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Institutionalized Erasure: The Influence of Binarism on Nonbinary College Students

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The narratives and experiences of nonbinary people and nonbinary college students are still infrequent in scholarship and are viewed as abnormal, niche experiences. Normative ideals are further enforced by the severe lack of nonbinary scholars and researchers. In this paper, I name the challenges of normativity and use the existing literature to explore current obstacles to nonbinary students' senses of liberation, safety, and belonging at their institutions of higher education. I use normativity, specifically transnormativity, and binarism frameworks to explore barriers to nonbinary students' liberation and full engagement in higher education, and the uniqueness of nonbinary students' experiences compared to other members of the wider trans community. The article concludes with imperative implications that I have identified through my experiences as a nonbinary student and as a nonbinary professional entering into the field of student affairs.

Keywords: nonbinary, trans, queer and trans, student, college student, normativity, transnormativity, binarism, belonging, lack of belonging, campus climate

Before the semester started, I emailed all of my professors, just as I did last semester. I created a template, and I shared it with my trans friend for communication with professors at the start of each semester.

Dear (your professor), My name is (your chosen name) (your ID #), and I will be attending (your class title and time) this term. I am transgender and have not legally changed my name. On your roster is my legal name, (your legal name). I would greatly appreciate it if you would make a not to refer to me as (your chosen name) and use (your pronouns) pronouns when referring to me so that there is no confusion on the first day or throughout the semester. Thank you for your understanding, and I look forward to your class and working with you this semester.

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Three out of five of my professors responded saying they would correct their roster and write down my pronouns. For one professor, I went to class early to talk with because they had not responded to my email. Thankfully, I was able to talk to them before all of my classmates arrived, and they corrected the roster. I arrived early to class with my fifth professor. I waited for him to arrive, but all of the students arrived first. He came to class late, and I was unable to talk to him before class started. When he called the incorrect name during roll call, I corrected him on my name and pronouns, but he did not write it down. Next class, it happened again. I sent another email that also went unanswered. Immediately, I considered dropping the class. Unfortunately, it was required to graduate, and he was the only professor to teach the class. Instead, I never participated in class, attempting to be called on as infrequently as possible.

The above narrative is a starting point from which to explore the harm perpetuated against nonbinary students on college campuses and within college classrooms. Lack of respect for, and education about, trans and nonbinary identities leads to environments that are hostile toward trans and nonbinary students. Going beyond this narrative, institutions, including institutions of higher education, enforce binaries that violently erase nonbinary people and create obstacles to their liberation. It is imperative that people in all areas within the academy—staff, faculty, researchers, administrators—investigate this harm by centering the narratives of nonbinary students within their work and scholarship.

The experiences of nonbinary people are not a monolith. All non-binary people have different experiences; they may understand their gender or genders and their relationships to gender labels differently. It is important to recognize that hegemonic systems of power exert pressure on nonbinary people and communities to present themselves and their communities in a single, united, monolithic way. This pressure is oppressive. The oppression caused by the pressure to flatten the experiences of nonbinary people can be compounded for nonbinary people who hold other identities marginalized by binary, cisheterosexist, normative, anti-Black, settler-colonial, racist, Euro- and US-centric, ableist, patriarchal, and classist systems of power. As an institution, higher education enforces and benefits from hegemonic systems of power. Institutions of higher education explicitly and implicitly shut out students with multiple marginalized identities, decreasing their access to environments and practices deemed as beneficial and liberatory (Stewart &

Nicolazzo, 2018).

Although I focus on nonbinary students broadly, it is essential to recognize the limitations on data discussed are often compounded for students who hold marginalized identities in addition to being nonbinary (Flint et al., 2019). Throughout this paper, I highlight the desperate need for an increase in research focused on nonbinary student experiences by nonbinary researchers and for the importance of studying subgroups within the nonbinary community, particularly multiply marginalized nonbinary students.

