which students are marginalized or mistreated as a result of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism (Shriberg & Fenning, 2009). As agents of social justice, school consultation professionals should consider how educational practices are implemented within, and reflect the biases of, their broader social and cultural context. Further, they should seek to find socially just solutions to challenges facing individuals and educational institutions, attending in particular to the needs of individuals who have been oppressed via larger systemic biases (Shriberg & Fenning, 2009). For example, consultants have an important role in examining educational practices and procedures, such as university policies, forms, and teaching practices, as well as broader norms and policies (e.g., government policies related to trans students), all of which intersect with one another and ultimately shape campus climate (Meyers et al., 2012; Shriberg & Fenning, 2009). In turn, intervention in one domain (e.g., university policies) may have implications for others (e.g., classroom or residential life practices), thus impacting school climate and student outcomes.

Our approach to this study, then, is informed by a model of organizational consultation that incorporates attention to social justice, whereby groups that are marginalized or silenced by the dominant culture are considered front and center in evaluating the need for and ways of achieving systems-level change (Clare, 2013; Shriberg & Fenning, 2009). This framework recognizes the significance of the larger context for student achievement and well-being and acknowledges the existence of specific inequities (e.g., related to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation) that disproportionately affect—and often render invisible—certain subgroups of students (Russell & Fish, 2016), which must be addressed to create a healthy learning environment. Further, within a social justice-oriented consultation model, it is crucial to include trans students in identifying and addressing needed systemic changes (Shriberg & Fenning, 2009); their voices and input should be solicited at every stage of the assessment and intervention process (Beemyn, *in press*; Clare, 2013; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). As the experts of their own experiences, trans students represent key participatory stakeholders and valuable sources of information regarding systems change (Meyers, Meyers, & Grogg, 2004). The act of engaging trans students' perspectives, experiences, and recommendations may also represent a form of empowerment for them (Ingraham, 2015), although consultants seeking to include trans students must be conscious not to overburden them and should compensate them for their time, energy, and experience.

The current mixed-methods study focuses on a large sample ( $n = 507$ ) of trans students, primarily in the United States (95%), with the goal of understanding (a) what institutional factors are associated with the presence of more trans-inclusive policies and supports, (b) what trans-inclusive policies and supports are viewed as important by different groups of trans students, and (c) how the presence of such factors is related to trans students' sense of belonging on campus and their perception of campus climate. Understanding trans students' perspectives on and experiences of systemic inequalities within the higher educational setting can inform the work of consultants who seek to advance socially just educational practices and who wish to promote the educational and personal well-being of all students (Meyers et al., 2012).

### Key concepts and terms

*Cisnormativity* refers to the false societal belief that there are only two genders, gender is immutable, and bodies define gender, such that people assigned female at birth will identify as girls/women, and people assigned male at birth will identify as boys/men (Enke, 2012a). *Cisgender* refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth. Due to cisnormativity, being cisgender is often considered standard and “normal”; thus, cisgender identities are often “unmarked” and invoked only in contrast to trans identities (Enke, 2012a). Cisnormativity is commonly institutionalized, such that the norms and actions of institutions (e.g., higher education) reflect and perpetuate the idea that cisgender identities are natural and superior (Enke, 2012a), and aggressively uphold the gender binary (Bilodeau, 2005).

*Trans* refers to the spectrum of individuals whose gender identities do not align with the gender assigned to them at birth or with the cisnormative expectations associated with that gender (Enke, 2012b; Stryker, 2008). *Binary trans* refers to trans persons with binary identities—people assigned female at birth who identify as men, and people assigned male at birth who identify as women (Stryker, 2008). *Nonbinary trans* refers to persons who identify as both men and women, identify as alternative genders that lie outside of the gender binary, or do not identify with any gender (Nicolazzo, 2016). Nonbinary trans identity labels include agender, gender fluid, and gender-queer (Beemyn, in press). In making this binary/nonbinary distinction, we do not seek to create another duality. We recognize that even people who identify with so-called binary gender identities may not undergo biomedical transition and may resist complying with some gendered norms (Catalano, 2015). There is diversity within and across binary/nonbinary identities, and the meanings of these vary across time and place (Enke, 2012b). We urge readers to recognize these terms—cisgender, trans, binary, nonbinary—as

conceptual tools, and encourage awareness of how overreliance on categories and dichotomies is overly simplistic and ignores the fluidity within and across categories. (See Appendix for definitions of other key terms.)

### **Trans students' experiences in higher education**

Colleges and universities are often inhospitable to trans students, in that campuses typically reflect and reinforce societal genderism (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014), or the rigid adherence to the gender binary in practices, policies, and norms. Trans students seeking to express their gender identities encounter pressures to conform to socially constructed gender norms in terms of appearance, dress, and pronouns (Catalano, 2015), which affects all trans students but especially nonbinary students. Nonbinary students face the challenge of presenting themselves in ways that are consonant with their gender identity (e.g., using pronouns other than “she/her/hers” or “he/him/his”) while avoiding being targeted because of their gender expression (Bilodeau, 2005). They may in turn face particular scrutiny for not seeking to conform to or be seen as “either” gender (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; McGuire, Kuvalanka, Catalpa, & Toomey, 2016).

Colleges and universities vary greatly in their support for trans students, such as the extent to which they provide trans-inclusive resources and have policies that protect trans students, staff, and faculty from harassment. In general, community colleges and religiously affiliated institutions do less for the trans people on their campuses. For example, relatively few of these institutions have “gender identity” in their nondiscrimination policies, offer gender-inclusive housing options (if they offer campus housing), enable students to have a chosen name on nonlegal campus records, or cover counseling, hormones, and surgery for transitioning students and staff under the institution’s health insurance policies (Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 2017).

Cisnormativity and genderism are evident in multiple domains within the higher education microsystem, from physical structures to official records to curricula (Bilodeau, 2005). Sex-segregated restrooms represent one institutional feature that excludes trans people and/or exposes them to harassment, which causes them significant stress (Seelman, 2014a). By extension, the ability to access gender-inclusive restrooms can alleviate anxiety (Seelman, 2014a, 2014b). Forms, documents, and records can also be alienating for trans students, who routinely confront paperwork that only allows male and female as gender options, does not differentiate between sex and gender, and provides no means for students to change their gender marker without legally changing their “sex.” In addition, few institutions enable trans students to use the name they go by, rather than their “dead” (i.e., birth, or legal) name, on records and documents, and the institutions that do offer this

option do not always advertise it well or make the process easy and seamless (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 2017; Seelman, 2014a).

Cisnormativity and genderism are also evident in the context of the classroom (Pryor, 2015; Pusch, 2005). Trans students often experience avoidance or antagonism from faculty and other students, leading them to feel anxious, uncomfortable, and possibly threatened (Bilodeau, 2005; Garvey & Rankin, 2015b). Research on trans adults indicates that nonbinary individuals report greater instances of misgendering than do trans-identified individuals (McLemore, 2015), which may carry over to the classroom: that is, faculty and other students will likely assume that they identify as female or male, unless they come out, which may not feel safe. Nonbinary students often experience anxiety about whether they should reveal the name and pronouns they use, particularly if the roster that is read aloud contains their birth name. Many decide that it is less burdensome to be misgendered and feel invisible as trans people than to be out and potentially experience harassment and discrimination (Beemyn, *in press*; Pryor, 2015).

When considering how to create a more trans-inclusive climate within higher education, it is critical to work with trans students themselves (Beemyn, *in press*; Clare, 2013; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). An emerging body of work addresses the institutional changes that trans students would like to see on their campuses, and this work offers key insights that can help guide systems-level consultation focused on making institutions more trans inclusive. Beemyn (*in press*) interviewed 111 nonbinary trans students from 62 different colleges about their campus experiences. All but one of these students asserted that their institution was not doing enough to support them—which is notable in that some attended colleges considered to be among the most “trans supportive” in the United States because of their many trans-inclusive policies. Among the most frequently desired changes were the creation of many more gender-inclusive restrooms, the development or expansion of gender-inclusive housing options, and the ability to use one’s chosen name and to identify outside of a gender binary on campus records. Students also wanted faculty and staff to be educated about trans people so that trans students are not commonly misgendered in classes and in interactions with staff members. Seelman (2014a) interviewed 30 trans people (including trans students and educators) about their ideas and solutions for greater inclusion in higher education. The themes that emerged in Seelman’s analysis were to (a) offer education, campus programming, and support for trans people; (b) improve college systems and procedures for recording name and gender; (c) encourage greater inclusivity and recruitment of diverse groups; (d) make physical changes to facilities; and (e) hold people accountable (e.g., if they violate nondiscrimination policies). The current study builds on Beemyn’s and Seelman’s work to examine desired institutional



changes identified by a large sample of trans students ( $n = 507$ ), both nonbinary and binary identified, and inclusive of both undergraduate and graduate students.

### ***Trans students' sense of belonging and perceptions of campus climate***

Indicative of their marginalization within college communities, trans students nationwide report greater levels of harassment and discrimination, have a more negative perception of campus and classroom climates, and feel less accepted as part of the campus community than do cisgender students (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2015a). For example, a study by Dugan et al. (2012), which compared 91 trans-identified students with matched samples of cisgender LGB and heterosexual students, found that the trans students viewed the climate on their campuses as more hostile (i.e., less tolerant and inclusive of them as trans people), and reported a lower sense of belonging (i.e., acceptance and integration) within their campus community.

Of particular interest in the current study is whether attendance at institutions with more trans-inclusive and affirmative policies, structures, and resources is related to a greater sense of belonging or perceptions of a more positive campus climate. Theoretically, attending an institution of higher education with more trans supports in place could enhance one's sense of belonging and perceptions of campus climate. On the other hand, perhaps students who attend institutions with relatively more trans supports possess a heightened awareness or recognition of the stark contrast between such (limited) supports and the systematic ways in which their institution and the campus community at large remain deeply rooted in the gender binary.

