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Transgender students in post-compulsory education: a systematic review

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Highlights for review

•   Students on the transgender spectrum are significantly under-researched.

•   College or university is a significant time for students to develop their identity.

•   Empirical studies reveal significant complexities around gender in education.

•   Action to promote transgender equality in post-compulsory education is now urgent.

Transgender students in post-compulsory education: A systematic review

Abstract: Students identifying on the transgender spectrum are significantly under-researched and under-reported in the education literature. Long term detrimental effects of gender-identity based discrimination and violence requires us to find more inclusive ways of supporting students with transgender identities. We report findings from a systematic review of the international research on transgender students in post-compulsory education. A standardised review protocol was used to synthesise findings from twenty empirical studies to: 1) describe the complexities of gender identities within education; 2) situate the importance of targeting equality issues for transgender students, and; 3) highlight emerging innovations and the need for further research. We recommend more critical engagement and dialogue with transgender issues to challenge institutional policies, processes in education with those involved.

1. Introduction

Transgender people are increasingly visible in public life and by sharing their personal stories have embedded transgender issues into popular culture. Nevertheless, gender-identity is one of the least discussed and under-researched phenomenon within post-compulsory education (Dilley, 2004). Scholarship in diversity and equality has failed to adequately address lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender and intersex (LGBQTI) issues within education (Dilley, 2004; Equality Challenge Unit, 2009; Renn, 2010). Historically the academy has been a primary source of queer theory (Tierney and Dilley, 1998) and feminist, critical, and multicultural pedagogies (Renn, 2000). Alexander and Wallace (2009) suggest identity as a useful tool for students and teachers to analyse the sociocultural and historical nature of culture and individual agency in their commitment to inclusion. Responding to transgender issues is more than individual given the institutional discrimination faced (Ellis et al 2015) requiring dialogue which engages both grassroots and strategic action in meeting transgender students' needs.

This paper reports findings from a systematic review of published empirical research on transgender students in education. It focuses on college and university education which follows compulsory schooling. If not inclusive and supportive, post-compulsory education can have long term detrimental effects on students from the transgender community (Oswalt and Wyatt, 2011). The rationale for this review came from interest in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in education (author 1, 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c) and the lack of guidance for transgender students. The needs and experiences of students identifying on the transgender spectrum are under-reported in the literature (Garvey and Rankin, 2015) and tends to be conceptual in nature (Dugan et al., 2012). This scarcity of research on

transgender issues extends across the educational system and reflects a context of societal transphobia. Students whose gender differs from the dominant norm may not only lack information but also the language to name their experiences and feelings or to reveal their transgender identities (Singh et al, 2013). These conundrums informed our approach to scoping the empirical evidence with the following questions:

- What are the complexities around gender and its related concepts within the setting of post-compulsory education and how do transgender students experience these?

- What might be the theoretical basis for examining and promoting transgender inclusion in post-compulsory education?

- Which policies, processes, and structures for engagement can be identified to work more inclusively with transgender issues including those included under the broader LGBTQI banner?

- What are the priorities for further research and how can existing innovations be promoted or new initiatives generated?

2. Background

2.1 Terminology

Transgender is an umbrella term for a person whose gender identity, and gender expression does not conform to that normatively associated with the gender they were assigned at birth and to persons who are gender transgressive. Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being a man, a woman or something else. Gender expression refers to the way a person communicates their gender identity to others through behaviour and/or appearance. "Trans" or "trans*" with an asterisk can be used as shorthand to reflect the full spectrum but

is not exclusive to: transgender, transfeminine; transmaculine; transsexual; transvestite; genderqueer; genderfluid; non-binary; genderfuck; genderless; agender; non-gendered; third gender; two-spirit; bigender; androgynous and gender nonconforming. In summary, transgender activists acknowledge the complexity of the area and the difficulties in negotiating through a vast range of terms (Beemyn, 2003; 2005; Beemyn and Rankin, 2011; Butler, 1988; Feinberg, 1999; Valentine, 2007).

Going beyond defining and understanding the variety of identities under the transgender umbrella should help to search for and support the implementation of more inclusive ways of conceptualizing, listening and supporting students with transgender identities (Boucher, 2011). Dominant discourse assumes culturally produced linear links between biological sex, gender and sexuality (being straight, gay, bisexual and other). Presuming a natural progression between sex and gender identity and the need to bracket different identities has been challenged by transgender and gender non-conforming activists (Feinberg, 1999, Valentine, 2007). Appreciating that cisgender or cissexual individuals whose 'identity and presentation match their physical morphology and mirror normative behavioural, cultural and psychological traits typically associated with their sex" (Seelman, 2014, p5) is key to understanding the oppression of transgender people and the benefits for cis populations. Typically, transgender issues are framed as identity "problems" situated within psychological pathology rather than as systemic and institutional manifestations of educational communities (Boucher, 2011). As our knowledge and understanding increases, there has been a critical analytical shift regarding the conceptual frameworks typically used to represent, define, and address "transgender issues" and the impact on transgender people within educational systems (Boucher, 2011 Mintz, 2011).