Positionality

I am a queer, genderqueer, trans nonbinary person who works to center nonbinary voices and narratives in research focusing on nonbinary people. Because of the limited number of nonbinary researchers and the dearth of research focusing on nonbinary experiences, I deeply value my identity as an insider researcher. In conjunction with being queer and trans, I hold many identities that give me privilege in academic spaces. I am a white, German, able-bodied, native English-speaking graduate student, raised in a middle class household on stolen Osage land.

After growing up in suburban Northern Appalachia with limited connection to queer and trans community, I moved to Long Island, New York to pursue an undergraduate degree. Expecting to leave ignorance and hostility toward queer and trans people behind in western Pennsylvania, I imagined I would find a thriving queer and trans community at my university. However, I found no such student community and experienced a profound lack of respect for, and education about, trans and nonbinary identities from faculty, staff, and administrators. My moments of feeling alienated and as if I did not belong at my undergraduate institution taught me the importance of finding connection and community among peers. It drove me to work towards forming more welcoming spaces for others. I formed trans and nonbinary community as a means of survival, in an attempt to thrive within institutions centered around binarism, normativity, and assimilation. My experiences resisting binarism and normativity helped me understand the importance of student affairs work, particularly building student community and belonging among queer and trans students, and led me to consider a career in student affairs.

I am currently a master's candidate in the University of Vermont's Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration program. I prioritize the experiences of queer and trans students in my work and research, working with UVM's Prism Center and the College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences' Office of Equity, Belonging, and Student Engagement. At the Prism Center, I worked to identify connections between the erasure of queer and trans students from within research and the experiences of queer and trans students on campuses and within institutions of higher education. In the Office of Equity, Belonging, and Student Engagement, I advocate for queer and trans students in science, technology, engineering, and math. My experiences in these roles have further convinced me of the need for more comprehensive research dedicated to centering the experiences of nonbinary students, particularly the systems of care and support and sense of belonging they find within their educational institutions. As an abolitionist and person dedicated to working toward justice and liberation, I recognize that it is essential to scrutinize institutions and industrial complexes and how they use their power as a force for expediting or delaying fights for liberation. To provide meaningful support to queer and trans students, it is imperative to challenge hegemonic understandings of institutional structure, systems of care, and student success.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this paper, I consider the experiences of nonbinary college students from two primary theoretical frameworks: transnormativity and binarism. Using the theory of transnormativity, I expose the oppressive pressure that normative narratives exert on nonbinary students, and their gender identities and presentations. Through the frame of binarism, I consider how nonbinary identities are policed and erased by binary structures and forms of thought. Although all normativity and binary ways of thought influence all students, the frameworks of transnormativity and binarism recognize how these influences specifically target and otherize nonbinary trans people.

Transnormativity

Transnormativity is a normative social framework and system of power that prioritizes, privileges, and legitimizes binary identities, presentations, and conceptualizations of gender (Bradford & Syed, 2019; Johnson, 2016). Johnson (2016) specifies the medical complex as the source offering legitimacy to

people, both cisgender and trans, who have a binary gender identity, meaning in order to achieve legitimacy, trans people must medically transition and achieve a prescribed medical standard. Although in this paper I look at the lens of transnormativity specifically, transnormativity is one of many normative systems of power, e.g., systems that designate a dominant identity as the norm; normative systems position groups that do not hold that dominant identity as abnormal and deficient.

Another directly related normative system of power is cisnormativity. Cisnormativity enforces transnormativity by reinforcing normative narratives of gender. It legitimizes the beliefs that there are only two genders, gender is defined by sex, gender is inherent, and that being cisgender is normal and being transgender is abnormal (Bradford & Syed, 2019). Bradford and Syed (2019) identified five themes within cisnormativity: aversion, biological essentialism, danger, sexualization, and pathologization. Transnormativity and cisnormativity work in conjunction to stigmatize and delegitimize the experiences and identities of nonbinary individuals. By enforcing transnormativity, binary trans individuals enforce a hierarchical system of power that privileges them over nonbinary trans people and positions them, as people with binary gender identities, as closer to the ideal of cisnormativity (Bradford & Syed, 2019).