In addition to examining trans-affirming resources as a predictor of belonging and campus climate, we address the role of students' involvement in campus activities and their level of openness about their gender identity. We expect that students who participate in more activities at their institution may also report a greater sense of belonging and perceive their campus climate more favorably because they presumably have more connections to other students and to the institution as a whole (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Alternatively, students who are involved in more activities might be more likely to come into contact with a wide range of individuals on campus, including those who are stigmatizing of their gender identities; as a result, highly involved trans students might report less of a sense of belonging and more negative climate. Likewise, we expect that students who report being more out or open about their gender identity might report a lower sense of belonging and perceive their campus climate less favorably because, being more visible as trans people, they are more likely to face harassment and discrimination (Davidson, 2016). At the same time, we



acknowledge that the consequences of outness are varying and complex, and differ considerably across contexts, such that individuals who are out in supportive contexts might ultimately experience benefits to their sense of belonging and mental health (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012).

We also examine nonbinary versus binary gender identity status in relation to sense of belonging and campus climate. Research has rarely considered gender identity differences among trans students, even though nonbinary students may experience unique forms of stigma and invisibility because nonbinary trans identities are even less intelligible in society than binary trans identities (Beemyn, *in press*; Nicolazzo, 2016). Finally, we examine undergraduate versus graduate student status in relation to these outcomes, given that trans graduate students are particularly understudied (McKinney, 2005), and graduate students may be additionally vulnerable to feelings of isolation and disconnection because of their decentralized position on most campuses (Grady, LaTouche, Oslawski-Lopez, Powers, & Simacek, 2014; Hirt & Muffo, 1998).

## The current study

This study includes 507 trans and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) students (74.9% undergraduate students or recent graduates of an undergraduate institution, 25.1% graduate students; 74.8% White, 25.2% of color) from across the United States (95.1%) and outside the United States (4.9%). We first examine *students' knowledge* of what trans-inclusive policies and practices exist on their campus (e.g., a nondiscrimination policy that includes gender identity; the ability to change one's name on school records without a legal name change; gender-inclusive restrooms) and the *institutional characteristics* that are associated with the reported presence of such policies and practices. We also assess the *perceived importance* of each of the 17 policies and practices that are listed, alongside students' "wish list" for how campuses can be more supportive of trans students. Finally, we examine the relationship between the presence of trans-inclusive campus policies and practices and students' sense of belonging and perceived campus climate. Our findings have the potential to inform the work of consultants who seek to facilitate systems-level change with the goal of enhancing trans students' educational and psychosocial well-being.

## Method

### Data collection

Data, collected in 2016, were drawn from an online survey of TGNC students' experiences in higher education, developed by the first author, and

constructed using the Qualtrics software application. Focus groups with seven TGNC students—led by trained TGNC-identified members of the research team—helped to inform the development of the survey. It was pilot tested for ease of use and functionality by four members of the target population prior to survey launch. Feedback was also sought from scholars who study TGNC populations. The suggestions of both groups led to changes in the survey. The survey was approved by the Human Subjects Board at Clark University and disseminated widely. For example, it was distributed via electronic mailing lists and social media pages aimed at TGNC people and/or college students and through lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) groups, clubs, and resource centers on college campuses across the United States. (Some colleges did not have LGBTQ groups or resource centers but, rather, a designated staff member within a larger center—such as multicultural affairs—who provided support or information to LGBTQ students. In such cases, we provided study information to them directly with a request to disseminate to relevant individuals.)

The survey included questions on a range of topics, including gender identity, experiences with faculty and other students, sense of belonging on campus, involvement in on-campus groups, and perceptions of campus policies. Participants were instructed as follows: “You may complete this survey if you (a) identify as trans, gender nonconforming, gender questioning, genderqueer, gender nonbinary, agender, or anywhere on the gender-nonconforming spectrum, and (b) are currently enrolled at least part-time in a college/university (or recently graduated). Graduate students may also participate. *Students with nonbinary gender identities are particularly encouraged to participate.*” Participants were told not to put any identifying information on the survey and that, upon completing it, they would be directed to a link where they could give their name and email—which would not be linked to their data—to win one of 10 \$50.00 Amazon gift cards.

### ***Data cleaning and preparation***

A total of 649 respondents initiated the survey, but only 510 (78.6%) completed all of the items used in the current study (i.e., demographic questions; questions about policies, procedures, and practices; measures of belonging, climate, outness, and activities). The median (and modal) time to completion was 39 minutes, whereas the mean time to completion was 153 minutes; there was a large range (10–8,685 minutes;  $SD = 762$ ), with the high upper limit seemingly reflecting the fact that participants could start and return to the survey. Respondents were prevented from completing the survey more than once. To enhance the validity of our data analysis, participants’ answers to similar questions (i.e., consistency indices) were inspected for evidence of careless, inattentive, or fraudulent responding; response times and missing data patterns were also assessed for this purpose (Dillman, Smyth, &

Christian, 2009; Meade & Craig, 2012). Respondents who did not answer any of the open-ended questions, and those who completed the survey in under 15 minutes, were subjected to careful inspection of their data to ensure logical responding patterns (Meade & Craig, 2012). These methods resulted in the deletion of three surveys. The final sample included 507 participants.

## **Participants**

See Table 1 for complete demographic data for the sample. Students ( $M$  age = 22.44 years;  $SD$  = 5.58) resided across the United States (95%) and in countries outside the United States (5%). Most students (74.9%) were undergraduates and recent graduates; the remainder were graduate students. Most students (74.8%) identified their race as White only, but a sizeable minority (25.2%) chose other racial categories and were classified as students of color. Students endorsed a range of sexual orientations, with the most common identifiers being queer (30.0%), pansexual (16.0%), bisexual (11.4%), and asexual (10.5%). Most participants (78.3%) were assigned female at birth; 20.7% were assigned male, and 1% were intersex and assigned female.

Students were able to select from a variety of gender identity options and could choose as many as they desired. Most participants identified as at least one of the nonbinary identity options (e.g., nonbinary, genderqueer, gender fluid) and can thus be classified as nonbinary (75.1%;  $n$  = 381); the remainder were classified as binary (24.9%;  $n$  = 126). (See “closed ended questions and measures” section for details about this reduction of categories.) Most participants were nonbinary trans and assigned female at birth<sup>1</sup> (AFAB) (61.5%;  $n$  = 312); the remainder were binary trans AFAB (17.8%;  $n$  = 90), nonbinary trans assigned male at birth (AMAB) (13.6%;  $n$  = 69), and binary trans AMAB (7.1%;  $n$  = 36).

It is challenging to compare the demographics of the TGNC undergraduate and graduate students in our sample with data from national surveys. College surveys that include questions on gender identity often do not ask students for their specific trans identities, or they have such a small  $n$  for trans students that they do not break down the data beyond trans and cis identities (e.g., Oswalt & Lederer, 2017; Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017). Notably, the 2017 National College Health Assessment did offer multiple gender identity choices for trans-identified students and found that 0.6% identified as genderqueer, 0.2% as trans men, less than 0.1% as trans women, and 0.9% as “another identity” (American College Health Association, 2017). However, the reported data did not break down the trans students by race, sexual orientation, or other identity categories. Further, large-scale studies of

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<sup>1</sup>Included here are the five participants who were intersex and assigned female at birth. In all analyses that used birth gender as a predictor, analyses were run both with and without intersex participants. Results did not change when these individuals were dropped from analyses.

**Table 1.** Sample Demographics (*N* = 507).

Student Characteristic	<i>N</i> , %
Region	
United States	
Midwest	139 (27.4%)
South	119 (23.5%)
East Coast	113 (22.3%)
West Coast	111 (21.9%)
Non-U.S.	25 (4.9%)
Student status	
First-year undergraduate	68 (13.4%)
Second-year undergraduate	98 (19.3%)
Third-year undergraduate	74 (14.6%)
Fourth-year undergraduate	70 (13.8%)
Fifth year and above	32 (6.3%)
Recent graduate (in the past year)	38 (7.5%)
Current graduate student	127 (25.1%)
Race	
White only	379 (74.8%)
Of color	128 (25.2%)
Latino/a/x/Latin American only	34 (6.7%)
Asian only	28 (5.5%)
Black/African American only	13 (2.6%)
Native American only	12 (2.4%)
Middle Eastern only	5 (1%)
Biracial/multiracial (multiple races)	36 (7.1%)
Gender assigned at birth	
Female	397 (78.3%)
Male	105 (20.7%)
Intersex, assigned female	5 (1%)
Gender identity	
Transgender/trans	210 (41.4%)
Nonbinary	199 (39.3%)
Genderqueer	136 (26.8%)
Trans man	106 (20.9%)
Gender nonconforming	91 (17.9%)
Gender fluid	89 (17.6%)
Agender	85 (16.8%)
Masculine of center	64 (12.6%)
Androgynous	58 (11.4%)
Questioning	50 (9.9%)
Trans woman	36 (7.1%)
Demigender	24 (4.7%)
Feminine of center	24 (4.7%)
Bigender	7 (1.4%)
Other identities not listed (man, woman, MtF, demigirl, transsexual, neutrois, two spirit, third gender)	21 (4.1%)
Sexual orientation	
Queer	152 (30.0%)
Pansexual	81 (16.0%)
Bisexual	58 (11.4%)
Asexual	53 (10.5%)
Gay	33 (6.5%)
Lesbian	24 (4.7%)
Questioning	17 (3.4%)
Heterosexual	17 (3.4%)
Demisexual	12 (2.4%)
Something else (e.g., I identify as multiple orientations; sexual orientation shifts depending on context)	60 (11.8%)

trans people also do not produce comparable data as not all of the young adult participants are in college, and/or participants who indicate having attended college are not asked when this occurred. That being said, among the respondents to the U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) who were 18–24 years old, 50.2% identified as nonbinary (43.1% of whom were assigned female at birth and 7.1% of whom were assigned male at birth), 31.6% as trans men, 17.7% as trans women, and 0.5% as crossdressers (James et al., 2016). Thus, three fourths of the sample had been assigned female and subsequently identified as another gender. Other studies of trans adults have also documented disproportionate representation by AFAB individuals, especially among younger and nonbinary-identified participants (Beemyn, *in press*; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012).