2.2 Student issues and concerns

The literature on transgender students reports high rates of bullying, abuse and violence (Wyss, 2005). Approximately 38% of transgender and gender nonconforming students, faculty staff and administrators have experienced harassment on campus, a rate significantly higher compared with the 20% experienced by their (non-transgender) lesbian, gay and bisexual counterparts (Rankin et al., 2010). High profile situations such as the death of student Tyler Clementi in 2010 at Rutgers University in the USA highlighted the seriousness of such targeted violence. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) young people report higher levels of depression (Westerfeld et al., 2001) and substance abuse (Bontempo and D'Augelli, 2002) both associated with suicidality (Russell and Joyner, 2001). Transgender youth have been less studied than their LGB peers. Grossman and D'Augelli's (2007) study of transgender youth found that almost half of their participants had seriously considered suicide with one fourth attempting suicide. A larger study of mental health issues and sexual orientation (Oswalt and Wyatt, 2011) noted that environmental responses were major contributing factors. Risk factors for suicide in transgender individuals, include; self-reported depression; having a history of substance abuse; being under twenty-five years old; being forced into sex; feeling victimized and; discrimination based on gender identity (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006). Risk factors shared with LGB students include: parental rejection; substance abuse; peer victimization, and family violence (Grossman and D'Augelli, 2007). Other academics have however challenged underlying assumptions or beliefs that people who are not transgender or gender non-conforming are more 'normal', 'healthy', and 'real' (Seelman, 2014, p619-20).

Identity development is a dynamic process for many transgender students. They may be of any age, ethnicity, race, class, or sexual orientation. Some use the opportunity of going to college or university to start living in their desired identities for the first time. Others may come out or transition during this period or may never even use the term 'transgender' to describe their identities. These choices may also depend on the degree to which they have established support systems beforehand (Bilodeau, 2005; Singh et al, 2013). More progressive colleges and universities have addressed physical, social structures and binary gender systems in their institutions (Beemyn, 2005). Beemyn et al., (2005) identified areas where transgender students experience discrimination because of gender-exclusive policies and practices. These included: health care; student accommodation, bathrooms and locker rooms; the collection and storage of student personal data; omissions in diversity inclusion programmes; staff and student training and support. Bathroom access remains a pressing challenge in the educational climate giving rise to very negative experiences (Seelman, 2016). Subgroups from different ethnicities; disabled and/or living in a rural area, and male-to-female (MtF) transgender individuals are significantly more at risk at being denied access to a bathroom or other facility (Seelman, 2016).

Less is known about transgender students' educational outcomes although drop-out or non-completion rates in further or higher education can be as high as 85% (Xavier et al, 2005). Transgender populations also face gender-identity-based prejudice and discrimination in employment (Beemyn, 2012) with very high unemployment rates (Scott et al, 2011). Despite this, there is a dearth of research regarding transgender students at community colleges and little vocational guidance for employers or career counsellors. An effective student-centred approach would therefore address the continuum of transgender experiences throughout and beyond post-compulsory education and underpin all institutional policies and support.

3. Methodology

The aims of the review were stated earlier. A systematic approach to scoping and conducting a review of published empirical studies was used to establish the type and range of knowledge regarding transgender students in post-compulsory education. It was based on a clear protocol (Rutter et al., 2013) stating the aims and process for answering the research questions.

The international electronic bibliographic databases in the fields of education were used to search for empirical literature up to the end of November 2016 (British Education Index, Higher Education Empirical Research, Educational Research Information Centre and Education Administration Abstracts). The Cochrane Library was examined for previous reviews with nil result. To ensure the precision of the search strategy the search terms used '' '' to group terms and * for the truncation of terms. Boolean (AND/OR/NOT) operators were used to link terms together to return literature that crossed the interdisciplinary boundaries between education, sexuality, gender and psychology. A pilot search helped to refine the final search terms after which generic truncated terms (producing large amounts of irrelevant studies) were excluded. Studies reported in books were not included. Lateral searching techniques using guidance from the mnemonic PICo (Population, phenomenon of Interest, Context) (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2011) was used to refine the criteria for inclusion after the pilot stage. Table 1 provides an outline of the search terms used and inclusion criteria.

Table 1: Key terms used in search strategy using PICo^ (JBI, 2011)

1.Population	2.phenomenon of Interest	3.Context
Student*	Trans*	Higher education
	"Cross dress*"	Curriculum
	Intersex*	Placement
	LGBTQ	Universit*
	Queer*	Further education

Summary of eligibility criteria

Study designs: No restrictions

Publication status: published (excluding books)

Dates: No limits. Conception of database to November 2015

Language: English

Settings: Post compulsory education facilities

Outcomes: Knowledge of Trans* students in post compulsory education

Notes:
^PICo: **P**opulation, phenomenon of **I**nterest, **Co**ntext.