In an early model, Johnson (2016) identified two themes within transnormativity: medicalization and gender binarism. Medicalization is the expectation that all trans people desire, have access to, and pursue medical intervention. Additionally, medicalization includes the expectation that all trans people seek and receive the same forms of medical interventions. Another component of medicalization is the defining of trans identity through medical diagnoses. Gender binarism is the legitimizing of, and preference toward, binary trans identities over nonbinary identities. In a later model, Bradford and Syed (2019) expanded the number of themes from two to seven, adding gender roles, nascence, victimization, gatekeeping, and legitimacy. These themes are how transnormativity perpetuates the belief system that nonbinary identities, presentations, and conceptualizations of gender are less legitimate and normal than binary ones.

In addition to privileging people with binary gender identities, transnormativity enforces other hegemonic systems of power and oppression. Transnormativity centers whiteness and white supremacy by centering the narrative

of white nonbinary trans people and erasing the experiences of Black and Indigenous nonbinary people and other nonbinary People of Color (Bradford & Syed, 2019). Transnormativity promotes fatphobia by centering images of straight-sized nonbinary people (Bradford & Syed, 2019), and in a similar way promotes ableism. Additionally, transnormativity enforces femmephobia, interphobia, sexism, and the patriarchy by positioning masculine and androgynous presentations of gender as the dominant experience, and by centering the narratives of afab (people assigned female at birth and societally assigned to feminine gender roles) nonbinary people over the experiences of amab (people assigned male at birth and assigned to masculine gender roles) and intersex nonbinary people (Bradford & Syed, 2019; Darwin, 2020).

Transnormativity is enforced by both individuals and societal structures and institutions. On an individual level, transnormativity is reinforced externally, by cisgender, trans, and other nonbinary people, and internally, by the individual themselves (Bilodeau, 2005; Darwin, 2020). One system of external individual enforcement is misgendering nonbinary people, denying the use of gender-specific singular they pronouns, denying the use of neopronouns, and insisting that nonbinary people must use a certain subset of pronouns (e.g., insisting nonbinary people cannot use she/her pronouns). Institutions work to delegitimize nonbinary people by many means, including conflating sex and gender, requiring individuals to label themselves with binary gender markers, and requiring individuals to declare their gender (Darwin, 2020). These aggressions are obstacles to nonbinary liberation and lead to harmful outcomes for nonbinary people, including nonbinary people reporting worse mental health symptoms than binary trans people, and some nonbinary people choosing to not identify as trans to avoid transnormative pressure (Bradford & Syed, 2019; Darwin, 2020).

Binarism

Binarism is the construction of gender as a binary with the options of woman and man. A binary gender structure fails to account for the experiences of intersex individuals and nonbinary individuals (Bradford & Syed, 2019; Johnson, 2016). Binarism reinforces gender normativity by blocking cultural narratives that expand beyond binaries of sex and gender. Additionally, it pressures nonbinary people to not express their gender and assimilate into a gender presentation deemed as more binary and, thus, as more interpretable (Bradford & Syed, 2019). Binarism provides a structure through which to

study the obstacles and marginalization specifically experienced by nonbinary trans people that extend beyond the transnormativity experienced by the broader trans community, including binary trans people. Nonbinary people experience obstacles beyond those of their binary transgender peers in areas of gender expression and presentation (Bradford & Syed, 2019); safety and medical and mental health (Budge et al., 2020); and the law, legal protection, and politics (Darwin, 2020).

Areas of expression and safety present more extensive barriers to nonbinary people even in comparison to their binary transgender peers. Nonbinary people report more barriers to expressing their gender, such as through clothing, than their binary transgender peers (Budge et al., 2020). Additionally, nonbinary people's expression of their identity is questioned and delegitimized through the narrative that being nonbinary is an immature phase and that they will eventually transition into a binary gender identity (Bradford & Syed, 2019). Nonbinary people are policed out of gendered spaces, and report more frequent misgendering than binary transpeople report (Bilodeau, 2005; Goldberg et al., 2019). Additionally, nonbinary people are more likely to experience harassment, violence, and poverty (Darwin, 2020).