### ***Closed-ended questions and measures***

#### ***Trans-supportive resources***

Participants were provided with 17 policies and practices (see Table 2), which were derived from existing literature (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Dominique, Pettit, & Smith, 2005) and online resources (Campus Pride Index, 2017; Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 2017), and asked to indicate whether each was present at their college/university (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*, 3 = *don't know*). We examined the distributions of responses (yes, no, don't know) for each item. In addition, the “yes” responses were summed to form a measure of college/university inclusivity, reflecting students' knowledge of available supports and services. While it is likely that some of these services/supports were present on students' campuses but they were unaware of them, we have no way of knowing whether this was the case. Thus, this is an index of known services/supports—reflecting, in part, their visibility and accessibility. Students also rated how important each resource was to them (1 = *not important*, 2 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *very important*). Cronbach's alpha was not calculated for these items as internal consistency estimates are not appropriate for this type of measure (i.e., these items are not expected to be highly correlated).

#### ***Sense of belonging***

Dugan and colleague's (2012) measure of sense of belonging was used, which consisted of three items: (a) I feel valued as a person at this school, (b) I feel accepted as a part of the campus community, and (c) I feel I belong on this campus. For each item, participants responded using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Scores were summed, and higher scores index a greater sense of belonging. The alpha for this measure was .90.

Table 2. Perceived Importance of Trans-Inclusive Services and Supports (N = 507).

Policy/practice	Presence (%; n)			Importance (M, SD) <sup>a, b</sup>	Rank (questionnaire)	# Qualitative responses
	Yes	No	DK			
Gender-neutral/gender-inclusive bathrooms in most campus buildings	44.9% (228)	47.0% (238)	8.1% (41)	2.77 (.51)	1	156
Nondiscrimination policy that includes gender identity/expression	65.0% (330)	8.3% (42)	26.7% (135)	2.75 (.51)	2	47
University-recognized student organization for LGBTQ students and allies	92.3% (468)	4.9% (25)	2.8% (14)	2.74 (.53)	3	5
Allows students to change their name on campus records (e.g., ID cards, rosters) without legal name change	41.7% (212)	25.5 (129)	32.8% (166)	2.70 (.57)	4	82
University-recognized student organizations for trans/GNC students and/or that primarily serve the needs of trans/GNC students	45.8% (233)	40.5% (205)	13.6% (69)	2.60 (.61)	5	71
Courses that address topics related to gender identity/expression	70.0% (355)	12.6% (64)	17.4% (88)	2.60 (.61)	6	50
Incorporation of topics related to gender identity/expression in new-student orientation program	22.7% (115)	41.1% (209)	36.2% (183)	2.59 (.64)	7	25
Courses that address topics related to sexual orientation	71.0% (360)	11.0% (56)	18.0% (91)	2.56 (.64)	8	–
Allows students to change their gender on campus records without changing legal documents	16.8% (85)	33.6% (170)	49.6% (252)	2.57 (.64)	9	52
Provides gender-inclusive housing (e.g., that enables trans students to be housed in keeping with their gender identity/expression)	46.1% (234)	27.2% (138)	26.6% (135)	2.55 (.69)	10	57
Incorporation of topics related to sexual orientation in new-student orientation program	28.0% (142)	35.8% (181)	36.2% (184)	2.53 (.66)	11	–
Career counseling for TGNC students	14.6% (74)	46.6% (237)	38.7% (196)	2.52 (.61)	12	2
Covers transition-related medical expenses under student health insurance	19.8% (100)	33.5% (169)	46.6% (236)	2.38 (.74)	13	40
Private changing facilities & single-person showers in athletic facilities and recreational centers	16.7% (91)	30.7% (168)	52.6% (287)	2.37 (.77)	14	13 (changing rooms); 11 (showers)
Trans/GNC-inclusive intramural athletic policy	12.1% (61)	20.2% (102)	67.8% (344)	2.11 (.81)	15	3
Gender identity questions included as an option on admission applications & enrollment forms	21.3% (108)	37.9% (192)	40.7% (207)	2.11 (.80)	16	0
Sexual orientation identity questions included as an option on admissions applications & enrollment forms	20.2% (102)	37.7% (191)	42.1% (214)	2.11 (.80)	17	–

Note: Although many community colleges do not have campus housing, health care services, and athletic teams, we included these items to capture data from the institutions that do. DK = don't know; SD = standard deviation.

<sup>a</sup>1 = not important; 2 = somewhat important; 3 = very important.

<sup>b</sup>While the median is the appropriate measure for ordinal variables, it is a 3 for all items so we report the mean (and SD) as it provides additional, useful information for comparing responses.

### ***Campus climate***

Dugan and colleague's (2012) measure of campus climate was used, which consisted of five items: (a) I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors, or gestures directed at people like me; (b) I have encountered discrimination while attending this institution; (c) I feel there is a general atmosphere of prejudice among students; (d) faculty have discriminated against people like me; and (e) staff members have discriminated against people like me. The same 5-point response scale was used (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), but items were reverse coded, so that the higher scores denoted a more affirming perceived climate, and then all items were summed. The alpha was .86.

### ***Involvement in campus activities***

Participants indicated whether they had (1) or had not (0) participated in the following activities at their institution: (a) clubs, (b) a sorority/fraternity, (c) sports, (d) community service, (e) internships, (f) research with a faculty member, (g) study abroad, (h) leadership positions in clubs/groups/teams on campus, and (i) jobs on campus. Items were summed to form an index of campus involvement. Again, alphas were not calculated for these items as internal consistency estimates are not appropriate for this type of measure.

### ***Openness about gender identity***

Students were asked to indicate how open/out they were about their gender identity to the following people: (a) parents, (b) siblings, (c) extended family/relatives, (d) peers on campus, in general, (e) my heterosexual cisgender friends, (f) my LGBTQ cisgender friends, (g) my trans/gender-nonconforming friends, (h) professors, and (i) university staff. For each group, participants responded using a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *mostly*, 5 = *completely*), and items were summed to form an index of outness (higher scores = more out). The alpha for this scale was .86.

### ***Undergraduate versus graduate students***

Undergraduate students and recent graduates (i.e., having graduated in the past 1–2 years) were coded as 1, and graduate students were coded as 0.

### ***Binary trans versus nonbinary trans students***

While we recognize the problems inherent in reducing the complex array of gender identities to a dichotomous variable, we created a binary/nonbinary category to consider differences between binary and nonbinary identities. Students who identified as transgender, trans, trans woman, trans man, female to male (FTM) woman, man, *and* who did not indicate any gender nonbinary options, were categorized as gender binary (1). Participants who endorsed any of the nonbinary options (nonbinary, genderqueer, gender



nonconforming, gender fluid, androgynous, agender, demigender, third gender, transmasculine, masculine or feminine of center, questioning) were categorized as gender nonbinary (0).<sup>2</sup>

### ***Gender assigned at birth (M, F)***

Birth gender was coded as 1 = *male*, 0 = *female*. We included this as a predictor in analyses because (a) a large majority were AFAB, and it is appropriate to account for this in analyses, and (b) research indicates that AMAB people who show gender nonconformity often encounter greater stigma (Bockting et al., 2013).

### ***Of color versus White***

Race was recoded such that any student who indicated a racial category other than Caucasian/White was coded as of color (1), and students who solely indicated Caucasian/White were coded as White (0). We included race as a predictor in analyses because (a) a large majority were White, and it is appropriate to account for this in analyses, and (b) trans people of color face a unique constellation of stigmas stemming from both their gender and their race (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011).

### ***Public versus private***

Public institutions were coded as 1, and private institutions as 0.

### ***Religious versus nonreligious***

Religiously affiliated institutions were coded as 1, and nonreligious institutions as 0.

### ***Two- versus four-year***

Two-year institutions were coded as 1 and four-year institutions as 0.

### ***Open-ended question***

Participants were asked to respond to the following open-ended prompt: "Please use this space to describe your 'wish list' for what you wish your university/college would do differently or better in regard to trans/GNC issues/students." This prompt occurred at the end of the survey and was separated from the list of trans-affirming resources by 14 questions, or about four pages.

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<sup>2</sup>We recognize that (a) masculine of center and feminine of center can be conceptualized as gender expressions and not gender identities, and (b) identifying as questioning is vague and does not clearly denote a binary or nonbinary identification. Thus, we carefully examined these participants' endorsement of other identities to best categorize them. All but one of the individuals who identified as questioning, feminine of center, or masculine of center participants also selected one or more nonbinary identities (e.g., agender, nonbinary) and were categorized as such. One masculine of center participant also identified as a trans man and was categorized as binary-identified.

