“There’s stuff that comes with being an unexpected guest”: Voices and Experiences of Trans* Academics

Erich N. Pitcher, MS
Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education PhD Student
Michigan State University
Email: pitche13@msu.edu
Equality Knowledge Project Research Report

Ardel’s Seahorse Tattoo,
a sign of their identity as genderqueer.
ABSTRACT:
Trans*¹ people represent an under-researched population who face intense workplace discrimination. Offering a unique perspective about the ways that gender is operationalized within higher education institutions, the ten trans* faculty who participated in this pilot study shared their experiences within a variety of academic workplaces. Using narrative inquiry, I develop three themes guided by organizational belonging: macro- and microaggressions, administering gender, and the role of departmental and institutional contexts. Using organizational belonging as a framework, I develop recommendations for colleges and universities who would like to unsettle current notions of gender in ways that are supportive of trans* people.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, trans*, faculty, organizational belonging

¹ I trans* used as a way to describe a wide range of identities, which includes transgender, transsexual, gender non-conforming, non-binary, genderqueer, and the countless other terms not listed here that people use to self-determine their gender.
Trans* people and issues were brought to forefront in 2014 when Laverne Cox was the first transgender person to be featured on the cover of *Time*. To say that trans* issues have increased in visibility is an understatement; yet, visibility beyond narrowly defined discourses of acceptable genders (e.g., traditionally feminine women) remains limited. Just as in the popular presses, so too within academic texts, trans* issues, especially experiences beyond the binary remain under-represented, ignored, or worse, marginalized.

As the title of this manuscript gestures, there is “stuff that comes with being an unexpected guest.” The data from this pilot study suggests that trans* faculty are unexpected guests within academia, and part of the experiences of being trans* faculty involved negative experiences like microaggressions. The voices and experiences of trans* academics also demonstrated the ways in which higher education institutions administer gender through sex-segregated facilities, healthcare, dress codes, and identifying documents. Although participants reported many negative experiences within higher education, the data also illuminate the various ways that trans* faculty exercise resistance. Building supportive environments at the disciplinary, departmental, and institutional level can improve the experiences of trans* faculty, for example, creating all gender bathrooms and conceptualizing gender as multifaceted are two ways participants felt higher education organizations could improve climate.

**Research Context and Background**

There are very few empirical investigations about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) faculty. There is however a robust literature about the campus climate for LGBTQ people. Scholars agree that the climate for LGBT people is hostile (e.g., Rankin et al., 2010; Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2014), but there is some evidence that the social climate improved around gay and lesbian issues, and to a lesser extent trans*issues (Marine, 2011).

Key findings from largest national study of campus climate indicate that a majority (52.6%) of faculty members reported the experience of being deliberately excluded (Rankin et al., 2010). Transgender faculty and staff were more likely to indicate that they thought about leaving their institution than LGBQ faculty and staff and were more fearful about disclosing their identities on campus (Rankin et al., 2010). People who are transgender report higher incidents of harassment on campus than non-transgender men and women (Rankin, et
Despite gains in improving the campus climate, overt hostility remains a concern, especially for trans* individuals (Rankin, et al., 2010; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993; Vacarro, 2012).

**Transgender Workplace Discrimination**

The first “comprehensive national transgender discrimination survey.” (Grant et al., 2011, p. 10) indicated that a majority of participants (63%) participants faced discrimination in one or more arena, including at work (e.g., being fired), in health care settings (e.g., being denied services), in social services settings (e.g., experiencing harassment), in prisons (e.g., being sexually assaulted), and within their personal lives (e.g., losing relationships). There is widespread mistreatment at work, with 90% of respondents experiencing harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination. Nearly half of the respondents reported having adverse outcomes, including being fired, not being hired, or being denied a promotion because of their status as a trans person, with 26% reporting having been fired. Often transgender workers hide their gender identities to avoid discrimination (71%) or delaying transition to avoid difficulties at work (57%). However, those who lived as in accordance with their gender identities reported being more comfortable at work after transition, and felt their job performance improved (78%).

**Research Questions**

This study addressed two research questions. First, what are the experiences of trans* identified faculty? Second, what, if any barriers exist for trans* faculty to develop organizational belonging? In order to address these two questions, I engaged in a narrative inquiry about the academic workplace experiences of ten trans* faculty.