International studies were limited to those published in English. 278 full-text studies were downloaded and subject to data abstraction.

3.1 Taking the 'T' out of LGBT

Following initial data abstraction, two groups of empirical studies were identified. The majority of studies were inclusive of LGBTQI (n=51) which aggregated transgender college students with their lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) peers. Whilst there is great value in these studies and common themes, detailed screening revealed that transgender students were not included in samples and/or the analysis did not breakdown the different and individual experiences of transgender students or explore transgender identities specifically. We therefore excluded these studies and focused on those concerned solely with transgender students as their target population (n= 20).

The complete search process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Trans* Review: Flow Diagram Overview
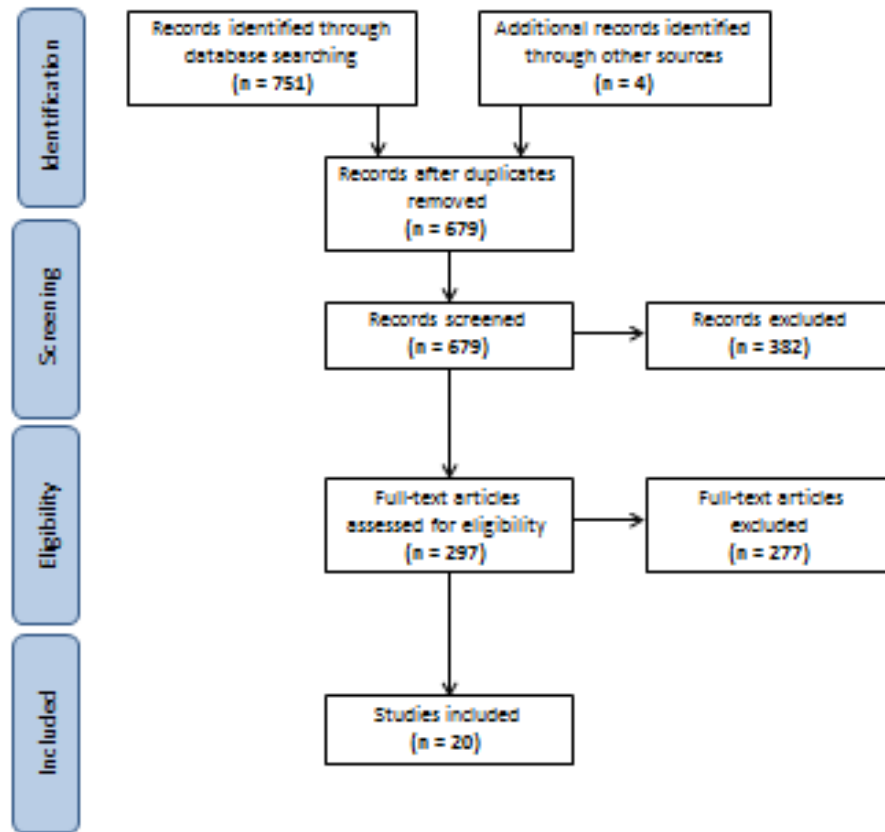
3.2 Review process

The critical appraisal skills programme tool developed for screening and appraising

qualitative research (www.casp-uk.net) was adapted to inform a pro-forma for systematically

assessing the studies including those of mixed methodological design. Each full text study

was read by one author and inter-rater reliability was achieved through re-reading, refining

and re-evaluating each study by one other author. Studies not empirically-based were discarded. Table 2 provides a list of all the studies finally confirmed as meeting the review inclusion criteria.

Please see separate document for Table 2

3.3 Data analysis and thematic synthesis

Included papers were annotated, coded, categorised and broad themes identified against the review aims. The majority were based on research conducted in USA, 2005-2016. We used Thomas and Harden's (2008) thematic synthesis to develop emerging overarching 'descriptive themes' and 'the generation of analytical themes' in relation to the research questions. Going beyond the primary studies is a critical component of synthesis, and metasyntheses provided integration to discover novel interpretations of findings.

Without exception, complex challenges in engaging transgender students in research was noted and attributed to a perceived lack of trust and concerns about how and whether the research would be used or not. Studies were rarely led by the transgender student population. Samples were relatively small, with the exception of those drawing on secondary data analysis. We listed four main themes emerging from what authors claimed as being significant or noteworthy in relation to transgender students in post-compulsory education. Findings synthesised under these themes were common and consistent. They illustrate that educational institutions have enormous work to do to reach any meaningful standards for transgender inclusion.

4. Results

4.1 Theme one: **Navigating transgender identities across a variety of spaces**

This theme was concerned with students' experiences of expressing and navigating their individual transgender identities and their sense of agency and community in educational environments. Sub-themes included the impact of other people's responses to their identities and the type of support needed. Navigation determined how transgender students positioned themselves within and between campus groups including in-group differences within the LGBTQ communities, their activism and hypervisibility.