## **Data analysis**

### **Quantitative**

Several methods of quantitative analysis were used to examine the data. Multiple regression models were used to explore what institutional factors (public vs. private college; religious vs. nonreligious; two-year vs. four-year) were related to the presence of more trans-affirming resources, and hierarchical regression models were used to examine what factors (including number of trans-affirming resources) were related to students' ( $N = 507$ ) sense of belonging and perceived climate. To examine whether graduate students and undergraduate students reported different levels of importance regarding the various trans-affirming resources, Mann-Whitney  $U$ -tests were used to account for the ordinal nature of the data.

### **Qualitative**

Qualitative analysis (i.e., content analysis, with the help of the software NVivo) was applied to responses to the open-ended survey portion; these ranged from a few sentences to several pages of text, with most students writing 3–5 sentences. A total of 306 (60.4%) participants responded to the open-ended question. During this process, we compared participants' "wish lists" about what they want their institutions to do to support trans students to their responses about the importance of various practices. This mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) added nuance to the findings. The qualitative responses offered by students did not simply echo the quantitative data; rather, the students' narratives uniquely qualified them by, for example, revealing students' explanations for why particular policies, practices, and supports are needed. The first author did the initial examination of the data using a content analysis method, which is a standard means for considering responses to open-ended questions and represents a process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns or themes in the data (Patton, 2002). This process of classifying qualitative data represents an organized, systematic, and replicable practice of condensing words of text into a smaller number of categories (Krippendorff, 1980), with the goal of creating a coding system to organize the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The first author initiated the coding process with open coding, which involves carefully examining responses and highlighting relevant passages. This led to the specification and refinement of emerging categories or codes. For example, one respondent provided this suggestion: "Mandatory coursework on trans identities ... for undergrads *and* graduate students because some of them may have not been exposed to many gender and sexuality minorities prior to coming here." This passage was initially assigned several preliminary codes: "lack of familiarity," "coursework/curricula," "graduate students," and "undergraduate students."

Next, focused coding was used to sort the data. For example, “mandatory coursework” was identified as one type of “student-oriented education” and was differentiated from suggestions for other types of student education (e.g., orientation) and from suggestions for training staff/faculty. This process of organizing and sorting is more conceptual in nature than initial coding (Patton, 2002), and the emergent categories are those that best synthesize the data. The first author applied the coding scheme to the data, allowing for the identification of more descriptive coding categories and the generation of themes for which there was the most substantiation. The scheme was reapplied; revisions were made until all data were accounted for. At this stage, it was possible to identify and distinguish between broad types of codes, some of which represented elaborated and nuanced descriptions of desired supports that were referenced in the quantitative responses.

Next, the author enlisted a research assistant to code a random selection of 30 responses (5.93% of total responses) to verify the soundness of the scheme (Patton, 2002). This process of code checking is useful in clarifying categories and definitions and in confirming reliability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). The research assistant was instructed to code responses to the open-ended question (i.e., what students wanted their university to do differently or better) with the goal of producing both higher-order codes (e.g., related to different systems: health care, faculty, and staff) and lower-order codes (e.g., types of recommendations within each category). Initially, intercoder agreement was 85% ( $\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{\#agreements}}{\text{\#agreements} + \text{\#disagreements}}$ ); disagreements largely reflected a slightly more fine-grained analysis by the primary coder, whereby, for example, different types of staff members were accounted for by subcodes, resulting in a larger number of codes overall. After discussion of these disagreements, the research assistant coded another random selection of 30 responses; intercoder agreement was 95%, providing strong evidence of the utility of the scheme.

## Results

### ***Question 1: What institutional factors are associated with the prevalence of trans-supportive policies?***

Participants’ knowledge of the presence/absence of campus policies and practices varied widely (Table 2). Coursework that was inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation was relatively common on campuses, according to student reports, as was the presence of LGBTQ student organizations. By contrast, private changing facilities, trans-inclusive athletic policies, and trans-sensitive career counseling were rarely named as present—although these resources also had high rates of “don’t know” responses, indicating potentially poor communication about or visibility of these resources. Not

surprisingly, the lowest rates of “don’t know” responses occurred for gender-inclusive restrooms (because many trans students seek to use such facilities) and for LGBTQ organizations (because most campuses have such groups and many trans students participate in them or know others who do; Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 2017).

We wished to examine whether institutional factors (public vs. private; religious vs. nonreligious; two- vs. four-year) were related to the presence of trans-inclusive policies and practices in general. Again, after coding negative and uncertain responses (no/don’t know) as 0 and coding affirmative (yes) responses as 1, we summed the 17 trans-inclusive items to form an overall index of trans-inclusive supports. The mean inclusiveness score across all students was 6.45 ( $SD = 3.36$ ). Thus, on average, students were aware of between 6 and 7 of the 17 listed trans-inclusive policies/practices. We then conducted a regression with the sum score as the outcome and the three institutional factors included as predictors. This showed that attending a two-year institution was associated with fewer supports ( $B = -2.27$ ,  $SE = .47$ ,  $t = -4.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Attending a public institution was also associated with fewer supports ( $B = -1.02$ ,  $SE = .29$ ,  $t = -3.48$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Attendance at a religiously affiliated institution was related to fewer supports ( $B = -1.50$ ,  $SE = .71$ ,  $t = -2.21$ ,  $p = .034$ ). Altogether, institutional factors accounted for 8.1% of the variance,  $F(3, 502) = 14.69$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, while all predictors were significant, their overall effect size was small.

To provide additional nuance to these findings, and better understand how different types of higher education settings differ in the known availability of these supports and services, we also examined each service/support by university type: four-year public university ( $n = 281$ ), four-year nonreligious private university ( $n = 150$ ), four-year private religious university ( $n = 21$ ), two-year public university ( $n = 44$ ), and two-year private university ( $n = 9$ ). We present these data for descriptive purposes only. However, we cautiously acknowledge that they suggest that different types of supports may be more or less prevalent at different types of institutions. See Table 3.

### **Question 2: What trans-inclusive policies and practices do students report as important?**

We examined the perceived importance of each of the 17 trans-inclusive policies and practices. As Table 2 shows, gender-inclusive restrooms in most campus buildings received the highest importance score ( $M = 2.77$ , where 2 = *somewhat important* and 3 = *very important*), followed closely by a nondiscrimination policy that includes gender identity/expression, a university-recognized LGBTQ student organization, and changing one’s name on campus records without a legal name change. Trans-inclusive athletic policies, gender identity questions on admissions/enrollment forms, and sexual orientation questions on admissions/enrollment forms received the lowest

**Table 3.** Services and Supports by University Type (*N* = 505).

	% "Yes" (Knowledge that College/University Has This Service/Support)					
	Public 4 year ( <i>n</i> = 281) % ( <i>n</i> )	Private 4 year, nonreligious ( <i>n</i> = 150) % ( <i>n</i> )	Public 2 year ( <i>n</i> = 44) % ( <i>n</i> )	Private 2 year ( <i>n</i> = 9) % ( <i>n</i> )	Private 4 year, religious ( <i>n</i> = 21) % ( <i>n</i> )	
Gender-neutral/gender-inclusive bathrooms in most campus buildings	45.2% (127)	52.0% (78)	22.7% (10)	33.3% (3)	38.1% (8)	
Nondiscrimination policy that includes gender identity/expression	66.5% (187)	67.3% (101)	50.0% (22)	66.7% (6)	57.1% (12)	
University-recognized student organization for LGBTQ students and allies	93.2% (262)	94.7% (142)	79.5% (35)	88.9% (8)	95.2% (20)	
Allows students to change their name on campus records (e.g., ID cards, rosters) without legal name change	42.3% (119)	52.0% (78)	27.3% (12)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	
University-recognized student organizations for trans/GNC students and/or that primarily serve the needs of trans/GNC students	50.5% (142)	44% (66)	36.4% (16)	33.3% (3)	23.8% (5)	
Courses that address topics related to gender identity/expression	72.6% (204)	71.3% (107)	50.0% (22)	55.6% (5)	71.4% (15)	
Incorporation of topics related to gender identity/expression in new-student orientation program	18.9% (53)	34.7% (52)	6.8% (3)	11.1% (1)	28.6% (6)	
Courses that address topics related to sexual orientation	74.0% (208)	76.0% (114)	52.3% (23)	55.6% (5)	71.4% (15)	
Allows students to change their gender on campus records without changing legal documents	16.4% (46)	20.7% (31)	13.6% (6)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	
Provides gender-inclusive housing (e.g., that enables trans students to be housed in keeping with their gender identity/expression) <sup>a</sup>	46.4% (129)	56.7% (85)	11.4% (5)	11.1% (1)	57.1% (12)	
Incorporation of topics related to sexual orientation in new-student orientation program	24.2% (68)	38.7% (58)	91% (4)	11.1% (11)	38.1% (8)	
Career counseling for TGNC students	14.2% (40)	18.7% (28)	9.1% (4)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	
Covers transition-related medical expenses under student health insurance <sup>a</sup>	19.7% (55)	26.7% (40)	6.8% (3)	0% (0)	9.5% (2)	
Private changing facilities & single-person showers in athletic facilities and recreational centers	17.4% (49)	17.3% (26)	15.9% (7)	0 (0)	0% (0)	
Trans/GNC-inclusive intramural athletic policy <sup>a</sup>	11.9% (65)	11.0% (31)	6.8% (3)	0 (0)	9.5% (2)	
Gender identity questions included as an option on admission applications & enrollment forms	15.7% (44)	33.3% (50)	20.5% (9)	0 (0)	19% (4)	
Sexual orientation identity questions included as an option on admissions applications & enrollment forms	15.3% (43)	29.3% (44)	18.2% (8)	0% (0)	28.6% (6)	
Total number of above supports (Sum, <i>SD</i> )	633 (2.91)	7.50 (3.61)	4.36 (3.58)	3.67 (1.93)	5.76 (2.40)	

Note. *n* = 2 missing cases.<sup>a</sup>Many community colleges do not have these services and supports.

perceived importance scores ( $M = 2.11$ ). No policy or practice received an average score lower than 2.11; thus, all were viewed as at least somewhat important.