**Social Justice Orientation**

Social justice grounds my approach to this research as I seek to raise the voices of marginalized individuals and provide space for thought, reflection, and action (Freire, 1970). Within this research, I take a relational justice perspective (Young, 2011) that emphasizes the examination of processes and the norms, values, and assumptions inherent to academic life. The three defining features of the relational social justice orientation of this proposed research are: advancing the development and exercise of one's capacities, providing a venue to express one's experience, and facilitating participation in determining one's actions and the
conditions of such actions (Young, 2011). I conceptualize social justice as the elimination of all systems of domination and oppression (Young, 2011).

**Theoretical Perspective**

I draw on the psychological literature about organizational belonging. Building on the notion that humans have an innate psychological need to belong (Maslow, 1958; Strayhorn, 2012), organizational belongingness is about the degree to which individuals are included in opportunities available to all members of the organization (Quinn, 2005). There are three ways, according to Quinn (2005), that organizational belongingness can manifest: in one’s access to individuals with authority over them, and the ability to contact influential individuals within the organization, and the ability to form social contacts within the organization. Existing literature suggests that opportunities, compensation, and power are unevenly distributed across organizations (Morgan, 2006; Scott & Davis, 2007) and this creates uneven belongingness (Quinn, 2006).

Within this study, I focus on the social aspects of organizational belonging. I extend the concept of organizational belonging beyond the mere ability to make social connections. I conceptualize organizational belonging as the extent to which participants reported that they experienced belonging (or not) and the degree to which they were recognized (or not) as their authentic selves.

**Methodology**

I used narrative inquiry for this research study, defined this as an exploration of the human experience with a focus on the stories of participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These stories “reveal how people view and understand their lives” (Josselson, 2011, p. 225). In particular, this study sought to understand experiences that trans* academics encounter in their daily lives. In following the notion of narrative modes of knowing (Bruner, 1990), I center lived experiences as a valid, legitimate, and important way of knowing about the self and the world.

**Study Procedures**

Participants were identified on the “Trans-Academics” mass email list and all interested parties filled out a brief interest survey. The interest survey included demographic information, details about institutional affiliation, discipline/field, and educational background. Then I purposely sampled (Patton, 2005) among interested faculty members to
include a range of racial/ethnic backgrounds, institutional types, and sexual orientations. My intention was to explore information rich cases which yielded understandings and insights into the potential range of experiences of trans* faculty across the aforementioned areas (Patton, 2005).

Interviews were conducted over the phone or using Google hangout/Skype computer mediated calls. With the exception of one participant, Kyle, all participants engaged in a single interview. Kyle engaged in three interview sessions due to time constraints not allowing for two to three hours of uninterrupted time.

I ensured that participants had control over their narratives throughout the process, including in the writing of results. To that end, member checking ensured the accuracy and validity of the data (Creswell, 2009). All participants received a modest monetary incentive for completing the narrative and the interview.

**Analytic Procedures**

I digitally recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim. Then participants reviewed and corrected their transcripts. All participants either approved the transcripts or made additions and then approved the transcripts. After transcripts were approved, I loaded them into DeDoose for computer-assisted data analysis (Maietta, 2008).

In order to analyze the data; I conducted several close readings of the interview texts and narrative responses. My first read of the two kinds of data focused on the structure and meaning of the narratives. My second reading focused on applying broad or open codes (Benaquisto, 2008) to the texts. After developing a long list of 35 codes, to be precise, I created a memo that described each of the codes, and any relevant theories. In the memo, I developed 11 code groupings, with multiple sub-codes through an axial coding process (Benaquisto, 2008). I then wrote a coding memo (Groenewald, 2008) and debriefed the preliminary coding process with a senior colleague. In that meeting, I developed the relationships between the different codes. I then determined that three codes were most relevant to understanding the experiences that trans* academics have within academic workplaces with respect to organizational belonging. The three themes I developed through this process are: macro- and micro-aggressions, administering gender, and academic workplace experiences. After the meeting with a senior colleague, I re-read the interview
texts and re-coded for the major themes. I describe each of the themes in the findings section. I draw primarily on the interview texts.