At an individual level, Finger's (2010) pen picture of eighteen students' day-to-day experience of developing and navigating identities found that identity development went hand-in-hand with increasing independence. Gender expression was associated with physical presentation and personal style as well as social interactions with peers, faculty and staff. Where students exercised self-identity and personal agency on campus, this improved their engagement in learning. Finger concluded that gender identity, whether normative or "betwixt and between," (p16) is very personal. Pusch (2005) explored eight students' perspectives on their own identity development as transgender and/or transsexual at various stages of living in their self-identified gender. He explored their feelings about the reactions of people who knew them as transgender and the extent to which these reactions were viewed as supportive and validating, or disapproving and discouraging. Moving to and being in an educational environment sometimes helped to mediate these reactions for example, between the initial discouragement from family with support from friends and other transgender people. Within this theme, students found themselves an object of curiosity (Pusch, 2005) which was welcomed but also draining. Curiosity potentially reinforced feelings of being 'not normal', particularly for those not living full-time in their desired gender. The greatest support came from those who "saw them as they saw

themselves" (Pusch, 2005, p60). Finger (2010) and Mintz (2011) for example, identified relationships with family, classmates, and university officials as significant and supportive, particularly during adjustment periods or following rejection by loved ones.

Dugan et al. (2012) found substantive within-group differences among transgender sub-identifications. They considered differences (i.e. MtF, FtM, intersex, prefer not to say) amongst transgender college students' perceptions in three dimensions; perceptions of climate, educational outcomes and engagement. The researchers considered between-group differences among transgender, non-transgender, LGB, and/or non-transgender heterosexual college students. Transgender students appear to have more in common than differences. These were attributed to shared experiences of marginalisation as well as having to challenge the gender-binary framework. Likewise Bilodeau's (2005) found that understanding the transgender experience is incredibly difficult and often deeply inaccessible to those not experiencing it directly.

Bilodeau's participants (2005) also confirmed the significance of an LGBT affirming environments and being political active within these. Students actively involved as volunteers within trans-inclusive LGBT and Queer student groups contributed to creating trans-affirming environments. The influence of political activism combined with participation and forging relationships reinforced the processes of identity development for transgender students who reported self-perceived healthier identity outcomes. Both Dugan et al. (2012) and Mintz (2011) noted differences in transgender students' leadership perceptions and behaviours which they attributed to conformity to perceived gender norms. In Dugan et al, MtF students reported interconnected lower leadership capacity, efficacy and attainment of

positional leadership roles. These latter findings reinforce the importance of institutional support for transgender inclusive student organisations.

Secondly in relation to navigating identities in communities, Dugan et al. (2012) used two composite measures from selected cases of transgender identified students to explore their perception of their sense of belonging and on-campus climate. Their study acknowledged that transition between genders is further complicated by the need to simultaneously navigate changing social power and role expectations. Bilodeau (2005) found that MtF students transitioned easier and possibly associated with their experiences of traditional gender privileges prior to transition. .McKinney (2005) suggests that whilst transgender graduate students interact with non-trans LGB graduate students, they rarely reported opportunities to meet and get to know other transgender students.

Both Bilodeau (2005) and Hart and Lester (2011) noted clustering around 'male' and 'female' identities in student experiences for example in residences, sports, gender specific policies, and curricular such as women's studies. Researching specifically the experiences of transgender students at a women's college, Hart and Lester (2011) noted the hyper-visibility for students transitioning from MtF whilst at college. This hyper-visibility continued into employment for those whose degree transcripts recorded a contradictory gender. Staff and students expressed frustration with the attention given to transgender issues which they saw as embodying a departure from the gender singularity of the women's college. Some felt that this refuted socially constructed norms of gender and gender performances, while others saw it as a violation of the notions of sex and gender. These local microclimates meant students had to navigating differing definitions of socially acceptable gendered performances. They

also cut across a range of communities; student's affairs, students groups, and even academic departments specialising in gender or women's studies.

4.2 Theme 2: Safety, wellbeing and transgender identities

Related to theme one was the recorded harassment, violence and discrimination including sexual harassment and racism experienced by students with transgender and gender non-conforming identities (Effrig et al., 2011; Pryor, 2015). This theme describes in more detail the individual impact on students of adopting other gender identities, norms and behaviours in education settings. These amplified a perceived violation of socially constructed gender roles and/or performative behaviours as described in theme one particularly where the institution lacked knowledge and strategies regarding transgender students. These ultimately affected their safety and feelings of belonging. Both internal stressors and external stressors threatened transgender students' safety, wellbeing and help seeking behaviour and were hampered by poor access to active support to meet these needs.