Medical and mental health, the law, legal protections, and politics are additional areas nonbinary people are marginalized beyond their binary transgender peers. Nonbinary people have more difficulty accessing legal and medical resources compared to binary transgender people (Darwin, 2020). In addition to barriers to accessing medical and mental health care, nonbinary people report higher minority stress, which leads to higher instances of trauma, depression, anxiety, self-injury, and suicidality (Budge et al., 2020). Also, nonbinary people do not always automatically benefit from legislation that protects binary transgender people. They often do not have avenues to legally express their gender (e.g., passports, birth certificates, insurance documentation, etc.) (Budge et al., 2020). Nonbinary people's lack of legal protections is exacerbated through the common political attacks against nonbinary people and the integration of the gender binary into political platforms (Budge et al., 2020). When studying the experiences of nonbinary people, especially when using literature that aggregates binary transgender and nonbinary trans individuals, it is essential to understand the nuances between the experiences of nonbinary people and binary transgender people and incorporate these nuances into the analysis of the data.

Literature Review

In this section, I review existing literature pertaining to students' sense of safety, campus climate, and belonging, with a focus on nonbinary students' experiences on college campuses. I name existing obstacles to liberation supported by institutions of higher education. Because of the systemic erasure and oppression of nonbinary people in research, few studies focus on nonbinary students (Flint et al., 2019; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Because of this dearth of data, the studies that include students in the wider trans community are presented and contextualized by jointly considering the oppressive implications of binarism and transnormativity that expand beyond the transphobia and cisnormativity experienced by both binary trans communities and nonbinary communities.

It is essential to center the voices of nonbinary authors and scholars when researching nonbinary students. Relying on nonbinary authors challenges the beliefs that outsider researchers are more objective, that cisgender authors can unilaterally declare themselves experts on the nonbinary experience, and that cisgender people are essential for helping and saving trans and nonbinary people (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). Although the number of nonbinary researchers is increasing, I still found few articles written by nonbinary scholars and even fewer written by a lead author who identified as nonbinary. My valuing of nonbinary researchers comes in part from my experiences as a nonbinary person feeling unrepresented, disrespected, and erased by most research. In order to adequately represent the experiences of nonbinary people, insider researchers who have a critical, liberatory lens and an intuitive understanding of experience as a nonbinary person are essential. For these reasons, I have intentionally organized the pre-existing literature into two groups, the first group as articles with a lead author who identified themselves as an insider researcher and the second group as articles with a lead author who identified themselves as an outsider researcher. I chose to focus on the lead author because I do not know the influence non-lead authors had over the framing of the work and the language used. I also chose to position insider researchers before the outsider researchers group because it is essential to center nonbinary researchers physically and intellectually in research.

Regrettably, even the articles including nonbinary researchers, both as lead and non-lead authors, did not make me feel represented and respected. Even in very recent scholarship, I found instances of exclusionary, binary, and obsolete

language. I recognize the challenge of using current and respectful language when writing about a community whose language is rapidly changing and when members of the community vary drastically in their use of language and what language they find offensive. However, the frequency of language misuse highlights both the absence of a sufficient number of nonbinary authors within the literature and the privileged, assimilatory nature of the narratives granted scholarly recognition.

Insider Researchers

Nonbinary college students lack a sense of belonging on their campuses because they feel unsupported and unprioritized by their educational institutions. According to Stewart & Nicolazzo (2018)'s research, academic settings and events tend to prioritize students with multiple privileged identities, meaning nonbinary students, particularly nonbinary students who hold additional marginalized identities, have less access to privilege in academic settings. They also found that nonbinary students are often forced to choose between binary options of gender in academic settings even when the institution positions itself as inclusive to trans and nonbinary students. Beemyn (2015) found that binarism and lack of belonging can feel even more acute, erasing, and marginalizing when the space represents itself as if it would be inclusive to nonbinary people. Not only can these binary systems cause gender dysphoria and decrease a student's sense of belonging, but they also promote transnormativity by positioning nonbinary students as deficient and not-the-norm. Binary systems situate nonbinary people in comparison to, and in competition with, their cisgender peers (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018).