### *Student characteristics associated with perceived importance of policies and practices*

We expected that graduate students ( $n = 127$ ) and undergraduate students ( $n = 380$ ) might differ in their perceptions of the importance of specific supports. We surmised that graduate students might view trans-specific career counseling as more important than did undergraduates, given the possibly greater salience of this service in their lives. We also expected that graduate students would view gender-inclusive housing, LGBTQ groups, and trans groups as less important than did undergraduates, given graduate students' lower likelihood of living on campus and the reality that such resources are created primarily by and for undergraduate students.

A series of Mann-Whitney  $U$ -tests were conducted to account for the ordinal nature of the outcome. We provide several statistics to illustrate the magnitude of the differences. The median, which is the standard measure for examining ordinal variables, was a 3 for all groups. Thus, it provided little information, despite significant differences, and so we have also included the mean (although it should be considered unreliable) and the most accurate estimate of effect size  $r$  (which is the  $Z$ -statistic from the  $U$ -test divided by the square root of  $N$ ). Results showed that gender-inclusive housing was less important to graduate students ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $M = 2.40$ ) than to undergraduate students ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $M = 2.59$ ),  $U = 20,764.50$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $r = .11$ . The presence of a college/university-sanctioned LGBTQ group on campus was also less important to graduate students ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $M = 2.60$ ) than to undergraduate students ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $M = 2.79$ ),  $U = 20,243.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .17$ , as was a trans-specific campus group ( $Mdn_{Grad} = 3.00$ ;  $M_{Grad} = 2.46$ ;  $Mdn_{Ugrad} = 3.00$ ;  $M_{Ugrad} = 2.64$ ),  $U = 20,814.50$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $r = .12$ . On the other hand, contrary to our prediction, trans-specific career counseling was no more important to graduate students ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $M = 2.50$ ) than to undergraduate students ( $Mdn = 3.00$ ;  $M = 2.55$ ),  $U = 23,600.50$ ,  $p = .71$ .

### *Open-ended responses: What do students want?*

We examined students' open-ended responses regarding what they wished their college would do differently or better in regard to trans/GNC issues/students. We hoped that these would both reveal areas of significance that were not captured in the list of policies/practices and add nuance and meaning to students' responses to the closed-ended items. We anticipated that participants would name some of the same items that were listed, but might also address issues that were not covered (see [Tables 2](#) and [3](#)).

## Education and training

### Curriculum

Fifty students named curricular inclusion of gender identity, specifically trans identities and experiences, as desirable (see Table 4). Students mentioned the need for trans-inclusive content in a range of disciplines (e.g., history, psychology, gender studies). Some noted the importance of coursework that actively seeks to dismantle transphobia (e.g., that “combats harmful stereotypes of trans/GNC individuals”). Students generally identified courses with trans-inclusive content as beneficial to both trans and cisgender students, with a few noting that at least one course of this kind should be required of all students. Some students had specific suggestions regarding coursework, such as ensuring that course content includes scholarship written by trans people and that the full gender spectrum is addressed in gender-related classes, which often focus heavily on the gender binary. Some students also pointed to a need for in-depth, less superficial coverage of trans-related topics. As one White student who identified as a trans man stated: “I wish there were classes that focused on TGNC topics instead of a day or two on an essay about David Reimer [a Canadian man who was born biologically male but reassigned as a girl and raised female] and the genderbread person [a depiction of sex, sexuality, and gender] before moving on.”

**Table 4.** Major Themes in Qualitative Analysis ( $N = 306$ ).

Theme	N (%)	Addressed by questionnaire?
Education/training		
Curriculum	50 (16%)	yes
Training-students	46 (15%)	no
Orientation	25 (8%)	no
Training-faculty/staff	130 (42%)	no
Policies/records		
Nondiscrimination policy	47 (15%)	yes
Enforcement, with consequences	25 (8%)	no
Name change	82 (27%)	yes
Gender change	52 (17%)	yes
Gender options	35 (11%)	no
Pronouns	25 (8%)	no
Structural supports		
Restrooms	156 (51%)	yes
Changing rooms	13 (4%)	yes
Showers	11 (4%)	yes
Housing	57 (19%)	yes
Counseling/health services	134 (44%)	no
Designated counselor for LGBTQ	25 (8%)	no
Transition-related care	20 (6.5%)	
Health insurance	50 (16%)	yes
TGNC group/spaces	71 (23%)	yes
Miscellaneous		
TGNC staff/faculty	18 (6%)	no
LGBTQ resource centers	5 (2%)	yes
TGNC-inclusive athletic policy	3 (1%)	yes
TGNC career counseling	3 (1%)	yes

Note. 306 of 507 participants responded to the open-ended question.



### *Trainings/education aimed at students*

Forty-six students stated that educating other students to enhance their understanding and acceptance of gender diversity was important. Such trainings should help students to “be aware of the existence of nonbinary gender identities” and “emphasize the fact that they/them pronouns are valid and acceptable.” Trainings for student leaders (e.g., resident advisors, officers of student organizations) were emphasized as important, so that, for example, “trans/GNC individuals can join clubs without worrying that the executive board will be transphobic or misgender them [and] knowing it will be a safe place.”

Twenty-five of these 46 students noted that such a training session should be part of new-student orientation, “because some students may not have been exposed to many gender and sexual minorities before ... [college].” Students recommended that orientation “use more gender-neutral language and discuss nonbinary genders” and “don’t just say, ‘you need to be respectful of trans kids’ but explain gender identity and sexual orientation to normalize it” and “help cis students know how to navigate conversations with trans/GNC students.” As one White student who identified as gender-fluid and agender said, “Many incoming students don’t even know what ‘transgender’ or ‘gender non-conforming’ means. It would be nice if there could at least be a session explaining the different identities and drilling in the importance of not misgendering.”

### *Trainings/education aimed at faculty and staff*

A total of 130 students stated that educating faculty and staff to enhance their understanding of trans and gender-diverse identities was a priority. Many indicated that this was their “number one concern” and recommended that such trainings be mandatory. One student (White, genderqueer, feminine of center) noted, “My university has trainings that faculty/staff can go to but I don’t think they’re very well attended.” Another student (of color, genderqueer, gender questioning) said that the same faculty and staff members tend to attend these types of events and trainings, and “it’s preaching to the choir.” Thus, making such trainings mandatory would ensure that the faculty and staff who “really needed it would get the message.” These students had many specific suggestions for what faculty and staff (e.g., campus security, dining services, financial aid, and residential life staff) should be taught, including trans terminology, pronouns, tools to interrupt the gender binary, and resources to create a more inclusive campus. As one student of color who identified as nonbinary and two-spirit said:

I want ALL faculty and staff, including maintenance workers and public safety, to be trained in diversity protocol that includes not only transgender people but nonbinary people as well (since it almost never does) so that rather than being confused and offensive when dealing with students, they can actually be helpful.

Students suggested a number of “best practices” for faculty, including asking for names and pronouns (although not always in front of the class), maintaining an attitude of openness and acceptance of TGNC students, and acting as an ally to students. For example, respondents wrote:

Be educated enough and compassionate enough to recognize these identities and create a space where students don’t feel scared to be themselves. (White transwoman)

Do not tell a student their pronouns are too hard to remember; just make the effort. Make sure you take note of a student’s preferred<sup>3</sup> name and never use another name for them. Learn, adjust your behavior and language to be inclusive, and listen. (nonbinary student of color)

## ***Policies and records***

### ***Nondiscrimination policies***

Forty-seven students stressed the importance of policies that protect TGNC students, including a nondiscrimination policy that is inclusive of gender identity, codified protections for TGNC students, and prohibited transphobic acts and language. As one White trans man put it: “I want a school-wide policy that has ZERO tolerance for not only outright discrimination, but for repeatedly failing to recognize students’/faculty’s/staff’s gender, pronouns, and preferred name.” Of note is that in the past two decades, more than a thousand colleges and universities have added “gender identity” to their nondiscrimination policies (Campus Pride Trans Policy Clearinghouse, 2017). And yet, as noted by 25 of these 47 students, such policies need to be enforced, such that faculty, staff, and students who engage in transphobic language and acts are held accountable. This recommendation is consistent with Seelman (2014a), who found that the enforcement of such policies was a central concern of trans faculty, staff, and students.

### ***Name change***

Eighty-two students voiced a desire to be able to have a name other than their legal first name on campus records, including student ID cards, class rosters, email addresses, and diplomas, so that they were not regularly misnamed and therefore outed. One student (of color, nonbinary) shared:

I want name changes to be on records without requiring legal documents. The institution can keep the birth name on file for legal purposes, but needing to explain your name and pronouns to every new professor, and dreading knowing that they’ll probably read your birth name out loud to the class, is extremely stressful and miserable and embarrassing.

Some students noted that their colleges and universities had instituted a chosen name process, but that it was incomplete or inefficient. One White trans man said: “The preferred name option is not utilized for anything

except the school login, leaving the email that everybody sees, and your name on school documents, as the birth name, which needs to be fixed.” Some students, who had changed their name in their institution’s system, said the process was not difficult, but the ability to make this change was not publicized on campus. They noted the need for institutions to advertise this option more effectively, so trans students would know they could use it.

### *Gender marker change*

Many students who wished for a chosen name process also wanted the ability to change their gender marker on campus records and documents without having to change their gender marker first on legal documents ( $n = 52$ ). Fourteen of these 52 students, all nonbinary-identified, also wanted students to be able to change their gender to something “other than male and female,” since “none of the current options are a good fit.”