Seelman (2014; 2016) using National Transgender Data Survey (NTDS) found that a sizeable portion of trans* people faced a multitude of interpersonal stressors in college. Nearly one-third of this sample experienced harassment, bullying, or physical or sexual assault by other students and 13.8% experienced victimization at the hands of teachers or staff in college or graduate school. In the only UK study (Lemond and Petrouska, 2014) the three student participants specifically chose a university in an area with "a big queer community" (p3) but still experienced transphobic verbal abuse. Participants in Mintz's (2011) small narrative study reported MtFs as more likely to be victims of violence than FtMs. In a women's college (Hart and Lester, 2011) transgender students were excluded from networks and opportunities because their gender identity was perceived as incongruous to the college mission. For

intersexed students whose ambiguity rejects the binary gender system, rejection was further amplified (Dugan et al., 2012).

Effrig et al. (2011) examined harassment and discrimination in relation to the psychological health of transgender students, using both treatment-seeking and non-treatment-seeking populations. Analyses of a random national sample of college students examined five dependent variables: self-injurious behaviour; suicidal ideation; suicide attempt; experiencing unwanted sexual contact; and experiencing harassing, controlling, or abusive behaviour. Treatment-seeking and non-treatment-seeking transgender college students were similar with regard to rates of victimization and levels of psychological distress. Effrig et al's diverse sample provided evidence that transgender students are in the minority for both gender and sexual identity; are universally distressed, regardless of whether they seek treatment; and experienced distress and victimisation at rates overwhelmingly higher than students with cisgender identities. Whilst rates of self-injury and suicide attempt were not significantly different between these populations, treatment-seeking transgender students experienced significantly higher suicidal ideation. Their findings suggest that experiencing suicidal ideation leads transgender students to seek treatment, but without corresponding rates of utilising student counselling services.

Finger (2010) explored the importance of self-care and actions taken to maximize mental health and wellness, and the importance of supportive relationships both personally and academically including special "go-to" allies on campus (p69). Self-care can be overlooked given the frenetic pace for students. Mentoring from within and outside of the transgender community can provide much needed support. Dugan et al. (2012) reported significantly less mentoring by faculty members of MtF and intersexed students than for their FtM peers.

Finger (2010) examined the language students used to describe their experiences of hurt and survival from verbal harassment and physical assault, as well as to celebrate feeling at ease with a trans identity. Real and perceived safety for her participants included physical, mental, spiritual, psychological, and relational aspects of security. Professors, advisors, and some administrators were identified as important allies (Finger, 2010; Pryor, 2015).

4.3. Theme 3: Institutional processes and systemic influences

Whilst themes one and two described how students navigated their identities and the impact of expressing their identities on their safety and wellbeing, this theme focused more on how institutions respond to transgender individuals and groups and revisits these issues from a systems perspective. The importance of creating safe spaces for dialogue and critical engagement with transgender issues in post-compulsory education was identified (Effrig et al., 2011). This theme highlights how transgender issues are 'othered' (Mintz, 2011); the extent to which they are incorporated into programme and curriculum planning; the lack of investment in developing and supporting the knowledge and skills of students and staff on transgender issues; the importance of gender inclusive policies and use of appropriate language and pronouns. Some studies focused on the provision of gender-segregated or inclusive facilities such as housing and student support services, to address mental health, harassment and violence and the role these institutional activities played in student choice and engagement.

Seelman (2014) uses the term 'institutional cisgenderism' to label the behaviours, goals, norms, and values of higher education institutions that reflect an underlying assumption or belief that cisgender identities are more 'normal', 'healthy' and 'real'. These are seen as

superior, resulting in systematic privileging of cisgender individuals and identities, and the marginalisation of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and identities (p6).

The lack of gender inclusive options and design of housing support varied across institutions (Krum et al., 2013). Students reported many problems with gender-segregated facilities, such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and accomodation which posed increased risks of harassment and violence (Lemond and Petrouska, 2014; McKinney, 2005; Rankin and Beemyn, 2012). In the UK study one participant reported never using the bathrooms at the university campus so as to avoid the issue altogether (Lemond and Petrouska, 2014, p3).

The introduction of gender inclusive housing (GIH) allowed students of different legal sexes to live together in different housing options. Krum et al. (2013) analysed the housing policies of eighteen educational institutions in the USA and categorised these into five different housing styles with some minor variations. These configurations facilitated greater choice around gender non-specific, single and shared housing as well as more specific options such as being able to select 'transitioning' on student housing applications. Many policies did not give students priority in accessing available GIH spaces or provide for expressed preferences and needs.

Krum et al.'s (2013) online survey to several mailing lists of LGBT student organisations, resource professionals and other relevant websites identified that GIH options influenced student's choice of institution. Eighty-seven percent of their sample believed that students should 'opt-in' to the gender inclusive community and eighty percent believed in 'community conduct and values agreements' to ensure prejudice free spaces. Other supportive features included introductory meetings; help to find a compatible housemate, and facilitating friendship-building and increased awareness in student residences. Some colleges and

universities failed to deliver by not implementing their own support policies designed to promote transgender or gender non-conforming inclusivity.