In addition to an unwelcoming campus climate, nonbinary students do not feel supported by their peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. They feel the university does not prioritize their needs for resources and that there is a lack of understanding about nonbinary identities, particularly from faculty (Beemyn, 2015). Students expressed they viewed faculty as unsupportive, referencing faculty misgendering them after asking their pronouns, as well as a general lack of opportunities to share their pronouns in class. In addition to this hostility from faculty, nonbinary students reported a lack of support from their peers and queer-centered student organizations (Beemyn, 2015). Many student organizations were focused entirely on sexuality and were not inclusive of trans people. Even organizations that incorporated gender or that were trans-specific frequently promoted transnormativity and binarism by

centering binary trans people and centering conversations around binary experiences. Because of this lack of space for nonbinary students and nonbinary experiences, even when nonbinary students attend these spaces, they report having a hard time finding community with other nonbinary people because of the limited number who participate (Beemyn, 2015). The convergence of the violent binarism of educational institutions and the people within these institutions leaves nonbinary students with fewer opportunities for forming community and decreases their sense of belonging as college students.

Outsider Researchers

Outsider researchers have identified hostile campus environments, legal and administrative erasure, and lack of support and understanding from faculty, other students, and queer and trans support networks, organizations, and centers as barriers to nonbinary student belonging. Budge and colleagues (2020) center the importance of belonging for nonbinary students saying that belonging, community connectedness, and pride in one's gender identity can offset the negative effects of adverse gender-related discrimination and experiences. This claim recognizes the power of belonging to help students achieve their goals within a college setting. It also clearly states that a nonbinary student's sense of belonging or lack thereof can impact a student beyond their college experiences. Institutions of higher education hold the responsibility and the opportunity to create welcoming, liberatory spaces for nonbinary students that increase their capacity for health and well-being.

Instead of welcoming, liberatory spaces, nonbinary students report perceiving their educational environments as hostile (Budge et al., 2020). They felt the transnormative pressure to alter their appearance to be more binary and reported pervasive and unnecessary use of gendered and binary language (Flint et al., 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019). According to Goldberg and colleagues (2019), 78.1% of nonbinary students reported being misgendered sometimes or often, and they reported faculty, staff, and administrators claiming that gender-specific singular they pronouns and neopronouns are ungrammatical, as an illogical and discriminatory excuse to not use nonbinary students' correct pronouns.

Legal and administrative erasure promotes the marginalization of nonbinary students through student records and creates environments in which nonbinary students do not feel welcomed or represented. Student

information systems and demographic collection and reporting systems force students to provide a binary legal sex marker (Flint et al., 2020; Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018; Nowicki, 2019). Similar erasure occurs on student forms, college applications, and other records, including forms that are not impacted by the student's legal sex marker or gender, making required legal sex marker reporting a superfluous request that enforces binarism. Many institutions refuse to recognize students' chosen names (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018). Even when universities offer software patches to incorporate students' chosen names and pronouns, these systems are not comprehensive enough and often experience lengthy and limited rollouts and glitches. When institutions do not provide access to and prioritize students' chosen names and pronouns within their student information systems, they create environments that encourage misnaming, mispronouncing, and misgendering (Darwin, 2020; Nowicki, 2019). Additionally, students are often assigned rooms based on their legal sex marker, forcing nonbinary students into potentially hostile and unsafe living environments (Budge et al., 2020).