**Study Boundaries**

There are two important boundaries of this study. They each represent a macroaggressions that I must name within this data set. First, trans women, and other male-assigned at birth trans* people, are exceedingly few within this data set, exactly one participant. Because of the macroaggressions that many trans women and transfeminine spectrum individuals (male assigned individuals who identify on the feminine spectrum, i.e., women) face within education systems (Grant, et al., 2011), trans women are largely invisible within higher education. Persistent transmysogyny (Serano, 2007) means that institutions of higher education systematically exclude transfeminine spectrum individuals and by extension within this research as well.

Second, there is also a silence around the perspectives of trans* people of color, as only one participant identified in this way. While there are three individuals who identify ethnically as Jewish, and one who identifies as part Asian, all believed that they benefited from white privilege in ways that are not comparable to the experiences of people of color. Given the systemic exclusion of people of color in higher education (e.g., Ahmed, 2007; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005), there is also a macroagression against trans people of color inherent in this study, which results from exclusion from formal education settings in the first place.
## Table 1.0 Participants’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Identification</th>
<th>Academic Appointment Type</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ardel</td>
<td>They</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>Cultural Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Gender Non-conforming</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White, Jewish</td>
<td>Non-Tenure</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>Transmasculine</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Post-Doc</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>She</td>
<td>MTF TS woman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>White, Jewish</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Ze</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Black, African American</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>Intersex Transman</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando</td>
<td>Ze</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-tenure</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessi</td>
<td>They</td>
<td>Transmasculine</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-tenure</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sj</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Trans*</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>Trans*FTM</td>
<td>Mostly Straight</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-tenure</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Findings

There are three major themes within the data that I discuss in this paper, they are: microaggressions, administering gender on campus, and role of disciplinary, departmental, and institutional contexts. I describe each of the three major themes in more detail, and then provide narratives from participants to flesh out each concept. In developing these themes, my intention is not to be overly reductive with the participants’ interview texts. Rather, in keeping with narrative inquiry, I attend to the parts of the narratives here, but also attend to the whole both within this paper, and elsewhere (Pitcher, in revision).

### Microaggressions

As stated earlier, I focus on the social aspects of organizational belonging. Within this theme, I focus on microaggressions, which are subtle daily insults that can manifest in behavior, verbal communication, and within one’s environment (Sue, 2010). Some scholars have described microaggressions as “death by a thousand cuts” (e.g., Nadal et al., 2011). The kinds of trans* microaggressions that participants experienced may be small, daily slights, but the cumulative effect of those insults erodes organizational belonging.

sj spoke to the ways that microaggressions influenced organizational belonging and ultimately sj’s ability to stay in a former workplace when sj stated,
I’m very sensitive to physical microaggressions, like someone moving away if I come out or changing the topic. Not wanting to engage anymore. All these things have happened. It’s 75 percent [of] why I left my first job. Rejection from other people. Fear of judgment.

Joy described about how her university treated her following her disclosure of being trans*. Joy stated:

The first thing that the schools did in response to my coming out—the first official thing they did was put me on involuntary research leave…They kept saying, “You can never come back to teach. It’s just not gonna work. Nothing personal. It’s just culturally this [your workplace transition] can’t happen. Students and parents won’t accept you.” I didn’t actually think that they were wrong.

Kyle described disclosing zir² identity as genderqueer, and the response ze received from colleagues at departmental professional development training. The trainer scanned to the room to identify the gender breakdown, but did so in a binary fashion stating that there were three men and four women. Kyle stated in response to the trainer assertion that:

“Yeah, I don’t really think you have four women in the room right now. You might have three women, three men, and one person who’s gender queer.” People were like, “Oh.” No one really knew what to say about that. There was no [response]—[people acted] very differently from the response when I came out as sexually queer. To come out as genderqueer was, [pause] people didn’t know what to do with that. It was like there was this real silence in the room, actually. That was kind of [pause]—that was very enlightening.

When Nathan disclosed his intentions to transition, he described the way the university handled it as “bizarre.” Nathan’s university policy is “you can’t use university email to tell people you are transitioning. I was only allowed to tell people orally when I encountered them.” He continued, “I wasn’t allowed to send an e-mail, and that meant that I had to come out in person a million times.” Continually having to disclose one’s identity is exhausting. But not having one’s gender recognized is doubly difficult. sj struggled for recognition at a previous institution and said:

---

² Ze, zir, zem are non-binary gender pronouns that affirm individuals’ gender identities.
People kept misgendering me at work, and even when I was fully passing as male, I was always doing guest talks in classrooms, they would introduce me as Dr. Martin who did this and she’s done this, and she’s done this. Students looking at me like, “You just called this person a ‘she’ and this is obviously not a ‘she’.”