Returning to the issue of transgender mental health from an institutional perspective, Seelman (2016) examined whether college institutional climate factors (such as gender appropriate facilities) are significantly associated with detrimental psychological outcomes. Using the NTDS subsample, Seelman analysed whether being denied access to these spaces is associated with lifetime suicide attempts, after controlling for interpersonal victimization by students or teachers. This complex study used the minority stress model to understand how institutional climate factors in college settings (specifically inaccessible bathrooms and campus housing) relates to psychological well-being in the form of lifetime suicide attempts. Denied access to facilities combined with interrogation and harassment, from fellow students, staff, faculty, and campus police (Bilodeau, 2005; Finger, 2010; Seelman et al., 2013; 2016) documented in themes one and two, makes a strong case for gender inclusive provision given that these are sources of great distress for transgender students (Beemyn, et al., 2005; Finger, 2010; Mintz, 2011; Seelman, 2013).

Further, Seelman (2016) found that a high proportion of the sample (46.5%) had a history of attempting suicide, higher than the 41% rate found for the full NTDS sample and higher than that of the general U.S. population. Coupled with the issues discussed earlier in theme one, Seelman emphasizes the importance of having well-funded and trans*-competent mental health services. Reinforcing evidence from the previous two themes, there was a poor institutional response to students with transgender or gender identity concerns from health care centres, and inadequate counselling. Only three out of 50 USA participants reported counsellors being; 'helpful, knowledgeable, and very supportive' (p70) or able to signpost

alternative providers where there was limited insurance cover (McKinney, 2005; Mintz, 2011). The UK study identified an increase in informal enquiries made by transgender students to student services (Lemond and Petrouska, 2014).

Many studies highlighted the need for staff development on transgender issues alongside access to a trained network of people specialising in understanding, preventing, and responding to students experiencing victimization (Garvey and Rankin, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016; Rankin et al., 2010; Seelman, 2014). This has direct implications for student retention (Pryor, 2015) and college reputation (Rankin et al., 2010). McKinney (2005) noted the lack of resources to support transgender students and issues. Rankin and Beemyn (2012) highlighted how gender-segregated curricular activities (e.g. fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams) and "women's health and support services likewise ignore and exclude the growing number of genderqueer and androgynous students (p9). This included the lack of transgender issues in any curriculum or other programme planning. Even under the LGBT umbrella this could be restricted to a drag show on campus (McKinney, 2005). Austin (2016) noted the betrayal and disillusionment of students on a social work programme who reported that social workers and schools of social work were among the very systems that oppress and marginalize trans people and trans experiences.

The use of appropriate language and terminology (Mintz, 2011) particularly in relation to learning and teaching featured strongly within this theme. One example included students being 'outed' through on-line teaching tools and facing awkward explanations that would follow (Pryor, 2015). Web chats or interactive blogs were tied to university records posing difficulties for those going by a preferred or alternative name. Pryor (2015) recommended adding gender identity/expression to anti-discrimination policies with a preferred name

system, and safeguarding of email and participation in online classroom assignments. Routine classroom activities such as student roll call could be intensely problematic (Pryor, 2015). The issue of names and pronouns was constantly reiterated. Both Lemond and Petrouska (2014) and Mintz (2011) found no clear protocols for updating records. Administrative staff lacked knowledge on how to change a student's name and gender on student record systems and relevant documentation. Students were wrongly signposted or advised, leading to repeatedly having to 'out' themselves to different members of staff (Garvey and Rankin, 2015; Mintz, 2011). These issues occurred in the enrolment process where staff did not appreciate legislation or provide confidentiality in on-site enrolment. Many study participants (Austin, 2016; McKinney, 2005; Pryor, 2015) were dissatisfied with the lack of awareness and knowledge on transgender issues from staff who made "frequent transphobic and clueless remarks in class" (McKinney, 2005, p70). Likewise Pusch (2005), Lemond and Petrouska (2014), and Austin, (2016) reported participants experiences of being asked inappropriate questions about their gender identity and having to educate staff and other students.

Political engagement and activism amongst transgender students was documented as a powerful response to these environmental issues (Finger, 2010; Seelman, 2014), alongside the importance of safe spaces within LGBQ networks and alliances. The notion of community and sub-cultures are important within education to offer support or political advocacy (Pryor, 2015). All of the studies revealed a substantial amount of institutional resistance that directly influences the transgender student population (Bilodeau, 2005; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016; Pusch, 2005). Seelman (2014) advocates for solutions coming directly from the transgender population based on their lived experiences. Paying particular attention to narratives of success and resilience allows researchers to honour the

agency of trans* college students and resist the use of deficit studies and rhetoric to understand trans* lives (Nicolazzo, 2016; Mintz, 2011).