### *Gender options*

Thirty-five students wanted to see their institution use more inclusive language for gender on documents, forms, and records, and some suggested that their institution use gender-inclusive language on its website and in general outreach to students. They wanted their campus to “go beyond the gender binary” on all forms, documents, and records, with some suggesting a third option for gender (e.g., transgender) and others regarding this as not sufficient, thus recommending a “fill in option for gender.” Some further noted that their campus needed to differentiate between sex and gender on forms, particularly on health services forms.

Some urged their colleges and universities to abandon the gender binary entirely and to commit to gender diversity in all aspects of the institution, such that “inclusive language is used everywhere: admissions, surveys, policies, etc.” As one White nonbinary student stated, “The language used in all documents, postings, and communications from the college should be gender neutral—referring to us as, for example, ‘students,’ and not ‘women’ and ‘men.’” One student (White, nonbinary, agender) pointed out, “There is no need for mailings to parents to say ‘your son or daughter’ when they could just say ‘your child.’”

### *Pronouns*

Twenty-five students voiced a desire for campus documents, records, and forms to ask for students’ pronouns, so that they would not be forced to come out to others or be misgendered. Several students noted that the ability to add their pronouns to their online record would help to facilitate more positive interactions with staff (e.g., in student accounts and residential life) and faculty. One White genderqueer student stated that “pronouns should be listed anywhere names are,” so that “the university system sends the professor those pronouns along with your name on the attendance sheet, so every

semester I don't have to have a slightly awkward conversation with my professor one-on-one." Nonbinary students especially noted that their affirmed pronouns were often unfamiliar to faculty and staff (i.e., "they/them" as opposed to "he/him" and "she/her"), leading to "confusion and resistance" when students tried to assert them.

## ***Structural supports and resources***

### ***Restrooms***

The number one issue that students named on their "wish list" was the need for many more gender-inclusive campus restrooms, which was also the highest-rated item on the quantitative measure. There were 156 independent mentions of gender-inclusive and/or single-stall restrooms, which were often qualified by statements about their paucity on campus. As one student (of color, genderfluid) noted, "We need gender neutral bathrooms across campus in every single building, and badly. There's only one that I'm aware of on campus that isn't part of an already trans/GNC specific dorm." Said a White trans man: "[I would like] more gender-neutral toilets! Currently there are only two on campus, neither of which are convenient."

Twenty-five of these 156 students reported that existing single-stall or all-gender restrooms on their campuses were not only rare, but inaccessible; that is, they were not centrally located or present in the most frequented buildings but, rather, were "tucked away in a far corner or disability inaccessible." One frustrated student (White, nonbinary, agender) exclaimed, "Stop putting gender neutral restrooms in some damp basement in [campus] buildings because it's extremely difficult to find them." Several participants also indicated that the existing single-stall restrooms at their institutions were poorly maintained and "rarely cleaned." One trans woman of color suggested that "a map with all the gender-inclusive bathrooms would be very helpful as there is no place with any of this information," and a few students recommended that better and more permanent signage would help with visibility.

### ***Private changing areas/showers***

Of the students who mentioned restrooms, 13 also wished for private changing areas and 11 desired private showers. Private changing areas and showers were typically referred to in the context of recreational or athletic facilities, although several students discussed the need for private showers in residence halls.

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<sup>3</sup>While several students use "preferred name," this language is increasingly seen as offensive because "preference" indicates a choice, and other people do not have a choice in what name to use for a trans person. The same can be said for the use of "preferred pronouns." Preferable language is "affirmed" names and pronouns.

## **Housing**

Fifty-seven students stressed the importance of trans-inclusive or trans-accommodating housing options, in which they would be housed in keeping with their gender identity and, specifically, had “options to room with roommates that understand [their] gender identity, to avoid transphobia.” Many students shared the challenges associated with their institution’s housing policies, and some discussed the failure of residence life to provide any support to trans students. As one White student who identified as a trans man said: “Most of our university dorms are split by sex so I was forced to live for three years on the half of the building that related to the sex on my ID rather than how I identify. It made me very uncomfortable, and considering how I present, I’m not sure anyone else was comfortable with it either.”

Other students indicated that their institutions had gender-inclusive housing, but that it was too limited for the demand or was poorly structured. One White nonbinary student wrote:

I only have one issue: Gender-blind housing. Currently, students are assigned housing based on a binary choice of M/F. I believe it is easy to change your official university gender, but housing only sees those two options. Students are automatically randomly assigned a roommate of the “same” gender, unless they request “gender-neutral housing.” But “gender-neutral housing” just means that you have to specify a particular person of the “opposite” gender that you want to live with. There is no option to just be randomly assigned a roommate of any gender. For a nonbinary person, this is very othering.

## ***Trans-inclusive/sensitive counseling and health care***

A total of 134 students wished that their institutions had trans-inclusive health care and counseling services. They wanted campus providers who were compassionate and knowledgeable about the unique concerns and experiences of trans students, did not misgender them, and attended to students’ affirmed names and pronouns. Nonbinary students specifically reported mistreatment and invalidation of their nonbinary identities by providers. One White nonbinary student shared that their therapist “did not seem to take my gender very seriously; but then in the same breathe assumed my other struggles were related [to my gender].” Another White nonbinary student shared: “[When] I broached the topic that I wasn’t a man, and would prefer not to be referred to like that, this seemed to confuse my therapist.” A number of students stated that they were “referred out” to off-campus providers because there was no provider in their university/college health services or counseling center who was capable of treating them. The lack of trans-competent campus health personnel led one genderqueer student of color to conclude:

If health services on campus cannot provide appropriate services [for] GNC and transgender students, we should be reimbursed for the health fees that we pay. It is a disservice to not have appropriate training to serve transgender students. Transgender and GNC students should have access to a competent clinician(s).

Twenty-five of these 134 students specifically voiced a desire for a counselor whose primary purpose was to meet the needs of trans/LGBQ students. They recognized the benefit of having a therapist who had extensive experience working with trans students. (A few of these students also mentioned that this counselor should ideally be trans themselves.) Similarly, 20 students expressed a desire for campus health care providers who were able to provide transition-related medical care, such as hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries. Further, some students said that not only were there no trans-competent providers at their health services center, but they had difficulty obtaining off-campus referrals for trans-related care, such as hormones or surgery. “Health services ... literally knows nothing about trans issues and offers no help in finding services like hormones,” said one White nonbinary student.

### *Health insurance*

Fifty students wanted their institutions to provide trans-inclusive health insurance, because they otherwise had limited access to transitioning procedures. One nonbinary student of color shared their wish that their “student health insurance covered even some of the cost of gender-related hormones, surgery, etc.” Many students explicitly noted that the student health insurance did “not cover anything related to trans stuff” (White trans man).

### *Trans-specific spaces*

A total of 71 students mentioned wanting spaces, such as TGNC-specific support groups and student organizations, where they could gather with other TGNC students, share information and resources, and receive mentorship. Students saw a variety of possibilities for these trans-specific spaces. “[I’d like] a [resource space] that provides binders, packing, breast inserts, and tucking supplies [and] teaches you how to do these things properly and safely,” said one White student who identified as genderqueer. Students also envisioned a “safe space for trans hangouts” that might also “hold events and speakers.” Several students imagined that one benefit of a trans-specific group that had its own office or space would be the ability to collect and share clothes, serving as “a trans closet for students who need clothing.”

Of note is that some students indicated that they did have TGNC groups on their campus, but described various problems with these groups. Four students asserted that their campus TGNC groups were plagued with organizational issues, such as poor funding and inconsistent leadership. Five students noted that their trans-specific campus groups failed to address

intersectionality, so were not inclusive of trans students who were of color, older, or had a disability. Five graduate students did not feel comfortable attending the TGNC groups at their institutions because of role- and boundary-related concerns and, thus, wanted to see TGNC graduate student groups formed on their campuses. One White trans man stated, “It is very difficult to relate to 18 year olds, especially when they could be your students in classes. You can’t be completely honest and open about your experience, because you don’t want them to know certain vulnerable areas in your life.”

### ***Additional responses***

Some students’ recommendations did not fit into the mentioned categories. Eighteen students wanted their institutions to hire more trans staff and faculty; five students wanted campus LGBTQ resource centers; three students indicated a desire for a trans-inclusive athletic policy; and three students expressed an interest in trans-specific career and graduate school counseling.

### ***Question 3: Are trans-affirming supports related to students’ sense of belonging and perceptions of campus climate?***

In a series of hierarchical regression models, we examined whether the total number of trans-affirming policies/practices (each of which was recoded to be a dichotomous variable, such that 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no/don’t know*) was related to students’ sense of belonging on campus and perceptions of campus climate. We examined gender status (binary/nonbinary) and student status (graduate/undergraduate) as predictors. We also included gender assigned at birth (female/male) and race (of color/White) as predictors, as most participants were assigned female and were White; thus, it is useful to take these components of the data distribution into account. We examined involvement in campus activities and openness about one’s trans identity on campus as substantive predictors. Hierarchical regression models were used to examine the effect of each key predictor beyond the effect of the personal characteristics and any prior predictors in the model.

All continuous variables (sense of belonging, campus climate, campus involvement, openness about gender identity) were normally distributed. Reports of sense of belonging ranged from 3 to 15, with a mean of 10.22 ( $SD = 2.92$ ). Ratings of campus climate ranged from 5 to 25, with a mean of 14.92 ( $SD = 4.74$ ). Campus climate was moderately correlated with sense of belonging ( $r = .41$ ). Reports of campus involvement ranged from 0 to 9, with a mean of 4.04 ( $SD = 1.99$ ). Ratings of openness about gender ranged from 9 to 45, with a mean of 30.45 ( $SD = 8.37$ ).