Sometimes misgendering comes in the form of refusing to use any name or gender pronoun with an individual. Jake, speaking about his time as a graduate student, said:

when I switched to going by a masculine name, a lot of my classmates refused to call me anything at all. So, they would just not acknowledge me. They wouldn’t call me by anything. They weren’t going to call me Jake, but they knew that I wasn’t going by my old name, and so they just wouldn’t engage with me…

These are examples of the kind of microaggressions that participants faced, there are many more examples within the data set.

**Administering Gender**

College and universities administer gender in four distinct ways according to participants: in sex-segregated facilities, like bathrooms; within healthcare settings; through identification documents; and with dress codes. I only describe the findings regarding bathrooms, as this was the most common way that participants experiences the adverse effects of genderism, which eroded their organizational belonging. A counter-force that supports organizational belonging is access to all gender bathrooms, I describe two cases of this as well.

Two participants engaged in high-level administration of gender and bathroom usage. Both Nathan and Joy’s institutions proscribed bathroom usage. In Nathan’s case, the administration:

drew up a memo which then had to be signed by the deans who were supervisors for each of the departments that had offices in that office building. That memo said that I would only use the fourth-floor bathroom in that one building on campus and that anybody who didn’t want to encounter me just could avoid that one bathroom.

Similarly, Joy described a meeting between her dean, the provost, and legal counsel. She said:
I’m not officially allowed to use the women’s room at my school… It’s really something to be a tenured professor and be in a room with the dean and three lawyers and the provost talking about where you’re allowed to use the bathroom.

In contrast to Joy and Nathan’s experiences with sex-segregated facilities, both Orlando and Jessi had access to gender neutral or all gender bathrooms. This meant that they did not have to debate, which was the appropriate bathroom to use in their workplaces. Jessi stated:

On campus in my building, there’s a gender-neutral bathroom. Then also, I usually use the women’s room, I mean I feel like I’m comfortable in women’s restrooms when people aren’t confused about who I am. I mean, I don’t think anybody would—anybody in my department—everybody knows I identify as some sort of genderqueer, transmasculine but wouldn’t question if I was in the women’s bathroom, so I usually just use that.

Similarly, Orlando stated simply, “We actually have a gender neutral bathroom across the hall…When I find gender neutral anything, I use that.” Ze contrasted the experience of all gender bathrooms with sex-segregated ones, stating that ze typically encounters harassment with people questioning hir gender in sex-segregated bathrooms. Especially for Orlando, Jessi, Bryce, Jake, and Kyle struggled with which bathroom to use. Jake described this conundrum in the following way:

…so public restrooms are the worst thing for me. I wish I would never, ever have to walk into a woman’s restroom ever again. I don’t feel comfortable there. I don’t like going in there. I just want use the men’s room; yet I’m very aware that I cannot use the men’s room in most places.

Bryce summarized the bathroom issue for trans* people as “Yes! The bathroom is such a problem.”

Most participants did not have coverage for gender confirming medical care and often faced difficulties in accessing trans* affirming medical care. Orlando, after describing many awkward situations in healthcare settings, said, “My healthcare is… I just avoid it at all costs.” Additionally, most had difficulty with identification documents that forcibly label individuals into either male or female. While some institutions do include chosen names on IDs, often the institution prints a person’s legal name on university issued identifications.
A final area of difficulty for at least one participant was dress codes. Joy stated that a condition to her return to teaching was that she wear “appropriate attire.” While this concept was never defined, Joy speculated that, “The stereotypes of trans women would definitely give you pause about what a trans woman comes to work dressed in.”

Despite the espoused values of diversity and inclusion, institutions of higher education often fail to fully live those values with respect to trans* faculty. The negative experiences individuals described with respect to the administration of gender helps to illuminate the ways that institutional conditions (e.g., sex-segregated facilities) constrain organizational belonging. Supportive disciplines, departments, and institutional contexts can help to bolster organizational belonging. I describe this finding next.