Finger (2010) examined how organizational systems hinder, enhance, expand, and redefine transgender student success. Of the twenty-seven institutions examined, twelve indicated individual listings or a combination of gender, gender identity, or gender expression on their non-discrimination clauses (McKinney, 2005). This sub-theme of oppression represents most accurately the presence of regulatory power in the performance of gender (p208). Hart and Lester (2011, p199) illustrated a range of other regulatory powers in single sex colleges: for example, administrative discourse that reinforces the "deviance" of transgender. Referring to USA statutory guidance Seelman (2016) notes that since transgender people are included as part of Title IX protections against discrimination and violence (Department of Education, 2014); failure to be inclusive will impact on the receipt of federal educational financial assistance.

4.3 Theme 4: Theoretical lenses and research methods to engage with transgender issues in education

This theme highlights theoretical contributions made from the studies to position transgender student experience. The studies drew on developmental psychology, performativity and critical theory in order to examine the role of power; the relationship between individual agency and institutional power and their impact on individual and group transgender identities (Hart and Leicester, 2011). The studies also facilitated a broader critique of the complexities and challenges involved in researching transgender issues.

Some studies offered specific theoretical lenses in their research for understanding transgender issues in post-compulsory education. Bilodeau (2005) explored transgender

student development themes to inform the creation of a transgender-specific development model by drawing on D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan model of sexual orientation identity development. Identity development occurs simultaneously with the development of a person's self-concepts, relationships with family and connections to peer groups and communities. D'Augelli's model consists of six developmental processes and assumes fluidity and fixed states over time. Applying this framework to transgender identity redefines the processes; from recognising one's own gender variant, labelling and affirming it, then entering a transgender community, making commitments to political and social action, and challenging transphobia (Bilodeau, 2005). Bilodeau's in-depth qualitative interviews with two students illustrated how they integrated different identities and addressed continuous conflicts arising from transgression of binary gender boundaries within educational environments and the influence of constant reinforcement. In a similar theoretical analysis, Rankin and Beemyn (2012) noted eight significant milestones in how students recognise and accept themselves as transgender.

Theories on performativity were also useful in examining the role of power and the relationship between transgender students' individual agency and power. Finger (2010) drew on post structural feminism and deconstruction theories to disrupt any regulated assumptions about being or doing gender. Finger used these to explore how students can develop the freedom and space to expand their definitions of their own gender identity. Butler (1988) theorised that gender is a socially constructed category created during gendered 'performances'. Hart and Lester (2011) used Butler's performativity theory to bring together contextual and cultural definitions of gender and to explore how individuals negotiate those definitions alongside power. Their analysis examined how the discursive presentation of gender in education can influence the resistance or acceptance of transgender students. Hart

and Lester (2011) looked at the impact on individual identity and the role of institutional power. Another tenet of performativity was used to explore how students might construct their identity in a specific context. Individuals for example may adopt different identities as they move from one context to another (e.g. from high school to college or the classroom to residence halls). They may for example, identify as a gay, female student in an all-male science classroom, or an activist within the LGBT community. These theories confirm the fluidity of identity and the studies provided salient examples of the changing nature of identity through such theoretical lenses.

Effrig et al. (2011) used the minority stress theory to provide a framework for understanding the impact of external stressors, like discrimination, on transgender individuals. They posited that the increased stress faced by minority individuals leads to an increased level of psychological distress when unable to successfully increase their level of coping. Distal (violence and discrimination) and proximal (internalisation of negative societal reactions to transgender) sources of stress (see Meyer, 2003) posed high risks for transgender students. Minority stress theory can be used to understand health outcomes in relation to the stressful experiences within education such as those described earlier. Mintz (2011) used the term 'critical transgender theory' (p132) to challenge critical theories which emphasizes the socialization of people into dominant and subordinate groups. Mintz developed a model which incorporates more self-reflective knowledge to reduce entrapment in systems of domination and take a more emancipatory and liberation stance which emphasises transgender identity realism.

In terms of researching transgender issues in education, most of the included studies referred to the importance of framing research around the unmasking of genderism, and examining

and supporting the identity development of transgender students (Bilodeau, 2005). Seelman (2013) suggests using national and cross disciplinary design to avoid reductionist approaches. As mentioned earlier, there were limited opportunities for measuring or monitoring transgender issues in education due to the lack of visibility of transgender students, particularly in survey research. Survey methods used in the studies reviewed did not always offer the right options or ask the right questions for transgender students. This may reflect student resistance to studies which use a deficit model and/or rhetoric to understand trans* lives (Nicolazzo, 2016). An alternative may involve problematising gender-dichotomous college environments and the reframing of transgender students as resilient individuals capable of creating supportive communities and developing their own strategies to promote success. Research still needs to find the appropriate language and terminology to engage students and offer appropriate response options when asking about their gender identities. For example whilst Krum et al.'s (2013) survey attracted 196 participants, 77 of these did not actually start the survey, 13 did not complete it and 2 did not identify their gender. The researchers suggested that students selecting 'prefer not to say' in any sub-trans identity descriptions may reflect difficulty in capturing the full array of labels adopted by the transgender community. Quantitative research can be particularly reductionist due to inherent statistical analyses techniques used (Dugan et al., 2012).