The first series of hierarchical regression models predicted subjective sense of belonging on campus. A hierarchical approach allows one to examine the additional explanatory power (additional variance or  $R^2$  accounted for) of each predictor beyond that of the variables included in the prior model. In Model 1, personal characteristics were entered: gender status, student status, gender assigned at birth, and racial status. In each subsequent model, the following predictors were added individually (in this order): (1) involvement in campus activities, (2) openness about one's trans identity, and (3) the number of trans-affirming policies (see Table 5).

In Model 1, the personal characteristics were all nonsignificant, and no significant variance in belonging was accounted for. In Model 2, involvement in campus activities was also nonsignificant and accounted for 0% of the variance. In Model 3, openness about one's trans identity was *positively* related to students' sense of belonging, such that students who reported more openness across various domains of their lives (professors, peers, family, etc.) felt a greater sense of belonging on campus, accounting for 5% of the variance. Student status was also significant in this model, such that undergraduates reported a greater sense of belonging. Finally, in Model 4, adding the number of trans-affirming policies accounted for an additional 4.8% of the variance beyond openness, with students who reported higher numbers of policies/supports having a greater sense of belonging. Follow-up analyses that excluded graduate students (because involvement in campus activities likely has a different meaning for them) revealed the same pattern of findings. Excluding students attending two-year institutions (because many campus activities, such as sororities/fraternities and sports are not available to them) also resulted in the same pattern of findings.

A slightly different pattern of findings emerged in predicting perceived campus climate. In Model 1, being an undergraduate was related to a more positive perception of campus climate, but the other personal characteristics were nonsignificant, and overall, they did not account for a significant amount of variance. In Model 2, higher levels of involvement in campus activities predicted *less* positive perceptions of campus climate, accounting for 8.6% of the variance. In Model 3, openness about one's trans identity was not significant. In Model 4, adding the number of trans-affirming policies accounted for an additional 1.5% of the variance—a small effect, with students reporting more policies/supports indicating more positive perceptions of campus climate.

Follow-up analyses that excluded graduate students revealed no changes, except that activity involvement was more significant, accounting for 9.3% of the variance. When students at two-year institutions were excluded, the same findings emerged as in the original analyses.

**Table 5.** Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Sense of Belonging and Campus Climate ( $N = 507$ ).

Variable	Belonging				Climate			
	Model 1 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 2 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 3 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 4 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 1 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 2 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 3 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Model 4 <i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )
Binary	.22 (.30)	.23 (.31)	-.17 (.31)	-.11 (.28)	.29 (.49)	.19 (.47)	.04 (.49)	.05 (.48)
Undergraduate	.56 (.30)	.57 (.31)	-.61 (.30)*	0.36 (0.34)	1.23 (.49)*	.60 (.47)	.62 (.47)	.47 (.47)
Assigned gender	.27 (.33)	.27 (.33)	.46 (.32)	.44 (.32)	-.24 (.53)	-.34 (.51)	-.24 (.51)	-.27 (.51)
Race	-.014 (.29)	-.014 (.29)	.02 (.29)	.02 (.28)	-.36 (.47)	-.025 (0.45)	-.018 (0.36)	-.018 (0.45)
Total activities		.03 (.07)	.03 (.07)	.06 (.07)		-.072 (.11)***	-.74 (.11)***	-.77 (.11)***
Openness			0.08 (0.02)***	0.08 (0.02)***			0.04 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Supportive policies				0.20 (0.04)***				0.18 (0.06)**
$R^2$ <i>ch</i>	.010	.000	.050	.048	.015	.086	.005	.015
$F$ for change in $R^2$	1.17	.002	26.23***	26.41***	1.86	47.24***	2.48	8.28**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

The findings of this study have numerous and far-reaching implications for consultants, practitioners, and administrators who seek to support trans students. Systems-level consultants who seek to support institutions of higher education in becoming more trans-inclusive should include trans students themselves—who represent key informants and stakeholders—in all stages of the consultation process: problem identification, problem analysis, intervention development and implementation, and evaluation (Clare, 2013; Ingraham, 2015). These students can provide valuable information about their experiences and needs, as well as their knowledge of institutional supports and resources, which can then be triangulated with data from college and university administrators about what resources and policies are “actually” present.

Consistent with some prior work (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015), our findings indicate that institutions of higher education vary widely in the known presence of trans-affirming supports and services, with religiously affiliated institutions and two-year institutions especially tending to lag behind in terms of their inclusion of trans student. Consultants working with religiously affiliated institutions in particular must carefully attend to the broader cultural norms in which such institutions are embedded and to the church-college mesosystem—possibly including religious officials as stakeholders and potential resources—to increase buy-in and, ultimately, to enhance the effectiveness and perceived acceptability of system-wide interventions (Ingraham, 2015). Regarding two-year institutions, it is notable that nearly one fourth of full-time undergraduates and about 38% of all undergraduates in the United States attend two-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). According to students who attended two-year public colleges, only about half of their institutions had “gender identity” in their nondiscrimination policy and enabled students to change their name on campus records without a legal name change; only about a third addressed gender identity in student orientation programs. Such changes would be fairly easy for community colleges to make and would come at little cost. Consultants working with two-year institutions must be especially deliberate in considering the exosystemic forces (e.g., state governing bodies, funding) that intersect with college practices and resources.

We also found that, consistent with prior work, gender-inclusive housing and restrooms are important to students. But, significantly, all of the listed trans-inclusive supports/services were at least “somewhat important” to students, on average, and there was notable uncertainty among students regarding the presence of some services/supports. Half or more of respondents answered “don’t know” to three items: allowing students to change their gender on campus records without changing legal documents, having a

trans/GNC-inclusive intramural athletic policy, and offering private changing facilities and single-person showers in athletic/recreational facilities. Seven other items had an uncertainty rate of between 30% and 50%. The large number of “don’t know” responses shows that colleges and universities not only need to create trans-inclusive policies, but also need to make them accessible to trans/GNC students. Consultants have an important role here in evaluating the level of “disconnect” between stakeholder (e.g., administrator) reports of practices and policies and students’ perception of such practices and policies—and, in turn, in encouraging institutions not only to adopt such policies, but to communicate them. Effectively publicizing existing trans-supportive resources can help to show awareness and acceptance of trans lives—but it must be part of a larger strategic and sustained commitment to long-term systemic change (Zins & Illback, 1995). Such small initial steps, however, can provide an important means of enlisting the involvement of various members of the educational community and can lead to greater support for, and commitment to, making more substantive changes (Zins & Illback, 1995).

Our qualitative findings build on and extend the work of Beemyn (*in press*) and Seelman (2014a) in documenting, in their own words, trans students’ desired changes on campus. Like the students in prior work, the students in this study often emphasized gender-inclusive restrooms, the option to easily change one’s name/gender on campus forms and records, and trainings for faculty, staff, and students to alleviate the burden of having to educate others about trans people and issues. Participants also offered a number of innovative suggestions that have not been the focus of much prior work, such as those regarding counseling/health services and trans-specific spaces. This highlights both the importance of trans students as key stakeholders and the need for future systems-based consultation in university settings to engage health providers as participants in the data-gathering process (Clare, 2013; Ingraham, 2015). For example, students noted the need for campus health providers and therapists to receive basic training in trans competency and expressed a desire for expanded health insurance coverage and appropriate health care referrals.

Health services providers could be a key source of campus support for trans students, but they must first enhance their knowledge of trans populations, including nonbinary students. Students also generated innovative ideas regarding trans resource centers on campuses, noting a number of ways such spaces could support trans students. Consultants are encouraged to work with colleges and universities to evaluate the presence and use of physical resources and to consider ways in which existing spaces can be creatively adapted for the purposes of supporting trans students. Indeed, trans resource centers could, if effectively implemented and supported, represent a key source of trans-inclusive education and programming for students as well as faculty and staff.

Although it is important not to reduce trans people's experiences and concerns to be solely about restrooms, it is also necessary to note that safe and accessible restrooms are a critical issue for trans students. In responding to both the closed-ended policy/support items and the open-ended "wish list," participants cited gender-inclusive restrooms as their foremost concern, reflecting the fact that many students have few places on campus where they can use a facility without fear of harassment. Colleges and universities must cease avoiding the reality that trans students on their campuses are anxious about their safety on a daily basis. In guiding institutions to adopt better practices in this regard, consultants can draw from the work of Beemyn (2003), (in press) and others (e.g., Beemyn & Brauer, 2015), who offer context-sensitive recommendations regarding trans students' educational needs. For example, institutions should change signage on all single-user restrooms to make them gender inclusive and adopt and publicize a policy that enables individuals to use multiuser, gendered facilities in keeping with their gender identity. If a campus has few single-user restrooms, it should undertake renovations to create such facilities in the most frequented buildings. Institutions should require gender-inclusive restrooms on every floor of new and substantially renovated campus buildings, including residence halls.

Our findings regarding sense of belonging and climate offer valuable insights into the experiences of trans students and highlight the significance of the university context (and the larger societal-political context in which universities are embedded) in shaping marginalized students' well-being (Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009; Russell & Fish, 2016). We found that, consistent with expectations, the known presence of such policies/supports was related to a greater sense of belonging and perception of a more affirming campus climate—which have been linked to positive mental health and academic outcomes among sexual minority youth (Russell & Fish, 2016). Notably, our measure of policies/supports is not an objective index, but represents students' subjective awareness of policies and supports. This underscores the significance of accessibility and visibility in determining the impact of such services on students' personal and educational outcomes. These resources must be known in order to have an impact, and they do appear to have an impact, particularly in fostering a sense of inclusion in the campus community. Indeed, by actively educating others about the existence of such resources, consultants and members of the college community play a key role in affirming the existence, humanity, and needs of trans people, thus helping to establish and maintain a trans-supportive community climate.