**Disciplines, Departments, and Institutional Contexts**

Faculty operate within at least three distinct cultures or contexts (Austin, 1992?): disciplinary, departmental, and institutional contexts. Depending on the supportiveness of any one of these, organizational belonging may expand or contract as a result. Vacarro (2012) argued that micro-climates can influence one’s overall perception of climate and these data support that claim.

Changing institutions can bring about more positive experiences for trans* faculty, but there can be different norms and expectations with which to contend. Ardel said:

The one time I have felt I needed to be more “feminine” was the one year I was tenure track at [a community college] in the south. This was 2004-2005. I actually had a tenured gay male colleague pull me into his office and tell me that if I was “out” at all, I would not get tenure. Mind you, my dissertation as part of my Ph.D. requirements at [my graduate institution] was all about queer culture, art, and history. Ardel quickly learned that being “out” was an occupational hazard, even though their work focuses on queer lives and history. Even though Ardel’s field is supportive, the institutional context was not. In contrast, Jake felt that his field was not supportive, but his new institution is. Jake described his previous institution in very negative terms, but said his new institution is better. He stated, “I’ve been both lucky and smart in the sense that I’ve found myself a place where I will feel supported and protected as a trans* -identified individual.”

Ironically, Joy and Nathan are at very different institutional types, Joy at a university with a specialized mission, and Nathan at a regional public university. Both experienced their
workplace transitions in unpleasant ways. While Joy felt she required legal representation and Nathan did not (possibly attributable to his legal background), both institutions created policies (e.g., which bathrooms to use) specific to the trans* individual who was transitioning on the job.

Fields or disciplines can also influence one’s experiences. There is widespread agreement among participants that most fields and disciplines, even those with multiple trans* individuals present within them (e.g., history), have much work to do in order to be more fully inclusive of trans* faculty. The most positive experience of all participants is sj who stated that sj felt “held by my field.” sj sated that:

I feel so blessed when I look around at the colleagues I have and the love, the love that comes in constantly. I feel held and I don’t know if it has to do with my own story and what I’ve gone through or the fact that they recognize that we need to have out trans-academics because we are a part of the changing landscape of identity and kids need us as much as we need them, be positive role models. […] I feel less alone now than I’ve ever felt in my life since I’ve come out.

sj concluded that “I think [my field] is very open and supportive of the shifts that are happening. However, Jessi who is in a closely aligned field to sj did not describe the field in such supportive terms. Jessi said:

I think the epitome of this would be, I was at a conference [for my field] last November and I looked for anything that was LGBT or queer, did the search on the app, and there were like five papers, which is great, and they were all very interesting. They were what I would consider—and I’m not trying to claim myself that I’m a radical, but they were pretty low-key. An analysis of children’s books and like, oh, we need more LGBT book characters. We need more safe spaces-type stuff, which I guess from my perspective, I think that that type of stuff’s important, but it’s not super radical.

One’s expectations of these various organizational levels influences perceptions of supportiveness of disciplinary, departmental, and institutional contexts. Jake, Jessi, and sj are in closely related fields, yet experienced them differently. sj seemed to have different criteria by which to evaluate the supportiveness of the field (e.g., feeling held), as Jake and Jessi did not find the field as supportive (e.g., lack of critique around heterosexism).
Timothy provides an example of how the departmental context can influence organizational belonging. For example Timothy talked about the white lion or tiger phenomena that he experiences. He felt that he is “seen as an exotic animal.” Timothy continued to say, “They’d [other faculty colleagues] come up and they’d shake my hand and say:

“Oh, I’m so glad you’re in this building. It’s wonderful to be on the same floor as you,” and I wouldn’t know who this person is. “Who the hell are you?” They were doing it [shaking my hand, being supportive] to show how progressive they were, and being nice to me. I felt like some sort of exotic animal that everybody wants to get a picture of.

The kind of spectacle of support that Timothy experienced is an example where despite being well intentioned, his colleagues inadvertently contributed to a hostile climate. If one aspect of the cultures that faculty operate within is supportive, this can positively influence the experiences of trans* faculty. Nathan, for example, said that while zir institutional context left much to be desired, his field is supportive. A lack of support on multiple levels can leave one feeling like there is no place to belong. Joy spoke to this, stating that, she has “become professionally other” as there is no support in her discipline, her department, or at her institution for her trans* identity.