Nonbinary students' sense of belonging is also decreased by the obstacles they experience forming relationships with people in higher education, particularly faculty. Faculty, staff, and administrators often have limited to no education that teaches them how to not perpetuate binarism and transnormativity, and students often do not feel respected (Flint et al., 2019; Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018). According to Goldberg and colleagues (2019), only 10.9% of nonbinary students identified their professors as very affirming of their gender identity. Students identify feeling disrespect and a lack of belonging, and point to faculty who invite students to share pronouns but who do not gender students correctly or correct students if they misgender another student as a source. The lack of accountability for faculty to learn about and respect nonbinary students and their identities creates hostile classroom environments that perpetuate binarism and transnormativity, and make nonbinary students feel as if they do not belong in academic spaces.

Lack of support from other students and from on-campus queer and trans community are additional barriers to nonbinary students' sense of belonging and liberation. Only 14.1% of nonbinary students considered their classmates to be very trans-affirming, making it challenging for nonbinary students to form relationships with their peers (Goldberg et al., 2019). Additionally, even among other queer and binary trans students, nonbinary students expressed not feeling respected and welcomed (Budge et al., 2020). Goldberg and Kivalanka

(2018), Flint and colleagues (2019), and Darwin (2020) also discussed the theme of nonbinary students not being welcomed and centered within queer and trans community, centers, and student organizations and offered similar perspectives and conclusions as Beemyn (2015). The multiplicitous obstacles of binarism and transnormativity and their far-reaching impacts damage nonbinary students' sense of belonging and highlight the dramatic need for an immediate centering of nonbinary students and a resource-heavy commitment to dismantling transnormativity and centering nonbinary liberation within academic institutions.

Outsized Impact

Although all students and people connected to institutions of higher education experience the impact of binarism and transnormativity, binarism and transnormativity specifically target nonbinary trans people. Structures of normativity, binarism, and assimilatory pressure fixate on, and perpetuate violence against, nonbinary people when they are unable or unwilling to assimilate. This violence is compounded by nonbinary students' frequent inability to access areas of community (Bradford & Syed, 2019). The combination of hyper-fixated gender policing and lack of community decrease nonbinary students' sense of belonging, which enables transnormativity and binarism to have an outsized impact on nonbinary students and their liberation compared to their binary gender peers.

Belonging

Belonging is the trust that one's needs will be valued and met by a group, and one's sense that they are important to, respected by, and fit in with the group and individual members within the group (Budge et al., 2020; Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn (2019) structures belonging as both a motivational framework and a basic human need. Belonging is formed within peer groups, and a sense of belonging can increase when a person develops relationships with people whose backgrounds differ from their own (Strayhorn, 2019). Significant research explores the effects of belonging and lack of belonging, with Budge and colleagues (2020) reporting that belonging is directly linked to trans and nonbinary students' well-being. Belonging impacts academic success and students' physical, mental, and physiological health (Budge et al., 2020; Strayhorn, 2019). For mental health, a high sense of belonging increases a student's self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being whereas

a lack of belonging increases a student's suicidality, community detachment, and depression (Budge et al., 2020). For minoritized students specifically, a sense of belonging can affect minority stress, e.g., "stress experienced by minority group members as a result of experiences of interpersonal prejudice and discrimination" (Budge et al., 2020, p. 222). A low sense of belonging causes high minority stress, but a high sense of belonging decreases a student's experience of minority stress and makes their experiences of minority stress less bothersome and easier to overcome. Belonging is an important tool for contextualizing the experiences of college students, including nonbinary students, and can help identify how hostile environments impact college students' well-being and sense of available opportunities.

Influence of Belonging

Budge and colleagues' (2020) research into belonging and minority stress theory found that a lack of belonging exacerbates the impacts of discrimination against nonnormative identities. Many students, including queer and binary trans students, are able to reduce the impact of normative campus culture through joining subgroups that form a normative culture around an identity classified as nonnormative by the dominant campus culture. However, nonbinary students are denied this opportunity due to systemic oppression and erasure. Institutions erase nonbinary students' gender identities by not collecting accurate data on nonbinary students and enforcing binary-gendered spaces (Goldberg & Kuvallanka, 2018), decreasing students' opportunities to find other students who share similar gender identities. Even when nonbinary students can identify spaces designated to serve queer and trans students, nonbinary identities are othered in these spaces through queer and trans culture's perpetuation of transnormativity and binarism (Beemyn, 2015). Because of the obstacles nonbinary students face to finding affinity spaces and community, they struggle to form a sense of belonging on campus, leading to both an increase in the harm against nonbinary students and a decrease in nonbinary students' ability to resist the impacts of that harm (Budge et al., 2020).