We also documented an interesting association between outness and sense of belonging, such that students who were more out reported a greater sense of belonging. Outness has been linked to positive benefits for mental health, but also to greater risk of discrimination (Davidson, 2016; Legate et al., 2012). Indeed, the positive association between outness and belonging may have been

mediated by some other variable, such as involvement in trans-supportive groups or advocacy on campus, which may have had the effect of enhancing self-esteem as well as institutional connections. Alternatively, it could be that the students who have a greater sense of belonging are more comfortable with their gender identity and thus are more comfortable being out in a variety of settings. By contrast, greater involvement in campus activities was related to more negative perceptions of campus climate. TGNC students who are more involved across campus may engage with a wide range of individuals (staff, faculty, and students) who are not “hand-picked” for their supportiveness or affirmativeness of trans identities, and as a result, students may develop a more critical lens through which they view their institution.

Neither gender identity (binary/nonbinary) nor student status (graduate/undergraduate) significantly predicted sense of belonging or campus climate once all other predictors were taken into account. These variables, as simplified as they were, may have obscured key distinctions. Graduate students in diverse disciplinary and professional environments might differ in their sense of belonging and perceived climate. Likewise, a more fine-grained analysis of gender identities within and across the binary/nonbinary distinction might reveal unique patterns and associations with respect to sense of belonging and climate. Significantly, nonbinary students espoused unique concerns as revealed in our analysis of the open-ended data (e.g., with respect to health providers and pronouns), highlighting the utility of our mixed-methods approach as well as the need for consultants to recognize and engage trans students with a broad range of gender identities.

### **Limitations**

Given the low rate of participation of persons assigned male at birth (AMAB) in prior research on trans people, particularly research involving nonbinary trans people (Beemyn, *in press*; Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016; Kuper et al., 2012), we were not surprised that AMAB individuals were only about 20% of our sample. Because of what Julia Serano (2007) called transmisogyny—the ways in which the hatred toward trans people and hatred toward women intersect in the oppression of trans women—trans feminine individuals and nonbinary AMAB individuals more frequently experience discrimination than other trans people, such as in the gender policing of women’s bathrooms, and may be less likely to be out on college/university campuses. The relative lack of trans women and nonbinary AMAB individuals in our study limits the ability of the findings to be applied to these groups. Interestingly, even with most of the participants being assigned female at birth, the respondents rated the need for gender-inclusive restrooms as the most important trans-supportive policy, showing that discomfort and fear of harassment in gendered restrooms is not just a critical issue for AMAB individuals.

Another limitation of our study was having only 21 participants from religiously affiliated institutions. Colleges that are tied to conservative religions are seemingly very inhospitable places for trans students. For example, more than 100 religiously affiliated colleges have been granted or are seeking an exemption from the federal civil rights protections provided by Title IX in order to be able to discriminate against LGBTQ students, with many of these requests coming after the law's prohibition against sex discrimination began to be interpreted as including discrimination based on gender identity (Campus Pride, 2016; Stack, 2015). Future work is needed that explores how trans students at colleges affiliated with conservative religions survive and thrive, given that they receive little institutional support and often encounter administrative opposition to their presence. At the same time, it is important to recognize that institutions affiliated with more liberal or LGBTQ-supportive religions may have unique resources and community bonds and, hence, the potential to provide uniquely affirming environments to trans students.

It should also be kept in mind that all quantitative analyses were conducted on cross-sectional data, so no conclusions can be drawn about causation, much less directionality of effects. In addition, while combining a myriad of nonbinary identities into a single category provided sufficient power to detect effects and discover important relationships, it also precluded exploring important differences among those identities. Similarly, reducing race into a binary variable indicating whether an individual was of color or not may have prevented us from identifying important underlying relationships between race and gender. Future research should pay more attention to both the specificity and intersectionality of students' identities.

## **Conclusions**

Trans students, and nonbinary students specifically, suffer at the hands of genderism (Bilodeau, 2005; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014), or the rigid adherence to the gender binary in practices, policies, and norms. Colleges and universities, which have long upheld and enforced a gender binary and thus caused great harm to trans students, must play an active role in upending it to create more hospitable, gender-expansive campus environments. Drawing upon this study's findings, consultants can act as agents of social justice (Shriberg & Fenning, 2009) by advocating systems-level changes that promote positive educational and personal outcomes for all students, regardless of gender identity. In so doing, consultants should center the perspectives of trans students themselves, using their input to guide institutional change.



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**Genny Beemyn, PhD**, regularly writes, speaks, and consults on the experiences of trans college students and how campuses can develop trans-inclusive policies and practices. Their books include *The Lives of Transgender People* (Columbia University Press), *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (Routledge), and *Trans People in Higher Education* (SUNY Press). They are the director of the Stonewall Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and the Trans Policy Clearinghouse coordinator for Campus Pride.

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## Appendix. Sexuality and Gender Terminology

Term	Definition
Agender people	Individuals who identify as not having a gender. Agender people may identify as genderless, gender-neutral or neutrois, having an unknown or indefinable gender, or deciding not to label their gender.
Androgynous people	Individuals whose gender identity and expression combine both traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics, although not necessary in equal amounts.
Asexual people	Individuals who generally do not experience sexual attraction to others of any gender.
Bigender people	Individuals who experience their gender identity as two genders at the same time or whose gender identity may vary between two genders.
Binary trans people	Individuals who identify as trans women or trans men.
Bisexual people	Individuals who experience sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to people of more than one gender or people who are attracted to genders similar to their own and to genders different from their own
Chosen name	The name that someone uses for themselves. The term “preferred name” should not be used because the name that a trans person goes by is not a preference.
Cis or cisgender people	Individuals who identify with the gender that was assigned to them at birth (i.e., people who are not trans).
Dead name	The first name assigned at birth to a trans person that they do not use for themselves.
Demigender people	Individuals who feel a partial connection to a particular gender identity. Examples of demigender identities include demigirl, demiboy, and demiandrogyne.
Demisexual people	Individuals who typically do not feel sexual attraction to someone unless they have already formed a strong emotional bond with the person.
Feminine of center people	Individuals assigned male at birth who tend toward the feminine in their gender identity/expression.
Gay men	Men who experience sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to other men.
Gender assigned at birth	Sex designation given at birth, typically based on one’s genitals. Most people are assigned female at birth (AFAB) or assigned male at birth (AMAB).
Gender binary	The social system that sees only two genders and that requires everyone to be raised as a man or a woman, depending on the gender assigned to them at birth.
Gender-fluid people	Individuals whose gender varies over time. A gender-fluid person may at any time identify as male, female, agender, or any other nonbinary gender identity, or as some combination of gender identities.
Gender-inclusive facilities	Bathrooms, restrooms, and locker rooms that are open to people of all genders. They may be single- or multiple-user facilities.
Gender-inclusive housing	Residence hall rooms that are assigned regardless of gender, so that a student can have a roommate(s) of any gender. Sometimes “gender-neutral housing” is used, but this term is increasingly seen as inappropriate because it implies that the concept of gender is being neutralized or erased, rather than being expanded and embraced.
Genderism	The societal, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that there are only two genders and that gender is determined by one’s sex assignment at birth or by specific sex characteristics. Genderism privileges cis people and leads to prejudice and discrimination against trans and gender-nonconforming people.
Gender-nonconforming people	Individuals who do not adhere to the traditional gender expectations for appearance and behavior of people of their assigned gender. Some identify as transgender, but others do not.
Genderqueer people	Individuals who identify as neither male nor female (but as another gender), as somewhere in between or beyond genders, or as a combination of genders.

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Term	Definition
Heterosexual people	Men who experience sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to women and women who experience sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to men. Also known as “straight.”
Intersex	An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural biological variations of individuals who are born with a chromosomal pattern, a reproductive system, and/or sexual anatomy that does not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.
Lesbians	Women who experience sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to other women.
Masculine of center people	Individuals assigned female at birth who tend toward the masculine in their gender identity/expression.
Neutrois people	Individuals who identify their gender as neutral or null. They may also identify as agender.
Nonbinary trans people	An umbrella term for individuals who do not fit into traditional “male” and “female” gender categories. Nonbinary people include individuals who identify as agender, bigender, gender fluid, genderqueer, pangender, and various other genders.
Pansexual people	Individuals who are attracted to others regardless of their gender identity or biological sex.
Queer	An umbrella term to refer to all LGBTQ people. It is also a nonbinary term used by individuals who see their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as fluid or as not fitting into a “box.”
Questioning people	Individuals who are uncertain about how they identify their gender and/or sexuality.
Third-gender people	Individuals who identify as neither male nor female but as another gender.
Trans or transgender people	An umbrella terms for individuals whose gender identity and/or expression is different from the gender assigned to them at birth. Individuals who might identify as transgender include binary trans people (trans women and trans men) and nonbinary trans people (individuals who identify as agender, androgynous, demigender, gender fluid, genderqueer, and other identities that go beyond traditional gender categories).
Trans men	Men who were assigned female at birth. Sometimes referred to as FTMs.
Transmisogyny	A term coined by trans writer and activist Julia Serano to describe the unique discrimination experienced by trans women and trans feminine individuals, who face a combination of anti-trans and anti-women beliefs and practices.
Trans women	Women who were assigned male at birth. Sometimes referred to as MTFs.
Two-spirit people	A Native American term for individuals who blend the masculine and the feminine. It is commonly used to describe individuals who historically crossed genders. It is also often used by contemporary LGBTQIA Native American people to describe themselves.