**Discussion**

There are many challenging, difficult, and unsettling experiences within participants’ narratives. The three themes of microaggressions, administering gender on campus, and disciplinary, departmental, and institutional contexts illuminate that institutional leaders have not done all they can to fully respond to the growing presence of trans* faculty. Negative experiences, including coping with microaggressions, administration of gender through bathrooms, among other places, and the lack of support from the institution, discipline, or department, all erode trans* faculty organizational belonging. Counter forces, like access to all gender bathrooms or having a supportive disciplines, increase organizational belonging. Trans* faculty in this study had too many negative experiences and too few affirming experiences. Leaders within institutions, departments, and disciplines have not done enough to ensure that trans* faculty feel like expected, welcomed members of their intellectual communities.
While much of what I report here is negative, trans* scholars in U.S. higher education demonstrate resilience and resistance throughout their work. Despite the challenges associated with navigating and surviving persistent genderism, participants articulated that there are many potential changes that institutions must make in order to more fully welcome trans* faculty. Trans* faculty in this study, many of whom were engaged in trans* inclusive work on their own campuses, retained hope that their institutions could improve by offering many ideas about how to improve the academy for trans* people. I describe these changes next.

Implications

Within each of the interviews, I directly asked participants what institutional changes they felt were necessary and what gender equity might look like if trans* voices were included. I develop the implications from this pilot study based on participants’ responses and ground those responses in organizational belonging. I divide these implications into intellectual strategies and practical strategies as some implications relate to shifting attitudes and social processes, while others focus on campus physical environments.

Practical strategies focus on increasing access to all gender bathrooms, trans* inclusive or gender confirming healthcare, and documenting trans* faculty lives. Increasing the number of all gender bathrooms need not be expensive, rather, re-signing existing, accessible, single stall bathrooms would suffice. As I argued elsewhere (Pitcher, 2015), thinking about facilities from an intersectional perspective is important to meet the needs of many individuals within our campus communities through facilities planning. Demanding that insurance companies offer equitable coverage for gender confirming healthcare is critically important, as not doing so represents a form of persistent discrimination that trans* people face within higher education. Finally, documenting trans* faculty’s lives through forms, surveys, and institutional data sets means that the institution itself is beginning to examine gender as more complex than male/man and female/woman. Each of these changes would signal to future trans* faculty that they are expected and important members of the campus community. Not making these changes sends the opposite message.

Intellectual strategies include routinely asking for pronouns, challenging one’s own assumptions about gender, and re-shaping systems and structures within higher education with trans* people in mind. Routinely asking for pronouns should occur in every classroom,
at faculty meetings, and whenever you meet someone new. Simply asking what gender pronouns do you use, is an important and meaningful way to welcome trans* people. It is important to note that cisgender people often do not take this seriously and say “any pronoun.” This ignores the struggles of trans* people to have their genders recognized.

Challenging one’s assumptions about gender also matters. Some ways to challenge one’s thinking about gender might be questions why certain expectations around behaviors exist (e.g., women tend to do…). Finally, and perhaps most difficult, institutional leaders must consider how their college or university would need to change in order to be structured around the fact that gender is more complex than men and women. Each institution must develop these strategies on their own, but the implications developed here represent a solid foundation on which to build. Each of these strategies would create institutional conditions that affirm the important of trans* faculty and ultimately increase the livability of their lives.

**Conclusion**

Trans* issues, especially experiences beyond the binary remain under-represented, ignored, or worse, marginalized within academic institutions. As I suggested at the outset of this report, there is “stuff” that comes with being an unexpected guest. Also, surviving persistent genderism as administered through sex-segregated facilities, healthcare, dress codes, and identification documents, is part of the “stuff” trans* faculty face as unexpected guests. The difficulties that trans* faculty face require organizations, administrators, and colleagues to respond by building supportive environments at the disciplinary, departmental, and institutional levels so as to increase organizational belonging among this population. Institutions of higher education can, and must, do better work on behalf of individuals marginalized based on their gender identities and/or expressions.
References


Gorski, P. C. (2014). Consumerism as racial and economic injustice: The macroaggressions that make me, and maybe you, a hypocrite. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege, 4*(1).


Quinn, S. S. (2005). The organization-based self-esteem, institutional belongingness, and career development opportunities of adjunct faculty at a small northeastern college (Doctoral Dissertation). Walden University, Minneapolis, MN.