Institutions of higher education perpetuate normative social frameworks and systems of power through their creation of campus culture (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). A normative campus culture creates a dominant, ideal identity, which often centers societally privileged identities. All members of the institution may struggle to feel they identify with campus culture and to find community when the normative ideal promotes a singular dominant

campus identity. This struggle to find community will leave many members feeling a lack of belonging and as if they fall outside of the campus's normative culture. Despite many students feeling they do not fit the dominant campus identity, college campuses provide students with opportunities to find niche areas of interest and community, including clubs, sports teams, and communal housing. Although normative culture harms all students, many students are able to reduce the impact of this harm through finding areas of affinity and shared identity that lead to a sense of belonging and connection to campus life.

For queer and trans students, areas of community can be formed through queer- and trans-centered student organizations, on-campus community centers, and affinity spaces. For nonbinary trans students, queer and trans spaces could provide pivotal spaces for them to create community, develop a sense of belonging, and resist minority stress and the harms perpetuated by the university (Budge et al., 2020). However, queer and trans spaces instead intensify this harm by using aspects of normative queer and trans culture, primarily transnormativity and binarism, to further alienate nonbinary students and reduce their ability to find affinity and belonging within queer and trans spaces (Beemyn, 2015). Nonbinary students are then denied access to cisnormative campus culture and also labeled as nonnormative within their nonnormative subgroup of queer and trans culture.

In addition to the transnormativity within the queer and trans space creating obstacles to forming community and liberatory spaces among nonbinary people, higher education institutions' systemic erasure of nonbinary people reduces their opportunities to find spaces of affinity and develop a sense of belonging. Students are frequently required to disclose their legal names and sex markers to the university, even when it is extraneous information (Nowicki, 2019). This creates a culture where nonbinary students' gender identities are infrequently recognized and respected and where gendering students with binary language is the norm (Goldberg & Kivalanka, 2018). Additionally, universities often structure their programs and physical spaces to privilege binary gender identities and erase nonbinary genders (Goldberg et al., 2019). Institutions often have gendered restrooms, locker rooms, and living spaces. These spaces erase nonbinary students' gender identities and deny them the opportunity to find other nonbinary students through same-gender living spaces. Because student information systems, forms, and other means of data collection often do not allow for nonbinary students to identify themselves (Nowicki, 2019), institutions of higher education force nonbinary students

into binary structures that reduce their ability to find other nonbinary students, reduce their capacity to develop a sense of belonging, and exacerbate their experiences of binarism and transnormativity within the institutional culture.

Implications

The diminished belonging nonbinary students feel at institutions of higher education points to the harm higher education perpetuates against all students, particularly students with multiple visible, marginalized identities, through normativity, binarism, and expectations of assimilation. When considering the marginalization of nonbinary students it is important to remember power-neutral language and histories are false, exclusionary, and oppressive (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). To combat this tendency, universities must teach histories and prioritize bodies of scholarship that center nonbinary and other radically liberationist narratives. Additionally, institutions must hire and retain multiply marginalized nonbinary people, particularly Black and Indigenous nonbinary trans femmes (Goldberg et al., 2019; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). Creating spaces where nonbinary professionals feel supported working in is essential to creating spaces where nonbinary students are fully included and welcomed into the learning environment. Supporting both nonbinary professionals and students requires changing gendered culture, designing accessible liberatory spaces, and forming systems of accountability to dismantle transnormativity and binarism.