Research is also hindered by not being able to capture or include students who choose not to come to an educational institution in the first place because of exclusionary practices (Krum et al., 2013). Some studies used snowball sampling and secondary datasets to reach the target population. Rankin and Beemyn (2012) noted that whilst research can recommend the implementation of transgender inclusive policies and practices, this is of little value to gender-nonconforming students who may not be included. Effrig et al. (2011) suggest that

further research should focus on larger sample sizes and sophisticated statistical analyses to better understand the nuances of transgender students concerns and to help inform programmatic interventions aimed at helping this population cope with distress. Life story and narratives (Mintz, 2011) were useful methods for capturing differences between populations in relation to their experiences and needs. Small samples of transgender students in these studies made it difficult to determine the degree to which they are reflective of the larger population although Johnston (2016) asserts that our own reflections during research on transgender, gender-variant, and queer people is not just about revealing their accounts, but requires questioning of established conventions of the research process that renders our identities stable. It also raises wider awareness and concerns toward social issues and relations that help or constrain the experiences of transgender students who access campus space. Seelman (2016) stresses the significance of evidence in helping educational administrators to understand the relationship between characteristics of the institutional climate and outcomes of well-being for this population and the importance of exploring a wide range of people's roles in any future research agenda.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Post-compulsory education has much to learn about transgender and gender non-conforming issues, particularly from students themselves. As most studies come from the USA, internationally, there are relatively few empirical studies that examine the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students. The research reviewed here captured the complex, provocative nature of gender-nonconforming identities and specifically recognized ways that education can improve their experiences. It confirms that students prefer to live beyond a binary frame of reference.

At a minimal level, institutions need to make room for students from different gender identities and communicate a sense of welcome. Having resources and information are important for student success but even more fundamentally, the need for language that names and supports transgender students in the campus community on a daily basis (Finger, 2010; Garvey et al, 2015; Renn, 2000, 2010; Singh et al, 2013). Incorporating student-led diverse interpretations and expressions about their identities will significantly challenge hetero-normative and cis-gendered thinking and processes. As colleges and universities grapple with creating inclusive environments for transgender students, they need to link macro level issues such as the complexity of identity, with the confines of a modern learning environment. Education is still influenced by dominant discourses and entrenched frameworks as well as micro level issues related to basic services and facilities. Theoretical contributions from the studies in this review offer the academy innovative ways to employ best practices that can create truly inclusive and diverse student bodies.

The review was limited by not including research published in books. Where studies relied on secondary research, identifying students with different gender or more complex identities in the original data collection methods meant that they did not always tap into the full range of participants in the transgender or gender non-conforming population.

There is a need to generally increase the degree, scope and approaches to research inquiry for transgender students. The studies in this review provided important and significant foundational evidence on transgender students' experiences and suggestions for future empirical studies. The themes all highlighted the notion and importance of 'community' for transgender and gender non-conforming students within education settings. Findings reinforce our understanding of the conflict that transgender students experience in relation to

a discursive paradox of essentialised notions of gender (Bilodeau, 2005). Students may become hyper-visible and therefore susceptible to targeted discrimination and violence by those who believe their performances of gender are deviant (McKinney, 2005; Pusch, 2005). There was also evidence of tokenism (Hart and Leicester, 2011). Given the lack of resources on most campuses for transgender students (McKinney, 2005) some are left responsible for promoting and educating others about their own issues. Evidence about lack of resources to support transgender students' needs to be addressed urgently so as to ensure that students feel welcomed and that non-trans people educate themselves and take responsibility for the issues confronting transgender students (Austin, 2015; McKinney, 2005). Spade (2011) referred to "trickle up activism"; a way of creating inclusive campus environments for the most marginalized student populations on campus. This approach enables equity to "trickle up" to all other student populations so that all groups would either benefit from such gains or, at the very least, not be negatively affected. Those institutions with insufficient resources may also lack institutional support for addressing transgender issues. McKinney (2005) suggests the need for support and advocacy groups.

Finally, many of the studies promote a critical epistemological stance which assumes that language, relationships, and lived experiences are socially constructed according to each individual's emotions, context, historical knowledge and perspectives. In educational research, there are many intersecting opportunities for development. This includes fostering a more open research environment that recognises the multiple aspects of identity and to engage with transgender students, faculty and the community about the issues that are unique and important to them. The studies identified that proactive, personal disclosure; being able identifying allies and developing and supporting advocacy are all valuable stepping stones but hitherto have not been addressed in further and higher education (Singh et al, 2013). This

is ironic given the espoused nature of inclusion and dialogue within education per se. Beyond firm implementation of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies underlying ideologies and practices and inclusive spaces are necessary for authentic dialogue. Many studies reflected the disciplinary power within educational institutions where systems are deeply entrenched. Likewise, mandatory transgender awareness training programs for all stakeholders is required. Only after a complete transformation of institutional cultures will colleges and universities become truly inclusive for transgender students (Rankin and Beemyn, 2012).

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