Eliminating gendered culture is an essential step toward increasing nonbinary students' sense of belonging (Goldberg & Kunalanka, 2018). Institutions must universalize chosen name policies and incorporate an option for students to declare and change their names and pronouns at-will. Additionally, an invitation to share pronouns should be incorporated into all introductions and any time names are shared pronouns should be included, creating a name and pronoun pair. When pronouns are not offered, gender-inclusive language should always be the default; an individual should not need to present in a way deemed non-conforming. Defaulting to gender-inclusive pronouns combats binarism and transnormativity and acknowledges the reality that requiring pronouns outs and endangers nonbinary people who use gender-specific singular they and neopronouns as well as trans people whose gender is presumed to be different from their gender identity. Institutions also need to expand the gender options students are able to declare and remove gender-specific policies (Bilodeau, 2005).

Designing spaces that are accessible and committed to liberation is essential to creating a welcoming environment for nonbinary students (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Physical spaces, such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and housing, need to be intentionally redesigned to be gender-inclusive and accessible (Goldberg et al., 2019). Student ID cards, forms, transcripts, diplomas, and surveys and data collection need to account for the expansiveness and flexibility of gender (Budge et al., 2020; Nowicki, 2019). Additionally, gendered programs, such as Women's Studies, and groups and organizations, including Greek Life and athletics, need to fundamentally restructure to stop promoting transnormativity and binarism (Bilodeau, 2005; Budge et al., 2020).

For these changes to succeed, institutions must simultaneously implement a system of accountability for community members who continue to perpetuate transnormativity and binarism. Claims to support students and offers of education are not complete without systems that enforce such a cultural shift. Schools need to educate faculty, staff, administrators, and students on community expectations, inclusive language use, nonbinary identities, and common microaggressions (Beemyn, 2015; Budge et al., 2020). Universities must prioritize their commitment to their nonbinary and marginalized students over their commitment to funding, from donors, corporations, other institutions, and the government, when the funding source does not uphold liberatory and anti-normative values. In conjunction with this education, institutions must create systems that require community members to treat others with respect and in ways that subvert systems and dynamics of oppression and privilege. Without accountability, people experiencing harm are less able to advocate within the system and find support, while people perpetuating harm are less able to find support to change their behavior and are allowed to continue to perpetuate harm with impunity.

Conclusion

Despite the drastically limited currently-available research focusing on nonbinary students' experiences of belonging, the research that is published is filled with implicit and explicit discussion that recognizes the adverse effects of transnormativity and binarism on students and the obstacles to liberation upheld by institutions of higher education. Nonbinary students' ability to access a sense of belonging is dangerously diminished because of the oppression, normativity, and assimilatory pressure perpetuated and enforced

by their academic institutions and campus climates. Nonbinary researchers spoke directly to transnormativity and binarism and discussed a lack of support from faculty and queer and trans community. Researchers outside of the nonbinary community reiterated the discussions of the researchers inside of the community and also discussed the impact of hostile campus environments, legal and administrative erasure, and lack of support from peers. The current scholarship shows the paucity and lack of complexity that dominates the field of research into nonbinary students, and specifically nonbinary students' sense of belonging.

To rectify the violence higher education is perpetuating against nonbinary people, institutions must make immediate, extensive, and costly changes. Institutions need to commit to unlearning binary gendered culture and creating a culture that deconstructs normativity. Universities must redesign their spaces, both concrete, physical spaces and abstract, intellectual spaces, to center radical narratives, accessibility, and intersectional liberation. Higher education desperately needs to envision and implement systems of accountability for all members of institutions, including students, staff, faculty, administrators, and donors. Finally, institutions need to provide comprehensive funding to multiply marginalized nonbinary students, hire multiply marginalized nonbinary employees, and retain the multiply marginalized nonbinary people at their institutions. By centering the needs of those most marginalized and structurally disadvantaged, particularly BIPOC nonbinary femmes, all students, including nonbinary students, benefit from more liberatory, just, and sustainable forms of education.

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